

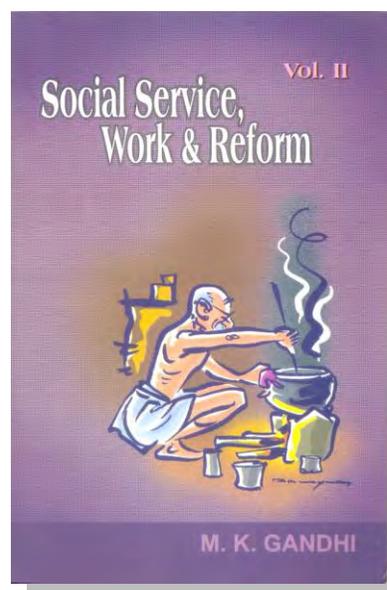
# Social Service, Work & Reform

Volume II

M. K. Gandhi

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## EDITORIAL NOTE

"To me political power is not an end but one of the means of enabling people to better their condition in every department of life."

*Young India, 2-7-1931*

"Mere withdrawal of English is not independence. It means the consciousness in the average villager that he is the maker of his own destiny, he is his own legislator through his chosen representatives."

*Young India, 13-2-1930*

When peaceful transfer of power to India was effected in a unique way, hopes were universally aroused that the non-violent revolution initiated by Gandhiji would be carried to its fruition in post-independent India. Three decades is comparatively a short span in a nation's life, but it is sufficiently indicative of the lines on which the country is proceeding. Seen in this light, it is undeniable that the revolution has soured on the way.

In independent India the humble villager in the 7,00,000 villages dotting the map of the country was to come into his own. He was to be the maker of his destiny and, in effect, the future of the country. The dung heap in the village was to be transformed into a green common ensuring adequate food, clothing and shelter for its inhabitants. The rule was to subserve his interests and not to lord it over him. The flow of men and commodities from the village to the city was to be reversed. With the village as the centre of planning, the village economy was to be enriched and only the surpluses generated, were to find their way to the city markets with profit both to the villager and the city-dweller. The weaker sections of the society exploited for centuries, such as the depressed classes, the aborigines, the women, the landless labourers etc. were to assume their due place in the society. In effect, all energies and attention of the society were to be absorbed in the uphill but the glorious task of ushering in justice -

social, economic, and political – by non-violent means, for therein lies the secret of non-violent freedom.

However, the rulers chose to turn their backs to nonviolent revolution for whatever reasons, maybe, their lack of faith in basic Gandhian tenets, their blind' admiration and adoration and slavish imitation of foreign models of planning, their failure to involve the masses in nation- building and last but not the least their incapacity for innovation. The results are there for all to see: the villages by and large steadily becoming penurious and the consequent exodus of the inhabitants thereof to the cities where they eke out a degrading and miserable sub-human existence in slums; the cities bursting at their seams under chaotic conditions with haphazard unplanned growth and polluted atmosphere; proliferation of bureaucracy corroded by corruption etc., one can go on and on with the narration of the disastrous consequences produced by the betrayal of the non-violent revolution. This is not to say that there has been no material progress but even that has been lop-sided and uneven. It is not the purpose of this Note to condemn or censure anybody but the facts must be stated without any gloss, so that we can at least begin to think where we have gone wrong and take corrective measures to save the nation from the impending ruin. As foreseen by Gandhiji, we have become "a fifth rate carbon copy of the West" without any worthwhile contribution to make to the world. Must this state of affairs continue? Renowned thinkers and social scientists like Gunnar Myrdal, Colin Clark, and others have also opined that the ills from which we are suffering are due essentially to our straying away from Gandhian thought and principles.

What does Gandhiji have to say on the economic, political, moral and ethical, and social challenges facing the country? A study in depth of Gandhiji's writings reveals the unique combination of a visionary and a practical reformer that he was, with an indissoluble bond of love and sympathy for the masses. Twenty-five years ago the Editor started with the thought of studying Gandhiji's ideas on various facets of life, but the study proved so absorbing and fascinating that he soon decided to share the fruits of his studies with his fellow citizens. As a result, the compilation in three volumes on economic, industrial and labour problems saw the light of the day under

the title "Economic and Industrial Life and Relations". This was followed by publication of the collection in three volumes of Gandhiji's Odyssey under the title "In Search of the Supreme". Next came the compilation, again in three volumes, on matters political, entitled "National and Political Life and Affairs". The last but not the least in the series is the present collection in three volumes on social questions, which is being published under the title "Social Service, Work and Reform".

The response and appreciation of the public to the series has justified the faith of the Editor in the task which he undertook years ago with much reverence. The prize, however, is in the process as declared by the Bhagwat Gita.

"You cannot have a good social system when you find yourself low in the scale of political rights, nor can you be fit to exercise political rights and privileges unless your social system is based on reason and justice. You cannot have a good economic system when your social arrangements are imperfect. If your religious ideas are low and grovelling, you cannot succeed in social, economic or political spheres. This interdependence is not an accident, but is the law of our nature".\*

- M. G. RANADE

\*From the address to the first Provincial Social Conference held in Satara

## TO THE READER

I would like to say to the diligent reader of my writings and to others who are interested in them that I am not at all concerned with appearing to be consistent. In my search after Truth I have discarded many ideas and learnt many new things. Old as I am in age, I have no feeling that I have ceased to grow inwardly or that my growth will stop at the dissolution of the flesh. What I am concerned with is my readiness to obey the call of Truth, my God, from moment to moment, and, therefore, when anybody finds any inconsistency between any two writings of mine, if he has still faith in my sanity, he would do well to choose the later of the two on the same subject.

**M. K. GANDHI**

*Harijan, 29-4-'33, p. 2*

## SECTION ONE: MISS MAYO'S INDICTMENT OF INDIA

### 1. DRAIN INSPECTOR'S REPORT

On the lips of the good vice becomes virtue,  
And even virtue appears as vice in the mouth of  
the evil-minded; this need not surprise us.  
For, do not the mighty clouds drink the salt  
waters of the ocean and return it as sweet  
refreshing rain?  
And does not the cobra, drinking sweet milk,  
belch it forth as the deadliest poison?  
Rivers drink not of their own waters, the trees  
do not themselves eat the fruit which they bear,  
Nor do the clouds partake of the grains they  
grow; even so the good devote their powers to  
the good of others.<sup>1</sup>

Several correspondents have sent me cuttings containing reviews of, or protests against, *Miss Mayo's Mother India*. A few have in addition asked me to give my opinion on it. An enraged correspondent from London asks me to give him answers to several questions that he has framed upon the authoress's references to me. Miss Mayo has herself favoured me with a copy of her book.

I would certainly not have made time, especially when I have only limited energy, and caution has been enjoined upon me by medical friends against over work, to read the book during my tour. But these letters made it obligatory on me to read the book at once.

The book is cleverly and powerfully written. The carefully chosen quotations give it the appearance of a truthful book. But the impression it leaves on my mind is, that it

is the report of a drain inspector sent out with the one purpose of opening and examining the drains of the country to be reported upon, or to give a graphic description of the stench exuded by the opened drains. If Mayo had confessed that she had gone to India merely to open out and examine the drains of India, there would perhaps be little to complain about the compilation. But she says in effect with a certain amount of triumph, "The drains are India." True, in the concluding chapter there is a caution. But her caution is cleverly made to enforce her sweeping condemnation. I feel that no one who has any knowledge of India can possibly accept her terrible accusations against the thought and the life of the people of this unhappy country.

The book is without doubt untruthful, be the facts stated ever so truthful. If I open out and describe with punctilious care all the stench exuded from the drains of London and say "Behold London", my facts will be incapable of challenge, but my judgment will be rightly condemned as a travesty of truth. Miss Mayo's book is nothing better, nothing else.

The authoress says she was dissatisfied with the literature she read about India, and so she came to India "to see what a volunteer unsubsidized, uncommitted and unattached, could observe of common things in daily human life".

After having read the book with great attention, I regret to say that I find it difficult to accept this claim. Unsubsidized she may be. Uncommitted and unattached she certainly fails to show herself in any page. We in India are accustomed to interested publications patronised, patronized is accepted as an elegant synonym for "subsidized"—by the Government. We have become used to understanding from pre-British days that the art (perfected by the British) of Government includes the harnessing of the secret services of men learned, and reported to be honest and honourable for shadowing suspects and for writing up the virtues of the Government of the day as if the certificate had come from disinterested quarters. I hope that Miss Mayo will not take offence if she comes under the shadow of such suspicion. It may be some

consolation to her to know that even some of the best English friends of India have been so suspected.

But ruling out of consideration the suspicion, it remains to be seen why she has written this untruthful book. It is doubly untruthful. It is untruthful in that she condemns a whole nation or in her words "the peoples of India" (she will not have us as one nation) practically without any reservation as to their sanitation, morals, religion etc. It is also untruthful because she claims for the British Government merits which cannot be sustained and which many an honest British officer would blush to see the Government credited with.

If she is not subsidized, Miss Mayo is an avowed Indophobe and Anglophil refusing to see anything good about Indians and anything bad about the British and their rule.

She does not give an elevated idea of Western standard of judgment. Though she represents a class of sensational writers in the West, it is a class that, I flatter myself with the belief, is on the wane. There is a growing body of Americans who hate anything sensational, smart or crooked. But the pity of it is that there are still thousands in the West who delight in "shilling shockers". Nor are all the authoress's quotations or isolated facts truthfully stated. I propose to pick up those I have personal knowledge of. The book bristles with quotations torn from their contexts and with extracts which have been authoritatively challenged.

The authoress has violated all sense of propriety by associating the Poet's name with child-marriage. The Poet has indeed referred to early marriage as not an undesirable institution. But there is a world of difference between child-marriage and early marriage. If she had taken the trouble of making the acquaintance of the free and freedom-loving girls and women of Shantiniketan, she would have known the Poet's meaning of early marriage.

She has done me the honour of quoting me frequently in support of her argument. Any person who collects extracts from a reformer's diary, tears them from their context and proceeds to condemn, on the strength of these, the people in whose midst the reformer has worked, would get no hearing from sane and unbiased readers or

hearers. But in her hurry to see everything Indian in a bad light, she has not only taken liberty with my writings, but she has not thought it necessary even to verify through me certain things ascribed by her or others to me. In fact she has combined in her own person what we understand in India the judicial and the executive officer. She is both the prosecutor and the judge. She has described the visit to me, and informed her readers that there are always with me two "secretaries" who write down every word I say. I know that this is not a wilful perversion of facts. Nevertheless the statement is not true. I beg to inform her, that I have no one near me who has been appointed or is expected to write down every word that I say. I have by me a co-worker called Mahadev Desai who is striving to out-Boswell Boswell and does, whenever he is near me, take down whatever he considers to be wisdom dropping from my lips. I cannot repel his advances, even if I would, for the relationship between us is, like the Hindu marriage, indissoluble. But the real crime committed against me is described by her at pages 387-88. She ascribes to the Poet " a fervent declaration that Ayurvedic science surpasses anything that the West can offer" (She has this time no quotation to back her statement). Then she quotes my opinion that hospitals are institutions for propagating sin, and then distorts out of all recognition a sacred incident, honourable to the British surgeons and, I hope, to myself. I must ask the reader to excuse me for giving the full quotation from the book:

As he happened to be in the prison at the time, a British surgeon of the Indian Medical Service came straightaway to see him. "Mr. Gandhi," said the surgeon, as the incident was then reported, "I am sorry to tell you that you have appendicitis. If you were my patient, I should operate at once. But you will probably, prefer to call in your Ayurvedic physician."

Mr. Gandhi proved otherwise minded.

"I should not prefer to operate," pursued the surgeon, "because in case the outcome should be unfortunate, all your friends will lay it as a charge of malicious intent against us whose duty is to care for you."

"If you will only consent to operate," pleaded Mr. Gandhi, "I will call in my friends, now, and explain to them that you do so at my request."

So Mr. Gandhi wilfully went to an institution for propagating sin, was operated upon by one of the "worst of all", an officer of the Indian Medical Service and was attentively nursed through convalescence by an English Sister whom he is understood to have thought after all rather a "useful sort of person."

This is a travesty of truth. I shall confine myself to correcting only what is libellous and not the other inaccuracies. There was no question here of calling in any Ayurvedic physician. Col. Maddock who performed the operation had the right, if he had so chosen, to perform the operation without a reference to me, and even in spite of me. But he and Surgeon General Hooton showed a delicate consideration to me, and asked me whether I would wait for my own doctors who were known to them and who were also trained in the Western medical and surgical science. I would not be behind-hand in returning their courtesy and consideration, and I immediately told them that they could perform the operation without\* waiting for my doctors to whom they had telegraphed, and that I would gladly give them a note for their protection in the event of the operation miscarrying. I endeavoured to show that I had no distrust either in their ability or their good faith. It was to me a happy opportunity of demonstrating my personal goodwill.

So far as my opinion about hospitals and the like is concerned, it stands, in spite of my having subjected myself and my wards to treatment more than once by physicians and surgeons, Indian and European, trained in the Western school of medicine. Similarly I use motor cars and railways, whilst holding to my condemnation of them as strongly as ever. I hold the body itself to be an evil and an impediment in my progress. But I see no inconsistency in my making use of it while it lasts, and trying in the best manner I know to use it for its own destruction. This is a sample of distortion of which I have a personal knowledge.

But the book is brimful of descriptions of incidents of which an average Indian, at any rate, has no knowledge. Thus she describes an ovation said to have been given to the

Prince of Wales, of which Indian India has no knowledge, but which could not possibly escape it if it had happened. A crowd is reported to have fought its way to the Prince's car somewhere in Bombay. "The Police," Miss Mayo says, "tried vainly to form a hedge round the car moving at a crawl unprotected now through a solid mass of shouting humanity which won through to the railway station at last." Then at the railway station while there were three minutes for the train to steam out, the Prince is reported by Miss Mayo to have ordered the barriers to be dropped and the "mobs" to be let in. The authoress then proceeds, "Like the sweep of a river in floods, the interminable multitude rolled in, and shouted and laughed and wept, and when the train started, ran alongside the Royal carriage till they could run no more." All this is supposed to have happened in 1921 on the evening of November 22nd, whilst the dying embers of the riots were still hot. There is much of this kind of stuff in this romantic chapter, which is headed "Behold a light".

The nineteenth chapter is a collection of authorities in praise of the achievements of the British Government, almost every one of which has been repeatedly challenged both by English and Indian writers of unimpeachable integrity. The seventeenth chapter is written to show that we are a "world-menace". If as a result of Miss Mayo's effort the League of Nations is moved to declare India a segregated country unfit for exploitation, I have no doubt both the West and the East would be the gainers. We may then have- our internecine wars. Hindus may be eaten up, as she threatens, by the hordes from the North-West and Central Asia,—that were a position infinitely superior to one of ever-growing emasculation. Even as electrocution is a humaner method of killing than the tortuous method of roasting alive, so would a sudden overwhelming swoop from Central Asia upon the unresisting insanitary, superstitious and sexuality-ridden Hindus, as Miss Mayo describes us to be, be a humane deliverance from the living and ignominious death which we are going through at the present moment. Unfortunately, however, such is not Miss Mayo's goal. Her case is to perpetuate white domination in India on the plea of India's unfitness to rule herself.

The picturesque statements that this clever authoress puts into the mouths of the various characters read like so many pages from a sensational novel in which no

regard has to be paid to truth. Many of her statements seem to me to be utterly unworthy of belief and do not put the men and women to whom they are ascribed in a favourable light. Take for instance this statement put in the mouth of a prince:

"Our treaties are with the Crown of England," one of them said to me, with incisive calm. "The princes of India made no treaty with a Government that included Bengali *babus*. We shall never deal with this new lot of Jacks-in-office. While Britain stays, Britain will send us English gentlemen to speak for the King Emperor, and all will be as it should be between friends. If Britain leaves, we, the princes will know how to straighten out India, even as princes should." (Page 316.)

However fallen Indian princes may be, I should want unimpeachable evidence before I could believe that there can be in India a prince so degraded as to make such a statement. Needless to say the authoress does not give the name of the prince.

A still more scandalous statement occurs on page 314 and reads as follows:

"His Highness does not believe," said the Dewan, "that Britain is going to leave India. But still, under this new regime in England, they may be so ill-advised. So His Highness is getting his troops in shape, accumulating munitions and coining silver. And if the English do go, three months afterward, not a rupee or a virgin will be left in all Bengal."

The reader is kept in darkness as to the name of His Highness or of the enlightened Dewan.

There are many statements which Miss Mayo puts into the mouths of Englishmen and Englishwomen living in India. All I can say with reference to these statements is that if some of them were really made by the authors, they are unworthy of the trust reposed in them and they have done an injustice to their wards or patients as well as the race to which they belong. I should be sorry indeed to think that there are many Englishmen and Englishwomen who say one thing to their Indian friends and another to their Western confidants. Those Englishmen and Englishwomen who may chance to read the sweepings gathered together by Miss Mayo with her muck-rake will recognize

the statements I have in mind. In seeking to see an India degraded Miss Mayo has unconsciously degraded the characters whom she has used as her instruments for proving her facts which she boasts cannot be "disproved or shaken". I hope I have given sufficient *prima facie* proof in this article to show that many of her facts stand disproved even in isolation. Put together they give a wholly false picture.

But why am I writing this article? Not for the Indian readers but for the many American and English readers who read these pages from week to week with sympathy and attention. I warn them against believing this book. I do not remember having given the message Miss Mayo imputes to me. The only one present who took any notes at all has no recollection of the message imputed to me. But I do know what message I give every American who comes to see me: "Do not believe newspapers and the catchy literature you get in America. But if you want to know anything about India, go to India as students, study India for yourself. If you cannot go, make a study of all that is written about India for her and against her and then form your own conclusions. The ordinary literature you get is either exaggerated vilification of India or exaggerated praise." I warn Americans and Englishmen against copying Miss Mayo. She came not with an open mind as she claims, but with her preconceived notions and prejudices which she betrays on every page, not excluding even the introductory chapter in which she recites the claim. She came to India not to see things with her own eyes, but to gather material three- fourths of which she could as well have gathered in America.

That a book like Miss Mayo's can command a large circulation furnishes a sad commentary on Western literature and culture.

I am writing this article also in the hope, be it ever so distant, that Miss Mayo herself may relent and repent of having done, I hope unconsciously, atrocious injustice to an ancient people and equally atrocious injustice to the Americans by having exploited her undoubted ability to prejudice without warrant their minds against India.

The irony of it all is that she has inscribed this book 'To the peoples of India.' She has certainly not written it as a reformer, and out of love. If I am mistaken in my

estimate let her come back to India. Let her subject herself to cross-examination, and if her statements escape unhurt through the fire of cross-examination, let her live in our midst and reform our lives. So much for Miss Mayo and her readers.

I must now come to the other side of the picture. Whilst I consider the book to be unfit to be placed before Americans and Englishmen (for it can do no good to them), it is a book that every Indian can read with some degree of profit. We may repudiate the charge as it has been framed by her, but we may not repudiate the substance underlying the many allegations she has made. It is a good thing to see ourselves as others see us. We need not even examine the motive with which the book is written. A cautious reformer may make some use of it.

There are statements in it which demand investigation. For instance she says that the Vaishnava mark has an obscene meaning. I am a born Vaishnavite. I have perfect recollection of my visits to Vaishnava temples. Mine were orthodox people. I used to have the mark myself as a child, but neither I nor anyone else in our family ever knew that this harmless and rather elegant looking mark had any obscene significance at all. I asked a party of Vaishnavites in Madras where this article is being written. They knew nothing about the alleged obscene significance. I do not therefore suggest that it never had such significance. But I do suggest that millions are Unaware of the obscenity of many practices which we have hitherto innocently indulged in. It was in a missionary book that I first learnt that Shivalingam had any obscene significance at all, and even now when I see a Shivalingam neither the shape nor the association in which I see it suggests any obscenity. It was again in a missionary book that I learnt that the temples in Orissa were disfigured with obscene statues. When I went to Puri it was not without an effort that I was able to see those things. But I do know that the thousands who flock to the temple know nothing about the obscenity surrounding these figures. The people are unprepared and the figures do not obtrude themselves upon your gaze.

But let us not resent being made aware of the dark side of the picture wherever it exists. Overdrawn her pictures of our insanitation, child-marriages, etc. undoubtedly

are. But let them serve as a spur to much greater effort than we have hitherto put forth in order to rid society of all cause of reproach. Whilst we may be thankful of anything good that foreign visitors may be able honestly to say of us, if we curb our anger, we shall learn, as I have certainly learnt, more from our critics than from our patrons. Our indignation which we are bound to express against the slanderous book must not blind us to our obvious imperfections and our great limitations. Our anger will leave Miss Mayo absolutely unhurt and it will only recoil upon ourselves. We too have our due share of thoughtless readers as the West has, and in seeking to disprove everything Miss Mayo has written, we shall make the reading public believe that we are a race of perfect human beings against whom nothing can be said, no one can dare say one word. The agitation that has been set up against the book is in danger of being overdone. There is no cause for fury. I would here close this review which I have undertaken with the greatest reluctance and under great pressure of work with a paraphrase of a beautiful couplet from Tulsidas:

Everything created by God, animate or inanimate, has its good and bad side. The wise man, like the fabled bird which separating the cream of milk from its water helps himself to the cream leaving the water alone, will take the good from everything leaving the bad alone.<sup>2</sup>

*Young India*, 15-9-1927, p. 308

1. गुणायन्ते दोषाः सुजनवदने, दुर्जनमुखे

गुणा दोषायन्ते तदिदमपि नो विस्मयपदम् ।

महामेघः क्षारं पिबति कुरुते वारि मधुरं

फणो क्षीरं पीत्वा वमति गरलं दुःसहतरम् ॥

पिबन्ति नद्यः स्वयमेव नाम्भः स्वयं न खादन्ति फलानि वृक्षाः

नादन्ति सस्यं खलु वारीवाहाः परोपकाराय सतां विभूतयः ॥

2. जडचेतन गुणदोषमय विश्व कीन्ह करतार

संत हंस गुण गहहिं पय परिहरि वारि विकार ।

## 2. MISS MAYO AGAIN

Miss Mayo is clearly trading upon her knowledge that what we in India write can at best reach but a few hundred Americans, and that what she writes reaches thousands. She therefore feels perfectly free, just as it suits her, to misquote, half-quote or distort other people's writings or speeches intended to contradict her. She has done me the honour again of referring to me in her article in *Liberty* and attempted to discredit my writing<sup>1</sup> about her compilation *Mother India*. This she has felt called upon to do, I suppose, because I enjoy a certain amount of credit among cultured Americans, and lest therefore their judgment may be affected by my article. But in her article in *Liberty* she has outdone herself. Her reference to my secretaries is a clever attempt to hoodwink the unwary reader. All that could be inferred from my repudiation of the statement that I had two secretaries (whether always or not is not the point) is that Miss Mayo was at least a careless writer if not a perverter of truth.

But the manner in which she described the secretaries leaves the reader under the belief that I have always two secretaries. Her adherence to the statement that I did give the message she ascribes to me proves her to be guilty of a gross suppression of truth. She seems to have thought that I would not have a copy of the corrected interview between her and me. Unfortunately for her I happen to possess a copy of her notes. Here is the full quotation referring to the hum of the wheel.

"My message to America is simply the hum of this wheel. Letters and newspaper cuttings I get from America show that one set of people over-rates the results of Non-violent Non-co-operation and the other not only underrates it but imputes all kinds of motives to those who are concerned with the movement. Don't exaggerate one way or the other. If therefore some earnest Americans will study the movement impartially and patiently, then it is likely that the United States may know something of the movement which I do consider to be unique although I am the author of it. What I mean is that our movement is summed up in the spinning wheel with all its implica-

tions. It is to me a substitute for gun-powder. For it brings the message of self-reliance and hope to the millions of India. And when they are really awakened they would not need to lift their little finger in order to regain their freedom. The message of the spinning wheel is, really, to replace the spirit of exploitation by the spirit of service. The dominant note in the West is the note of exploitation. I have no desire that my country should copy that spirit or that note."

The first sentence only of the foregoing extract, which Miss Mayo quotes without the most important commentary on it, is intended to ridicule me. But the whole paragraph, I hope, makes my meaning and message clear and intelligible. I wrote my article on her book whilst I was travelling. Had I had the notes before me, I should have quoted from them, and thus added force to my article. I claim however that the message as it appears in the full paragraph quoted is not different from what I have stated in the article Miss Mayo attempts to shake.

Whilst therefore even in "the trivial quibble" as she rightly calls the subject matter of her contradiction, she is, I trust proved wholly unsuccessful, I claim that even if my memory had betrayed me, my conclusive reply to her is left unanswered and untouched. Having no case, she has followed the method of the pettifogging lawyer who vainly tries to discredit a hostile but unshakable witness by making him state things from memory which might be found on verification to be not quite accurate. It gives me pain to have to say that her article in *Liberty* proves her to be not only an unreliable writer but an unscrupulous person devoid of sense of right and wrong.

*Young India*, 2-2-1928, p. 34

### 3. A CALL TO INDIA'S POETESS

Shrimati Sarojini Devi has received a call from America chiefly for the purpose of undoing the mischief created by Miss Mayo's untruthful and libellous production. No writing undertaken in India can possibly overtake the mischief done by that sensation-monger who has the ear of a gullible public hungering for and living on sensation. No serious American can possibly be taken in by Miss Mayo's scurrilous writings. The seriously minded American does not need any refutation. And the general public that has been already affected by *Mother India* will never read the refutation however brilliant attempted in India. The idea therefore has been happily conceived in America of bringing out Sarojini Devi on a lecturing tour by way of reply to *Mother India*. If Sarojini Devi would respond to the invitation, her visit is likely to undo some at least of the mischief wrought by Miss Mayo's novel. That the Poetess would draw crowds wherever she goes and command a patient and respectful hearing need not be doubted. She is as sure by the magic of her eloquence to captivate American imagination as she captivated South African and paved the way for the Round Table Conference, and finally for the great work that the Right Honourable Srinivas Sastri is doing in South Africa. Let us hope that the way would be clear for her to accept the invitation and that Dr. Ansari would be able to spare her for the foreign mission that seems to call this gifted daughter of India.

Young India, 5-1-1928, p. 8.

#### 4. REFUTING MISS MAYO'S LIBEL

(The following is a note by Gandhiji to a series of chapters contributed to *Young India* in reply to Miss Mayo's *Mother India*.)

It is not without regret, certainly not without hesitation, that I find room for the following chapter and more to follow.<sup>1</sup> I doubt if replies to Miss Mayo have not been overdone. If I was convinced that the readers of Miss Mayo's libel read the refutations that have been and are being published I should have much less hesitation in publishing Deenabandhu Andrews' reply. But I fear that the refutations do not reach her readers and therefore lose much of their value. Miss Mayo represents an evil principle. No nation can be a world menace. India certainly is not. But writers like the authoress of *Mother India* are a world menace. And I am not sure that they can be dealt with by mere counter writings however pure and able they may be. In other words the question that is troubling me is whether lying tongues and pens can be checked merely by truthful tongues and pens. Is not something quite different and nobler necessary to be *done* if the evil propaganda of Miss Mayo is to be successfully checked? But I have no ready-made effective substitute for the writings such as Deenabandhu Andrews'. And as he is a co-sharer with me in the principle that *Young India* connotes and as even after second thoughts he persists in thinking that there is still room for his refutations, I am no longer able to resist him. I know that he will be satisfied, as I shall certainly be, if even one man or woman who before believed Miss Mayo's caricature comes to be disillusioned by his chapters.

*Young India*, 17-5-1928, p. 159

<sup>1</sup> Omitted from this Collection.

## 5. A VISIT TO MISS MAYO

(From "Notes")

Deenabandhu Andrews writes as follows about his visit to Miss Mayo:

I felt it necessary, since I had imputed political motives to Miss Mayo in my first article on *Mother India*, to see her personally; and an opportunity occurred.

After a very long conversation with her, during which she herself did most of the talking, it seemed clear to me that she had gone out independently without a conscious political motive.

But this only drives the problem of her grossly unfair book still deeper. The thought is coming home to me, that owing chiefly to the excessive use of machinery in the West compared with the East, giving all kinds of comforts, luxuries and conveniences, West and East are in serious danger of drifting apart; and those who dwell on the surface of things and do not look deeply *below* the surface to the hidden things in human life are likely to drift further and further apart in the two hemispheres. Those Americans like Richard Gregg, William Simpson and others, who have not been caught up into the machine stage of human existence, can appreciate and love India. They find the heart of India, instinctively and immediately. Verrier Elwin, to mention another name, can do the same thing. We can welcome such souls from the West and open our hearts to them: for they instinctively respond.

But we cannot expect a personality such as that of Miss Mayo ever to understand. Therefore, when she writes about India, it is bound to be a misinterpretation.

This thought grew upon me, hour after hour, as I listened to Miss Mayo and spoke to her in reply, I am sorry that I uncharitably imputed political motives to her, which I now withdraw; but at the same time I experienced, while talking with her, a sense of the great and vast dividing rift, which is extending between those who are absorbed in the superficial aspects of Western life and ourselves.

On the other hand, it seems to me that we have in every country of the West the choicest spirits, who think deeply and are distressed at those giant mechanical forces in the West that have got beyond man's control; and *these* men and women are akin to us in India, and can truly sympathise and understand. We can expect an understanding verdict from them.

Deenabandhu has given me the option of publishing this note and whilst in fairness to Miss Mayo, I have thought it necessary to publish it, it is due to the public for me to say that in spite of Deenabandhu Andrews' retraction, I am not shaken in my opinion that the book bears in it patent evidence of a political bias. It contains falsehoods which the authorities must have known to be such. She has since written things which too are probably false. In the face of such patent facts, evidence to the contrary must be held to be irrelevant.

*Young India*, 21-3-1929, p. 94

## 6. AN UNTRUE PICTURE

(From "London Letter" by M.D.)

Public meetings had to be avoided, excepting one which it was impossible to resist. There were requests from various women's organizations for an address by Gandhiji, but Miss Agatha Harrison combined them all into one and, under the auspices of the Women's Indian Council, invited Gandhiji to address a representative gathering of women in Morley College Hall. At this meeting Gandhiji took the opportunity of correcting various fantastic notions about the women of India and presented a vivid picture of the heroic part they had played during the last struggle. "They are perhaps in many ways superior to you", he said. "You had to go through untold suffering to win your suffrage. In India women got it for the asking. No hindrances have been placed in the way of their entering public life and the Congress had not only women for its Presidents but had Mrs. Naidu as a member of its cabinet. For several years, and during the last struggle when our organizations were declared illegal and those in charge of them put into prison, it was the women who came to the forefront, took the place of dictators and filled the jails. That, however, does not mean that they have not suffered at the hands of men. They have had their bitter cups to drink, but I have no hesitation in telling you that what you have read in Miss Mayo's book about India is 99 per cent untrue. I have read the book from cover to cover and as I finished it I exclaimed that it was verily a drain-inspector's report. Some of the things she has said are true, but her generalizations are absolutely false, and several statements in the book are pure figments of her imagination."

*Young India*, 3-12-1931, p. 378 at p. 379

## 7. AN AMERICAN CRITICISM

The vast majority of letters received from the West on the recent fast have been full of goodwill and appreciation of it and the motive lying behind it. The following letter balances the opinion reflected in the friendly letters and probably represents the majority opinion:

\* \* \*

No one thing can raise the lower classes of India out of their poverty and degradation; if it is ever accomplished, it must be the working of many influences, each contributing to the one end. And the start must be from within themselves.

It must be a mental urge for something better.

No race whose women are subservient,—or "without a soul" as you have it—has ever risen high in the scale of human progress.

Cleanliness is next to Godliness; and the nauseating filth in which the millions of your people live would preclude a start upward, until they begin to emerge from this mire.

A clean mind and a clean body will begin to turn their thought to a new life, which can have in it none of the "persecution of the body" for the "sake of the spirit".

For instance, your "Holy Men", sitting for years in some deformed position, publicly torturing the body to liberate the soul, are no longer taken seriously by any enlightened person; I doubt if by themselves. Do they sit and think; or do they just sit?

The Pagan religious rites, of sticking the body full of nails, spears through the tongue, and other revolting tortures, now widely known in America and throughout the world, bring nothing but disgust, and the feeling that they are, indeed, "untouchable".

I have not read *Mother India*, by Katherine Mayo, but am told on good authority, (India's resentment to the contrary, notwithstanding,) that it is a compilation of facts—so horrible that I have known cases of extreme illness from reading it.

\* \* \*

But one can heartily endorse the opinion that "no one thing can raise the lower classes of India but of their poverty and degradation" and that "the start must be from within themselves".

Almost the very next sentence repeats the exploded libel about the women of India being "without a soul". It is, perhaps, useless to tell the correspondent that many foreign writers of note have marvelled at the comparative freedom enjoyed by the women of India. This is not to say that there is not much to be done for the amelioration of their condition. But this can be said without fear of contradiction that whilst the betterment of the condition of women of the West is of recent growth, the women of India have from ancient times enjoyed in essential matters a freedom which has not escaped foreign observers.

The correspondent has evidently read literature containing ignorant and interested distortions about Indian habits and customs. No one, perhaps, has written more severely than I have done about our insanitation. But to describe it as "nauseating filth" is a gross libel. It betrays violent intolerance of habits other than one's own.

The correspondent would not have been betrayed into the wild generalization he has indulged in about the tortures which so-called *yogis* undergo, if instead of relying upon ignorant and sensational literature he had seen things with his own eyes. Just as one swallow does not make a summer, so cannot one *yogi* so-called resorting to self-tortures warrant the libel that self-torture is the general practice of those who seek liberation of the soul through crucifixion of the flesh,— a practice general to mankind and indispensable for the subjugation of the body to the soul.

I must pass by Miss Catherine Mayo and "the unknown cases of extreme illness" from the reading of her libellous production of *Mother India*. One can but pity the readers,

if there were any such, who made themselves sick by reading a book which opened the drains of India and made the readers believe that they were India.

*Harijan, 22-7-1933, p. 4*

## SECTION TWO: THE INDIAN WOMEN

### 1. ON SERVING WOMEN

### 8. WHY I SERVE WOMEN

(From an account of Gandhiji's speech at a meeting of girls in Lahore as given by V.G.D. in "Weekly Letter-No.34")

Gandhiji said he had come in contact with lakhs of women who told him that they found a fellow-woman in him and not a man. And he thought they were right. Ever since he was in South Africa, he had dedicated his all to the service of the poor and discovered that this service was impossible without serving women. India could not make any progress until her women did their duty. He was sorry to note that Punjabi girls more and more went in for finery as well as girls in other parts of the country. The simple habits of old were going out of fashion and the multiplication of wants was looked upon as the essence of culture. But history bore witness to the truth that luxury leads to degradation and destruction of nations.

*Harijan*, 3-8-1934, p. 196 at p. 197

## 9. HOW CAN TRUE SERVICE BE RENDERED?

(From an article which originally appeared under the title "Four Functions")

During my day's stay in Bombay on my way to Bhopal I had four interesting functions to attend to....

The second function was the laying of the foundation stone of a building which is to serve as a nucleus for the service of India's women. It is a creation of the energy and devotion of Sjt. Karsandas Chitalia of the Servants of India Society. He has set himself apart for mute service of the women's cause. Though in my opinion the erection of the building is premature till he has found a steady, selfless, sober tried woman who would devote herself to the cause and a few girls at least who would follow her, I have yielded to his superior faith and devotion, and not only laid the foundation but devoted a large part of the purse of nearly Rs. 25,000/- presented to me ten years ago through his and Shrimati Jaiji Petit's labours. True service of any cause is rendered by raising of stout hearts than buildings. Brick and mortar have no power to attract true hearts. But they come into being whenever they are needed by true and stout hearts. At any rate it is my prayer and hope that this building will fulfil the noble aspirations of Karsandas Chitalia. I know that he would not have been happy without it.

*Young India*, 12-9-1929, p. 300

## 2. THE STATUS AND ROLE OF THE WOMEN

### 10. WOMAN, THE COMPLEMENT OF MAN

(From "Weekly Letter" by M.D.)

In reply to a question from an American lady as to how they could reorient their curricula of education for women so as to enable them to keep the best in them and to become good co-workers of men, Gandhiji replied: I believe in the proper education of women. But I do believe that woman will not make her contribution to the world by mimicing or running a race with man. She can run the race, but she will not rise to the great heights she is capable of by mimicing man. She has to be the complement of man.

*Harijan*, 27-2-1937, p. 17 at p. 19

### 11. WOMAN – NOT THE WEAKER SEX

(From "Questions and Answers" by M.D.; an extract from Gandhiji's talk at Lausaune is given below.)

Woman, I hold, is the personification of self-sacrifice, but unfortunately today she does not realize what a tremendous advantage she has over man. As Tolstoy used to say they are labouring under the hypnotic influence of man. If they would realize the strength of non-violence they would not consent to be called the weaker sex.

*Young India*, 14-1-1932, 17 at p. 19

## 12. THE BETTER HALF OF MAN

(From "Implications of Constructive Programme")

Woman is described as man's better half. As long as she has not the same rights in law as man, as long as the birth of a girl does not receive the same welcome as that of a boy, so long we should know that India is suffering from partial paralysis. Suppression of woman is a denial of Ahimsa. Every village worker will, therefore, regard every woman as his mother, sister or daughter, as the case may be, and look upon her with respect. Only such a worker will command the confidence of the village people.

*Harijan*, 18-8-1940, p. 252

### 13. WHAT MEN OWE TO WOMEN

(From the speech on June 29, 1919, while laying the foundation stone of an independent building for the Vanita Vishram, a school for girls, Ahmedabad)

You are sorry, I know, that the great patriot, Bharat- bhushan Pandit Malaviyaji, who treats me as an elder brother, is not here to day, but I am more sorry than you are. This ceremony should have been performed by him. We can understand how much it must have hurt Sulochanabehn and Rukshmanibehn that this could not be. Panditji could have possibly come here sometime ago. He had come as far as Bombay. But this function was then postponed owing to the events which occurred and which we were unable to control. Even on this occasion, it was my wish that this ceremony should be performed by Malaviyaji. But he has had to go to Lahore and it is his own order that I should perform it. I, therefore, do this as his representative. His words are worth noting.<sup>1</sup> I agree with what he says about how much men owe to women.

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

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

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

\* \* \*

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

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

(From Gujarati)

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. XV, p. 408*

1 In his message, Malaviyaji had said:

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

## 14. HONOUR WOMEN

(From "Gandhiji's Post-Prayer Speeches")

In his post-prayer address on the New Year's day, Gandhiji expressed pleasure at the large size of the gathering, but regretted that seven minutes had to be lost in making seating arrangements for women. Even one minute lost by a meeting meant so many minutes lost to the nation. Men should learn to give place to women and a community or country in which women were not honoured could not be considered civilized.

Birla House, New Delhi, 1-1-1948

*Harijan, 11-1-1948, p. 506 at p. 508*

## 15. WOMEN IN TULSIDAS RAMAYANA

(From "Tulsidas")

It is true that the *Ramayana* is sometimes used by evil- minded persons to support their evil practices. But that is no proof of evil in the *Ramayana*. I admit that Tulsidas has, unintentionally I think, done injustice to womankind. In this, as in several other respects also, he has failed to rise above the prevailing notions of his age. In other words Tulsidas was not a reformer; he was only a prince among devotees. The faults of the *Ramayana* are less a reflection on Tulsidas than a reflection on the age in which he lived.

What should be the attitude of the reformer regarding the position of women or towards Tulsidas under such circumstances? Can he derive no help whatever from Tulsidas? The reply is emphatically "he can". In spite of disparaging remarks about women in the *Ramayana* it should not be forgotten that in it Tulsidas has presented to the world his matchless picture of Sita. Where would be Rama without Sita? We find a host of other ennobling figures like Kaushalya, Sumitra, etc. in the *Ramayana*. We bow our head in reverence before the faith and devotion of Shabri and Ahalya. Ravana was a monster but Mando- dari was *sati*. In my opinion these instances go to prove that Tulsidasji was no reviler of women by conviction. On the contrary, so far as his convictions went, he had only reverence for them. So much for Tulsidasji's attitude towards women.

*Young India*, 31-10-1929, p. 353

## 16. WOMEN IN THE SMRITIS

A correspondent sends me an issue of *Indian Swarajya* published at Bezwada. It contains an article on the place of women in the *Smritis*. From it I copy the following few extracts without any alteration:

The wife should ever treat the husband as God, though he be characterless, sensual and devoid of good qualities. (*Manu* 5-154).

Women should follow the word of their husbands. This is their highest duty. (*Tajnyavalkya* 1-18).

A woman has no separate sacrifice ritual or fasting. She gains a high place in heaven by serving her husband. (*Manu* 5-145)

She who fasts and performs rituals, while the husband lives, cuts off the life of the husband. She goes to hell. -A woman who is after the sacred waters should wash the feet or the whole body of the husband and drink the water; and she attains the highest place. (*Atri* 136-137)

There is no higher world for the woman than that of the husband. She who displeases the husband cannot go to his world after death. So she should never displease the husband. (*Vasishtha* 21-14).

That woman who prides in her father's family and disobeys the husband should be made by the king a prey to the dogs in the presence of a big assembly of people. (*Manu* 8-371)

None should eat the food offered by a woman who disobeys the husband. Such a woman is to be known as a sensualist. (*Angiras* 69)

If the wife disobeys the husband when he is given to bad habits or becomes a drunkard or is suffering from physical ailment, then, for three months she should be deprived of her valuable clothes and jewels and kept away. (*Manu* 10-78)

It is sad to think that the *Smritis* contain texts which can command no respect from men who cherish the liberty of woman as their own and who regard her as the mother of the race; sadder still to think that a newspaper published on behalf of orthodoxy should publish such texts as if they were part of religion. Of course there are in the

*Smritis* texts which give woman her due place and regard her with deep veneration. The question arises as to what to do with the *Smritis* that contain texts that are in conflict with other texts in the same *Smritis* and that are repugnant to the moral sense. I have already suggested often enough in these columns that all that is printed in the name of scriptures need not be taken as the word of God or the inspired word. But everyone can't decide what is good and authentic and what is bad and interpolated. There should therefore be some authoritative body that would revise all that passes under the name of scriptures, expurgate all the texts that have no moral value or are contrary to the fundamentals of religion and morality, and present such an edition for the guidance of Hindus. The certainty that the whole mass of Hindus and the persons accepted as religious leaders will not accept the validity of such authority need not interfere with the sacred enterprise. Work done sincerely and in the spirit of service will have its effect on all in the long run and will most assuredly help those who are badly in need of such assistance.

*Harijan*, 28-11-1936, p. 333

## 17. DESCRIPTION OF WOMAN IN RELIGIOUS LITERATURE

(From "How Non-violence Works")

Referring to the rules and restrictions prescribed by religious tradition for observance of celibacy, Gandhiji observed as follows:

If I have not followed the prescribed restrictions, much less have I accepted the description found even in religious literature of woman as the source of all evil and temptation. Owing as I do all the good there may be in me to my mother, I have looked upon woman, never as an object for satisfaction of sexual desire, but always with the veneration due to my own mother. Man is the tempter and aggressor. It is not woman whose touch defiles man but he is often himself too impure to touch her.

*Harijan*, 23-3-1938, p. 193 at p. 194

## 18. THE STATUS OF WOMEN

(From an address at the All-India Social Service Conference held in Calcutta on 31-12-1917)

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

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. XIV, p. 121 at p. 127*

## 19. ELEVATION OF WOMEN

I

(From the gist of a speech at Women's meeting in Dohad)

The protection of *dharma* is in the hands of women as men, being too much engrossed in wordly cares, often forget it and sometimes neglect it. It is for the women to protect it as dearly as their children. I have ever believed that the salvation of India lies in the elevation of her women.

*Young India, 10-9-1919*

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. XVI, p.79*

II

(From "Our Aim")

I will always pray to God that in every home women read *Navajivan*. Who will preserve *dharma*, if not women? What would be the fate of the future generation if the women remain in a state of ignorance and darkness and know nothing about India's plight? *Navajivan* will, therefore, arouse the women and will try to awaken the men to a sense of their duty towards them.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. XVI, p. 92 at p. 94

## 20. THE FUTURE LIES ON YOUR KNEES

(From "To the Women of India")

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

*Young India*, 11-8-1921, p. 253

## 21. DOMESTIC SLAVERY OF WOMEN

(From "Municipal Service and Non-violence" by P\*)

Shrimati Mridulabehn Sarabhai, who is a keen social worker and founder of the Jyoti Sangh, an institution for the uplift and emancipation of women at Ahmedabad put Gandhiji a few leading questions on the position of women in society: "The awakening of civic and political consciousness among Indian women has created a conflict between their traditional domestic duties and their duty towards society. If a woman engages in public work, she may have to neglect her children or her household. How is the dilemma to be solved?"

Basing his reply on a celebrated text of the *Gita*, Gandhiji remarked that it was always wrong to run after the "distant scene" to the neglect of the more immediate duties that might have accrued to one naturally. Neglect of present duty was the way to destruction. The question was whether it is a woman's duty to devote all her time to domestic work. More often than not a woman's time is taken up not by the performance of essential domestic duties but in catering for the egoistic pleasure of her lord and master and for her own vanities. To me this domestic slavery of women is a symbol of our barbarism. In my opinion the slavery of the kitchen is a remnant of barbarism mainly. It is high time that our womankind was freed from this incubus. Domestic work ought not to take the whole of a woman's time.

*Harijan*, 18-2-1939, p. 22 at p. 24

1 Pyarelal

## 22. EQUALITY OF SEXES

(From "Swaraj through Women")

Since the beginning of time there has been a division of labour between men and women. Adam wove and Eve span. The distinction persists to the present day. . . . Experience shows that spinning will remain woman's speciality. I believe there is a good reason behind the experience. Spinning is essentially a slow and comparatively silent process. Woman is the embodiment of sacrifice and therefore non-violence. Her occupations must therefore be, as they are, more conducive to peace than war. That she is now being dragged down for purposes of violent war is no credit to modern civilization. I have no doubt that violence so ill becomes woman that presently she will rebel against the violation of her fundamental nature. I feel that man too will repent of his folly. Equality of the sexes does not mean equality of occupations. There may be no legal bar against a woman hunting or wielding a lance. But she instinctively recoils from a function that belongs to man. Nature has created sexes as complements of each other. Their functions are defined as are their forms.

*Segaon, 27-11-1939*

*Harijan, 2-12-1939, p. 359*

## 23. ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE OF WOMEN

(From "Question Box")

Q. Some people oppose a modification of laws relating to the right of married women to own property on the ground that economic independence of woman would lead to the spread of immorality among women and disruption of domestic life. What is your attitude on the question?

A. I would answer the question by a counter question: Has not independence of man and his holding property led to the spread of immorality among men? If you answer "yes", then let it be so also with women. And when women have rights of ownership and the rest like men, it would be found that the enjoyment of such rights is not responsible for their vices or their virtues. Morality which depends upon the helplessness of a man or woman has not much to recommend it. Morality is rooted in the purity of our hearts.

*Harijan*, 8-6-1940, p. 159 at p. 160

## 24. ADVICE TO WOMEN

(From "Gandhiji's Walking Tour Diary")

Q You have referred to numerous social abuses prevalent among us. They are there; but then if the men are unwilling to effect the necessary social changes what can we women do about it?

A. Gandhiji said that there was no occasion for women to consider themselves subordinate or inferior to men. Languages proclaimed that woman was half of man and by parity of reasoning man was half of woman. They were not two separate entities but halves of one. The English language went further and called woman the better half of man. Therefore, he advised women to resort to civil rebellion against all undesirable and unworthy restraints. All restraints to be beneficial must be voluntary. There was no possibility of harm resulting from civil rebellion. It presupposed purity and reasoned resistance.

*Harijan, 23-3-1947, p. 78 at p. 80*

## 25. WHAT IS WOMAN'S ROLE?

I

With certain omissions I quote below the following from a highly educated sister:

You have shown the world, through Ahimsa and Satya- graha, the dignity of the soul. These two words are the only solution to the problem of how to overcome man's baser nature.

\* \* \*

I beg you to solve the problem of us, the women. Rajaji says that there is no women's problem. Perhaps not in the political sense. Perhaps it could be made by legislation not to matter in the professional sense, that is, all professions could be made equally open to men and women. But these things would not alter the fact that we are women and, as such, of a different quality from men. We need an additional set of principles besides Ahimsa and Satyagraha to overcome our baser qualities. A woman's spirit like a man's strives to attain better things. But just as there is need for Ahimsa and *brahmacharya* for a man to get rid of his aggressive spirit, lust, brutish instincts of inflicting pain, etc. so there is for woman need of certain principles that would enable her to get rid of her baser qualities, which are different from men and commonly said to belong by nature to her. The natural qualities of her sex, the upbringing meted out to her because of her sex, and her environment which is created because of her sex, all are against her. And in her work these things, namely her nature, upbringing and surroundings always get in the way and hinder her and give occasion for the hackneyed, phrase, "She is only a woman, after all." And I think that, if we only possess the correct solution, the correct method of improving ourselves, we could make our natural qualities, such as sympathy and tenderness, a help instead of a hindrance. The improvement, just as your solution in the case of men and children, must come from within us.

I said nature, upbringing and environment. I will give an example to make myself clearer.

Women by nature are intended to be soft, tender hearted, sympathetic, to mother children. These things influence her to a great extent unconsciously. So when it comes to doing things, she becomes too emotional. When moving with men, she commits blunders. She is soft-

hearted, when she should not be so. She is temperamental, easily gets vain and generally acts in a silly way.

When I came to see you, although I had desired the meeting very much and spent the previous night sleepless thinking over it, when in your presence I was asked to sit down, I went and sat behind the broad back of Shri Desai. I could not hear and I prevented myself from seeing you! What a silly thing to do! Further, I found I could not explain myself, could not articulate. This I attribute to my being saddled with an emotional nature which gets out of control easily. Of course suitable training would have cured that particular fault, but I dare say I would commit some other equally silly act.

A friend of mine showed me the answers she has written to a questionnaire sent by the National Planning Subcommittee for women's role. The questions, as you no doubt know, are numbered, and are something like this: To what extent, in your part of the country, is woman entitled to hold, acquire, inherit, sell or dispose of property in her own right? What provision has been made, or facilities available, for the appropriate education and training of women for the several kinds of work and employment that women of different capacities may need to engage in? She has not replied to the questions, but has written: "We cannot say with an ounce of truth that women were not getting any education as such in the good old ancient days," and, "in the Vedic period the wife, on her marriage, was at once given an honoured position in the house and she was mistress in her husband's home," etc. and has quoted Manu. I asked her what necessity there was to write about ancient customs when the questionnaire was about present-day ones. She murmured something about thinking that a reply in the form of an essay would be nice, and brightened up saying Mrs. Some one else's reply was worse than hers. I think this mistake of my friend is due to lack of proper training, which was denied to her because she is a woman. Even a clerk would know that when one is asked a question one should not write an essay on a different matter in reply.

I do not think I need go on quoting examples and explaining myself. You, with your vast experience of women of all kinds, would know whether I am right in saying that women lack the vital principle that would set them right.

Your advice to me was to read *Harijan*. I do so eagerly. But so far I have not come across, well, the advice for the inner spirit. Spinning and fighting for the national freedom are only some aspects of the training. They do not seem to contain the whole solution. For I have seen

women who do spin and do try to work out the Congress ideals and still commit blunders which are attributed to the fact of their being women.

I do not want woman to become like man. But just as you have taught men Ahimsa for their baser nature, do teach us the thing that would remove our sillier qualities. Tell us, please, how to make the best use of our qualities, how to turn our disadvantages into advantages.

This, the burden of my sex, is with me always. Every time I hear someone say, "She is a woman, after all," in a sneering way, my soul winces, if, that is, a soul is capable of wincing. A man to whom I talked of these things laughed at me and said, "Did you see that child at our friend's house? He was playing at trains, and chugchugged along until he came against a pillar. Instead of going round it he just tried to push it aside with his shoulders, thinking, in his childish mind, that he could remove it. You remind me of him. What you say is a psychological thing. You make me laugh in your attempt to understand and solve it."

I had flattered myself that my contribution to the woman's cause definitely began with the discovery of Satyagraha. But the writer of the letter is of opinion that the fair sex requires treatment different from men. If it is so, I do not think any man will find the correct solution. No matter how much he tries, he must fail because nature has made him different from woman. Only the toad under the harrow knows where it pinches him. Therefore ultimately woman will have to determine with authority what she needs. My own opinion is that, just as fundamentally man and woman are one, their problem must be one in essence. The soul in both is the same. The two live the same life, have the same feelings. Each is a complement of the other. The one cannot live without the other's active help.

But somehow or other man has dominated woman from ages past, and so woman has developed an inferiority complex. She has believed in the truth of man's interested teaching that she is inferior to him. But the seers among men have recognized her equal status.

Nevertheless there is no doubt that at some point there is bifurcation. Whilst both are fundamentally one, it is also equally true that in the form there is a vital difference between the two. Hence the vocations of the two must also be different. The duty of motherhood, which the vast majority of women will always undertake, requires

qualities which man need not possess. She is passive, he is active. She is essentially mistress of the house. He is the bread-winner, she is the keeper and distributor of the bread. She is the care-taker in every sense of the term. The art of bringing up the infants of the race is her special and sole prerogative. Without her care the race must become extinct.

In my opinion it is degrading both for man and woman that woman should be called upon or induced to forsake the hearth and shoulder the rifle for the protection of that hearth. It is a reversion to barbarity and the beginning of the end. In trying to ride the horse that man rides, she brings herself and him down. The sin will be on man's head for tempting or compelling his companion to desert her special calling. There is as much bravery in keeping one's home in good order and condition as there is in defending it against attack from without.

As I have watched millions of peasants in their natural surroundings and as I watch them daily in little Segaoon, the natural division of spheres of work has forced itself on my attention. There are no women blacksmiths and carpenters. But men and women work on the fields, the heaviest work being done by the males. The women keep and manage the homes. They supplement the meagre resources of the family, but man remains the main bread-winner.

The division of the spheres of work being recognized, the general qualities and culture required are practically the same for both the sexes.

My contribution to the great problem lies in my presenting for acceptance truth and Ahimsa in every walk of life, whether for individuals or nations. I have hugged the hope that in this woman will be the unquestioned leader and, having thus found her place in human evolution, will shed her inferiority complex. If she is able to do this successfully, she must resolutely refuse to believe in the modern teaching that everything is determined and regulated by the sex impulse. I fear I have put the proposition rather clumsily. But I hope my meaning is clear. I do not know that the millions of men who are taking an active part in the war are obsessed by the sex spectre. Nor are the peasants working together in their fields worried or dominated

by it. This is not to say or suggest that they are free from the instinct implanted in man and woman. But it most certainly does not dominate their lives as it seems to dominate the lives of those who are saturated with the modern sex literature. Neither man nor woman has time for such things when he or she is faced with the hard fact of living life in its grim reality.

I have suggested in these columns that woman is the incarnation of Ahimsa. Ahimsa means infinite love, which again means infinite capacity for suffering. Who but woman, the mother of man, shows this capacity in the largest measure? She shows it as she carries the infant and feeds it during nine months and derives joy in the suffering involved. What can beat the suffering caused by the pangs of labour? But she forgets them in the joy of creation. Who again suffers daily so that her babe may wax from day to day? Let her transfer that love to the whole of humanity, let her forget she ever was or can be the object of man's lust. And she will occupy her proud position by the side of man as his mother, maker and silent leader. It is given to her to teach the art of peace to the warring world thirsting for that nectar. She can become the leader in Satyagraha which does not require the learning that books give but does require the stout heart that comes from suffering and faith.

My good nurse in the Sassoon Hospital, Poona, as I was lying on a sick bed years ago, told me the story of a woman who refused to take chloroform because she would not risk the life of the babe she was carrying. She had to undergo a painful operation. The only anaesthetic she had was her love for the babe, to save whom no suffering was too great. Let not women, who can count many such heroines among them, ever despise their sex or deplore that they were not born men. The contemplation of that heroine often makes me envy woman the status that is hers, if she only knew. There is as much reason for man to wish that he was born a woman as for woman to do otherwise. But the wish is fruitless. Let us be happy in the state to which we are born and do the duty for which nature has destined us.

Segaon, 12-2-1940,

*Harijan*, 24-2-1940, p. 12

II

(Originally appeared in "Question Box" under the title "Women and Their Work.")

Q.: You say, "It is degrading both for man and woman that woman should be called upon or induced to forsake the hearth and shoulder the rifle for the protection of the hearth. It is a reversion to barbarity and the beginning of the end." But what about the millions of female labourers in fields, factories, etc.? They are forced to forsake the hearth and become "bread-winners". Would you abolish the industrial system and revert to the stone age? Would that not be a reversion to barbarity and the beginning of the end? What is the new order that you envisage where the sin of making women work will be absent?

A.: If millions of women are forced to forsake their hearth and become bread-winners, it is wrong, but not so wrong as shouldering the rifle. There is nothing inherently barbarous in labour. I see no barbarity in women voluntarily working on their fields whilst they are looking after their homes. In the new order of my imagination, all will work according to their capacity for an adequate return for their labour. Women in the new order will be part-time workers, their primary function being to look after the home. Since I do not regard the rifle as a permanent feature in the new order, its use will be progressively restricted even so far as men are concerned. It will be tolerated as a necessary evil while it lasts. But I would not deliberately contaminate women with the evil.

*Harijan, 16-3-1940, p. 41*

### 3. RIGHTS OF WOMEN

#### 26. HINDU LAW REFORM

(Originally appeared under the title "Hindu Law and Mysore").

Sjt. Bhashyam Aiyengar of Bangalore writes:

The principles of Hindu Law as at present administered are antiquated and opposed to our sense of equity and justice. I shall give a few instances:

1. Near and dear relations like the sister's daughter, the daughter-in-law, the brother's widow and the step-mother are altogether denied the right of inheritance. If a man were to leave a widowed daughter-in-law as his only surviving relation, his properties escheat to the Government, and the poor girl who staked all her life and fortune on the family of her husband gets out into the street.
2. Even such near relations as are included in the list of heirs do not get a chance because of the priorities of distant agnates. The sister is an heir; but if only the deceased has left a fifth descendant of a great-great-grand-father of his, the latter takes the property and the sister gets nothing. So too the son's daughter, the sister's son and the brother's daughter.
3. Women are not allowed to exercise full rights of ownership in properties inherited by or gifted to them. A widow should carefully handle her husband's property and if only she spends more or incurs a debt on the security of the property, may be for her own livelihood, a distant *dayada* can drag her to the court and coerce her into giving up her rights. *Mita- kskara* which is the prevailing authority here clearly and definitely says that all properties which a woman may get in any manner whatsoever are her *stridhana* and she can dispose of them at her will. The Privy Council refused to follow it stating that Indians always treated women as incapables and the author of *mitakshara* is a fire-eater.
4. The deaf and the dumb are excluded from inheritance. In this we are beating the lame man with his own crutches.
5. The legality of widow-remarriage is not recognised in Mysore, as in British India.

6. It is doubtful whether post-puberty marriage is legal. The age of consent should be raised to 14 in the case of girls.
7. Divorce may be provided for if people agree. We had it in India formerly. We find Parashara mentioning the circumstances under which a wife may marry a second husband during the life-time of the first.
8. Inter-caste marriages are not allowed under the present law. They must be legalised. It was an institution freely recongnized by our ancients. Many of our sages such as Vasishtha, Vyasa, Narada and Parashara were the off-spring of inter-caste marriages. If I may marry a Christian wife lawfully why not I be permitted to marry a Hindu wife though of another caste?
9. An orphan is declared ineligible for adoption. If ever a boy be fit for adoption it is the orphan, and yet we have the prohibition.
10. Widows are not allowed to adopt unless they have been authorized by the husband or the consent of *sapindas* is taken. Authority should be presumed and the widow allowed to adopt unless directed by the husband not to do so. This is the law in Bombay.

There are many more such instances. I have chosen only a few.

Thinking people feel the oppressiveness and desire reform. The only way of changing the law is by legislation. The legislature is unable to pass any law without consulting public opinion. And public opinion can only be consulted by a committee appointed for the purpose. Hence I moved a resolution in the last Budget Session of our Assembly asking for the appointment of a committee to go into the question, take evidence and report thereon formulating suggestions for legislative action. It was unanimously passed by the House.

The committee has not yet been appointed though people all over the State desire it. The fear seems to be that British India not having moved in the matter yet, it may be that any attempt by Mysore might be laughed at. This is absurd as you said. Mysore is peculiarly fitted to undertake the work, whereas there are real difficulties with British India. Mysore has peculiar advantages which it would be unwise on our part to ignore. We have now a most enlightened ruler and an equally earnest and progressive Dewan. If we cannot effect the desired reforms now we never can hope to do it.

Can you not take up this matter in *Young India*?

The prominence I have given to the foregoing need not imply that I endorse every one of the reforms suggested by the writer. That some of them require immediate attention I have no doubt. Nor have I any doubt that all of them demand serious consideration from those who would rid Hindu society of its anachronisms.

In pre-British days there was no such thing as rigid Hindu Law governing the lives \*of millions. The body of regulations known as *Smritis* were indicative rather than inflexible codes of conduct. They never had the validity of law such as is known to modern lawyers. The observance of the restraints of the *Smritis* was enforced more by social than by legal sanctions. The *Smritis* were, as is evident from the self-contradictory verses to be found in them, continually passing, like ourselves, through evolutionary changes, and were adapted to the new discoveries that were being made in social science. Wise kings were free to procure new interpretations to suit new conditions. Hindu religion or Hindu shastras never had the changeless and unchanging character that is now being sought to be given to them. No doubt in those days there were kings and their councillors who had the wisdom and the authority required to command the respect and allegiance of society. But now the custom has grown up of thinking that *Smritis* and everything that goes by the name of shastras is absolutely unchangeable. The verses which we find to be unworkable or altogether repugnant to our moral senses we conveniently ignore. This very unsatisfactory state of things has to be, some day or other and somehow, changed if Hindu society is to become a progressive unit in human evolution. The British rulers cannot make these changes because of their different religion and their different ideal. Their ideal is to sustain their commercial supremacy and to sacrifice every other interest, moral or otherwise, for the attainment of that ideal. Unless therefore Hindu public opinion clearly demands it and it can be made without any injury to their ideal, no drastic change in our customs or so-called laws will be attempted or countenanced by them. And it is difficult to focus Hindu public opinion on identical points in a vast territory like British India covering many schools of thought and law. And such public opinion as there is is naturally and necessarily preoccupied with the struggle for political freedom. A State like Mysore however has no such limitations or pre-occupations. In my humble

opinion, it is its duty to anticipate British India in the matter of removing the anachronisms in the Hindu Law and the like. Mysore State is large and important enough to attempt such changes. It has become a progressively constitutional monarchy. It has a Legislative Assembly representative enough to initiate social changes. It seems already to have passed a resolution asking for the appointment of a committee to consider what changes, if any, are necessary in the Hindu Law. And if a strong committee representing orthodox as well as progressive Hindu opinion is appointed, its recommendations must prove useful and pave the way towards making the necessary changes. I do not know the rules of the Mysore Assembly governing the constitution of such committees, but there is little doubt that they are elastic enough to admit of appointing or co-opting members from outside the Mysore State. Anyway Sjt. Bhashyam Aiy- engar has shown that a revision of the Hindu Law is absolutely necessary in several cases. No State is better fitted than Mysore for initiating the belated reform.

*Young India*, 13-10-1927, p. 344

## 27. POSITION OF WOMEN

A fair friend, who has hitherto successfully resisted the matrimonial temptation, writes:

There was a women's conference yesterday at the Malabari Hall, at which many sound speeches were made, and many resolutions passed. The question of the evening was the Sarda Bill. We are so glad you uphold the age of 18 for girls. Another important resolution dealt with the laws of inheritance. What a help it would be if you wrote a strong article on this subject in *Navajivan* and *Young India*? Why should women have either to beg or to fight in order to win back their birthright? It is strange—and also tragically comic—to hear man born of woman talk loftily of "the weaker sex" and only promising to "give us" our due! What is this nonsense about "giving"? Where is the "nobility" and "chivalry" in restoring to people that which has been unlawfully wrested from them by those having brute power in their hands? Wherein are women less important than men? Why should their share of inheritance be less than that of men? Why should it not be equal? We were discussing this very heatedly with some people a couple of days ago. A lady said, "We don't need any change in the law. We are quite content. After all, it is but fair that the son, who carries on the name and family traditions, should have the greater share. He is the mainstay of the family. ..." We said, "And what about the girl?" "Oh," intervened a strapping young man who was there, "the other fellow will look, after *her*!" There you are. The "other fellow!" Always the other fellow! This other fellow is an absolute nuisance! *Why* should there be another fellow? *Why* should it be taken for granted that there will be another fellow? They talk as though a girl were a bale of goods to be tolerated in the parental house until "the other fellow" comes round, and then coolly handed over to him with a sigh of relief. . . . Really, wouldn't you be wild if *you* were a girl?

I do not need to be a girl, to be wild over man's atrocities towards woman. I count the law of inheritance among the least in the list. The Sarda Bill deals with an evil far greater than the one which the law of inheritance connotes. But I am uncompromising in the matter of woman's rights. In my opinion she should labour under no legal disability not suffered by man. I should treat the daughters and sons on a footing of perfect equality. As women begin to realize their strength as they must in proportion

to the education they receive, they will naturally resent the glaring inequalities to which they are subjected.

But to remove legal inequalities will be a mere palliative. The root of the evil lies much deeper than most people realize. It lies in man's greed of power and fame and deeper still in mutual lust. Man has always desired power. Ownership of property gives this power. Man hankers also after posthumous fame based on power. This cannot be had, if property is progressively cut up in pieces as it must be if all the posterity become equal co-sharers. Hence the descent of property for the most part on the eldest male issue. Most women are married. And they are co-sharers, in spite of the law being against them, in their husbands' power and privileges. They delight in being ladies this and what not simply for the fact of being the wives of particular lords. Though therefore they may vote for radical reform in academic discussions over inequalities, when it comes to acting up to their vote, they will be found to be unwilling to part with the privileges.

Whilst therefore I would always advocate the repeal of all legal disqualifications, I should have the enlightened women of India to deal with the root cause. Woman is the embodiment of sacrifice and suffering, and her advent to public life should therefore result in purifying it, in restraining unbridled ambition and accumulation of property. Let them know that millions of men have no property to transmit to posterity. Let us learn from them that it is better for the few to have no ancestral property at all. The real property that a parent can transmit to all equally is his or her character and educational facilities. Parents should seek to make their sons and daughters self-reliant, well able to earn an honest livelihood by the sweat of the brow. The upbringing of minor children will then naturally devolve upon the major descendants. Much of the present imbecility of the children of the wealthy will go, if the latter could but substitute the worthy ambition of educating their children to become independent for the unworthy ambition of making them slaves of ancestral property, which kills enterprise and feeds the passions which accompany idleness and luxury. The privilege of the awakened women should be to spot and eradicate age-long evils.

That mutual lust too has played an important part in bringing about the disqualifications of the fair sex hardly needs any demonstration. Woman has circumvented man in a variety of ways in her unconsciously subtle ways, as man has vainly and equally unconsciously struggled to thwart woman in gaining ascendancy over him. The result is a stalemate. Thus viewed, it is a serious problem the enlightened daughters of *Bharata mata* are called upon to solve. They may not ape the manner of the West which may be suited to its environment. They must apply methods suited to the Indian genius and Indian environment. Theirs must be the strong controlling, purifying, steady hand, conserving what is best in our culture and unhesitatingly rejecting what is base and degrading. This is the work of Sitas, Draupadis, Savitris and Damayantis, not of amazons and prudes.

*Young India*, 17-10-1929, p. 340

## 28. WOMAN'S SPECIAL MISSION

The Editor, *Harijan*

Sir,

I have read your articles on the recent European crisis with great joy. It was only natural that you should speak to Europe now. How could you restrain yourself when humanity was on the very verge of destruction?

Will the world listen? That is the question.

There is no doubt judging from letters from friends in England—that people there went through absolute agony during that ghastly week. I am sure the same applies to the whole world. The mere thought of war—modern warfare—with its devilish ingenuity and consequent pitiless butchery and bestiality—definitely made people think as they had never thought before. "The sigh of relief that was breathed and the gratitude to God that went up from every heart when the news came through that war had been averted are something that I can never forget as long as I live" writes an English friend. And yet is it just the fear of unspeakable suffering, the dread of losing one's nearest and dearest, of seeing one's country humiliated, that cause one to detest war? Are we glad war has been averted even at the humiliation of another nation? Would we have felt differently if the sacrifice of honour had been demanded of us? Do we hate war because we realize it is the wrong way to settle disputes or is our hatred of it part and parcel of our fear? These are questions that must be answered in the right way if war is really to vanish from the earth.

The crisis over, however, what do we see? A more strenuous race than before for armaments, a more comprehensive and intensive organization than ever of all the resources available—of men, women, money, skill and talent—in the event of war! No avowed declaration that "war shall not be" from anywhere! Is this not a recognition that war—however averted today—is still hanging over our heads as the proverbial sword of Damocles?

To me as a woman—it is painful to realize that my sex has not contributed to world peace the quota that should be ours by instinct and prerogative to contribute. It pains me to read and hear of women's auxiliary corps being organized, of women being commandeered and

volunteering to take their full share in the actual field as well as behind the lines. And yet, when war comes, it is the women's hearts that are wrung in agony—it is their souls that are scarred beyond repair. It is all so inexplicable. Why is it that we have not chosen the better part through all the ages? Why have we, without murmur, bowed the knee to hideous, soulless, brute force? It is a sad commentary on our spiritual development. We have failed to understand our high calling. I am quite convinced that if women could only have a heart-understanding of the power and glory of non-violence all would be well with the world.

Why cannot you inspire and organize us women of India? Why will you not concentrate on having us as your "sword arm"? How often have I longed for you to undertake an all- India tour just for this purpose? I believe that you would have a wonderful response, for the heart of Indian womanhood is sound and no women, perhaps, in the world have finer traditions of sacrifice and self-effacement behind them as we. Perhaps if you would make something of us we may, in however humble a manner, be able to show the way of peace to a sorrowing and stricken world. Who knows?

22-10-1938

A WOMAN

I publish this letter not without hesitation. The correspondent's faith in my ability to stir the woman heart flatters me. But I am humble enough to recognize my limitations. It seems to me that the days of my touring are over. Whatever I can do by writing I must continue. But my faith is increasing in the efficacy of silent prayer. It is by itself an art—perhaps the highest art requiring the most refined diligence. I do believe that it is woman's mission to exhibit Ahimsa at its highest and best. But why should it be a man to move the woman heart? If the appeal is addressed exclusively to me not as man but as the (supposed to be) best exponent of Ahimsa to be practised on a mass scale, I have no urge in me to go about preaching the doctrine to the women of India. I can assure my correspondent that there is no want of will in me that deters me from responding to her appeal. My feeling is that if men of the Congress can retain their faith in Ahimsa and prosecute the non-violent programme faithfully and fully, the women would be automatically converted. And it may be that there shall arise one among them who will be able to go much further than I can ever hope to do. For woman is more fitted than man to make explorations and take bolder

action in Ahimsa. For the courage of self- sacrifice woman is any day superior to man as I believe man is to woman for the courage of the brute.

Bannu, 25-10-1938

*Harijan*, 5-11-1938, p. 317

## 29. RELATIONS BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

(Originally appeared in "Question Box" under the title "Men and Women".)

Q: I should like to know whether you would approve of men and women satyagrahis mixing promiscuously and working together, or whether they should be organized into separate units with a clear delimitation of the field of each. My experience is that the former must lead, as it has led, to a lot of indiscipline and corruption. If you agree with me, what rules would you suggest to combat the potential evil?

A.: I should like to have separate units. Women have more than enough work amongst women. Our women are terribly neglected, and hundreds of intelligent women workers of sterling honesty are required to work among them. On principle too I believe in the two sexes functioning separately. But I would lay down no hard and fast rules. Good sense must govern the relations between the two. There should be no barrier erected between the two. Their mutual behaviour should be natural and spontaneous.

*Harijan*, 1-6-1940, p. 145

### 30. YOUTHS' SHAME

(Originally appeared under the title "Students' Shame".)

There is a most pathetic letter from a college girl in the Punjab lying on my file for nearly two months. Want of time was but an excuse for shirking the answer to the girl's question. Somehow or other I was avoiding the task, though I knew the answer. Meanwhile I received another letter from a sister of great experience, and I felt that I could no longer evade the duty of dealing with the college girl's very real difficulty. Her letter is written in chaste Hindustani. I must try to do as much justice as I can to the letter, which gives me a perfect picture of her deep feeling. Here is my rendering of a portion of the letter.

To girls and grown-up women there come times, in spite of their wish to the contrary, when they have to venture out alone, whether they are going from one place to another in the same city, or from one town to another. And when they are thus found alone, evil-minded people pester them. They use improper or even indecent language whilst they are passing by. And if fear does not check them, they do not hesitate to take further liberty. I should like to know what part nonviolence can play on such occasions. The use of violence is of course there. If the girl or the woman has sufficient courage, she will use what resources she has and teach miscreants a lesson. They can at least kick up a row that would draw the attention of the people around, resulting in the miscreants being horse-whipped. But I know that the result of such treatment would be merely to postpone the agony, not a permanent cure. Where you know the people who misbehave, I feel sure that they will listen to reason, to the gesture of love and humility. But what about a fellow cycling by, using foul language on seeing a girl or a woman unaccompanied by a male companion? You have no opportunity of reasoning with him. There is no likelihood of your meeting him again. You may not even recognize him. You do not know his address. What is a poor girl or a woman to do in such cases? By way of example I want to give you my own experience of last night (26th October). I was going with a girl companion of mine on a very special errand at about 7-30 p.m. It was impossible to secure a male companion at the time and the errand could not be put off. On the way a Sikh young man passed by on his cycle and continued to murmur something till we

were within hearing distance. We knew that it was aimed at us. We felt hurt and uneasy. There was no crowd on the road. Before we had gone a few paces the cyclist returned. We recognized him at once whilst he was still at a respectful distance. He wheeled towards us, heaven knows whether he had intended to get down or merely pass by us. We felt that we were in danger. We had no faith in our physical prowess. I myself am weaker than the average girl. But in my hands I had a big book. Somehow or other courage came to me all of a sudden. I hurled the heavy book at the cycle and roared out, "Dare you repeat your pranks?" He could with difficulty keep his balance, put on speed and fled from us. Now, if I had not flung the book at his cycle, he might have harassed us by his filthy language to the end of our journey. This was an ordinary, perhaps insignificant, occurrence; but I wish you could come to Lahore and listen to the difficulties of us unfortunate girls. You would surely discover a proper solution. First of all, tell me how, in the circumstances mentioned above, can girls apply the principle of Ahimsa and save themselves. Secondly, what is the remedy for curing youth of the abominable habit of insulting womenfolk? You would not suggest that we should wait and suffer till a new generation, taught from childhood to be polite to their womenfolk, comes into being. The Government is either unwilling or unable to deal with this social evil. The big leaders have no time for such questions. Some, when they hear of a girl bravely castigating ill-behaved youth say: "Well done. That is the way all girls should behave." Sometimes a leader is found eloquently lecturing against such misbehaviour of students. But no one applies himself continuously to the solution of this serious problem. You will be painfully surprised to know that during Diwali and such other holidays newspapers come out with notices warning women from venturing outdoors even to see the illuminations. This one fact should enable you to know what straits we are reduced in this part of the world! Neither the writers nor the readers of such warnings have any sense of shame that they should have to be issued.

Another Punjabi girl to whom I gave the letter to read supports the narrative from her own experiences of her college days and tells me that what my correspondent has related is the common experience of most girls.

The other letter from an experienced woman relates the experiences of her girl friends in Lucknow. They are molested in cinema theatres by boys sitting in the row behind them using all kinds of language which I can only call indecent. They are stated to resort even to practical jokes which have been described by my correspondent but which I must not reproduce here.

If the immediate personal relief was all that was needed, no doubt the remedy that the girl who describes herself to be physically weak adopted, i.e., of flinging her book at the cyclist, was quite correct. It is an age-long remedy. And I have said in these columns that when a person wants to become violent, physical weakness does not come in the way of its effective use, even against a physically powerful opponent. And we know that in the present age there have been invented so many methods of using physical force that even a little girl with sufficient intelligence can deal death and destruction. The fashion nowadays is growing of training girls to defend themselves in situations such as the one described by my correspondent. But she is wise enough to know that even though she was able to make effective use for the moment of the book she had in her hand as a weapon of defence, it was no remedy for the growing evil. In the cases of rude remarks, there need be no perturbation but there should be no indifference. All such cases should be published in the papers. Names of the offenders should be published when they are traced. There should be no false modesty about exposing the evil. There is nothing like public opinion for castigating public misconduct. There is no doubt that, as the correspondent says there is great public apathy about such matters. But it is not the public alone that are to blame. They must have before them examples of rudeness. Even as stealing cannot be dealt with unless cases of thieving are published and followed up, so also is it impossible to deal with cases of rude behaviour if they are suppressed. Crime and vice generally require darkness for prowling. They disappear when light plays upon them.

But I have a fear that the modern girl loves to be Juliet to half a dozen Romeos. She loves adventure. My correspondent seems to represent the unusual type. The modern girl dresses not to protect herself from wind, rain and sun but to attract attention. She improves upon nature by painting herself and looking extraordinary. The non-violent way is not for such girls. I have often remarked in these columns that definite rules govern the development of the non-violent spirit in us. It is a strenuous spirit. It marks a revolution in the way of thinking and living. If my correspondent and the girls of her way of thinking will revolutionize their life in the prescribed manner, they will soon find that young men, who at all come in contact with them, will learn to respect

them and to put on their best behaviour in their presence. But if perchance they find, as they may, that their very chastity is in danger of being violated, they must develop courage enough to die rather than yield to the brute in man. It has been suggested that a girl who is gagged or bound so as to make her powerless even for struggling cannot die as easily as I seem to think. I venture to assert that a girl who has the will to resist can burst all the bounds that may have been used to render her powerless. The resolute will gives her the strength to die.

But this heroism is possible only for those who have trained themselves for it. Those who have not a living faith in non-violence will learn the art of ordinary self-defence and protect themselves from indecent behaviour of unchivalrous youth.

The great question, however, is why should young men be devoid of elementary good manners so as to make decent girls be in perpetual fear of molestation from them? I should be sorry to discover that the majority of young men have lost all sense of chivalry. But they should, as a class, be jealous of their reputation and deal with every case of impropriety occurring among their mates. They must learn to hold the honour of every woman as dear as that of their own sisters and mothers. All the education they receive will be in vain if they do not learn good manners.

And is it not as much the concern of professors and school-masters to ensure gentlemanliness among their pupils as to prepare them for the subjects prescribed for the classroom?

Segaon, 26-12-1938

*Harijan*, 31-12-1938, p. 408

## II

(Originally appeared under the title "The Modern Girl".)

I have received a letter written on behalf of eleven girls whose names and addresses have been sent to me. I give it below with changes that make it more readable without in any way altering the meaning:

Your comments in the letter of a lady student captioned "Students' Shame" and published in *Harijan* of the 31st December 1938, deserves special attention. The modern girl, it seems, has provoked you to the extent that you have disposed of her finally as one playing Juliet to half a dozen Romeos. This remark which betrays your idea about women in general is not very inspiring.

In these days when women are coming out of closed doors to help men and take an equal share of the burden of life, it is indeed strange that they are still blamed even when they are maltreated by men. It cannot be denied that instances can be cited where the fault is equally divided. There may be a few girls playing Juliets to half a dozen Romeos. But such cases presuppose the existence of half a dozen Romeos, moving about the streets in quest of a Juliet. And it cannot or should never be taken that modern girls are categorically all Juliets or modern youths all Romeos. You yourself have come in contact with quite a number of modern girls and may have been struck by their resolution, sacrifice and other sterling womanly virtues.

As for forming public opinion against such misdemeanours as pointed out by your correspondent, it is not for girls to do it, not so much out of false shame as from its ineffectiveness.

But a statement like this from one revered all over the world seems to hold a brief once more for that worn out and unbecoming saying "woman is the gate of Hell".

From the foregoing remarks, however, please do not conclude that modern girls have no respect for you. They hold you in as much respect as every young man does. To be hated or pitied is what they resent much. They are ready to mend their ways if they are really guilty. Their guilt, if any, must be conclusively proved before they are anathematized. In this respect they would neither desire to take shelter under the covering of "ladies, please," nor would they silently stand and allow the judge to condemn them in his own way. Truth must be faced; the modern girl or "Juliet", as you have called her, has courage enough to face it.

My correspondents do not perhaps know that I began service of India's women in South Africa more than forty years ago when perhaps none of them was born. I hold myself to be incapable of writing anything derogatory to womanhood. My regard for the fair sex is too great to permit me to think ill of them. She is what she has been described to be in English, the better half of mankind. And my article was written to expose

students' shame, not to advertise the frailties of girls. But in giving the diagnosis of the disease, I was bound, if I was to prescribe the right remedy, to mention all the factors which induced the disease.

The modern girl has a special meaning. Therefore there was no question of my restricting the scope of my remark to some. But all the girls who receive English education are not modern girls. I know many who are not at all touched by the "modern girl" spirit. But there are some who have become modern girls. My remark was meant to warn India's girl students against copying the modern girl and complicating a problem that has become a serious menace. For, at the time I received the letter referred to, I received also a letter from an Andhra girl student bitterly complaining of the behaviour of Andhra students which from the description given is worse than what was described by the Lahore girl. This daughter of Andhra tells me, the simple dress of her girl friends gives them no protection, but they lack the courage to expose the barbarism of the boys who are a disgrace to the institution they belong to. I commend this complaint to the authorities of the Andhra University.

The eleven girls I invite to initiate a crusade against the rude behaviour of students. God helps only those who help themselves. The girls must learn the art of protecting themselves against the ruffianly behaviour of man.

Bardoli, 30-1-1939

*Harijan*, 4-2-1939, p. 468

### 31. WHITED SEPULCHRES?

(From *Harijansevak*)

I am a woman, but feel I must write to you about this matter. About three months ago a man who said he was..s servant came here. I have always had a high opinion of the integrity of Congressmen and was therefore glad to meet him. I used to spin every day and he used to come to see me daily and call me daughter. I too began calling him uncle. One evening he brought a car and asked me if I had ever been in one and if not, would I not go with him for an outing? It never entered my head to suspect him and I acceded to his request. I was first taken to . . . where I was gagged and later we proceeded to a house in. . . . For some days every effort was made to commit an outrage on me. I tried several times to escape but was always stopped with the threat of being shot. Who does not love life and I confess I was frightened. Then one day a wealthy merchant and Congress leader of . . . came and asked me to go and enjoy life with him in. . . . My abductor was looking at me and laughing. I cannot describe in words the horrible behaviour of this scoundrel. There are others also implicated whose names I do not know, but the wealthy merchant gave Rs. 500/- to the old woman in charge of the house where I was kept. She tried to persuade me to go with him and told me that I would be kept in comfort.

Later one day I was rescued by a friend of my father's with the help of the police.

I have received more than one such letter accusing some Congressmen of immorality. It would not be wisdom to believe that they are all untrue and ignore the complaint. It has never been claimed that every Congressman is a model of virtue. But it is a matter of pride that the public expect a high standard of morality from Congressmen. All kinds of immorality are prevalent among us. It is a reformer's duty to try to wean from error those who are justly accused of misbehaviour. There are limits to immorality, if any can be claimed to pass muster. If what has been related is true, every man has to ask himself how far he is justified in seeking to satisfy his lust at the expense of innocent girls.

New Delhi, 26-4-1946

*Harijan*, 5-5-1946, p. 124

## 32. ABDUCTED GIRLS

(From "Notes")

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

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

New Delhi, 24-10-1946

*Harijan*, 3-11-1946, p. 381

## 4. EMANCIPATION OF WOMEN

### 33. FOR WOMAN TO COME INTO HER OWN

(Originally appeared under the title "Position of Women".)

Shrimati Saraladevi of Katak writes:

Don't you admit that the treatment of women is as bad a disease as untouchability itself? The attitude of the young "nationalists" I have come in contact with, is beastly in ninety cases out of a hundred. How many of the non-co-operators in India do not regard women as objects of enjoyment? Is that essential condition of success—self-purification—possible with out a change of attitude towards women?

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

intelligent return to simplicity, there is no escape from our descent to a state lower than brutality. I passionately desire the utmost freedom for our women. I detest child marriages. I shudder to see a child-widow, and shiver with rage when a husband just widowed with brutal indifference contracts another marriage. I deplore the criminal indifference of parents who keep their daughters utterly ignorant and illiterate and bring them up only for the purpose of marrying them off to some young man of means. Notwithstanding all this grief and rage, I realise the difficulty of the problem. Women must have votes and an equal legal status. But the problem does not end there. It only commences at the point where women begin to affect the political deliberations of the nation.

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

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

*Young India*, 21-7-1921, p. 228

### 34. LIBERATE THE WOMAN

Dr. S. Muthulakshmi Reddi, the well-known social worker of Madras, has written a long letter based on my Andhra speeches from which I take the following interesting extract:

Your observations on the urgent need for reforms and for a healthy change in the daily habits of our people, during your journey from Bezwada to Guntur, have appealed to me very much indeed.

I may humbly submit that I as a medical woman fully concur with you. But will you kindly permit me to say that if education is really going to bring in its train social reform, better sanitation, and improved public health, it is going to achieve this result only through the education of our women?

Under the present social system, don't you think that very few women are given sufficient opportunities for education, full development of body and mind, and self expression?

Don't you think that their very individuality is being recklessly crushed under the burden of customs and conventions?

Does not early marriage strike at the root of all development—physical, intellectual, and even spiritual?

Do not the pangs of child-wives and child-mothers, and the unmitigated sorrows of our widows and deserted wives demand an immediate remedy?

Is the Hindu society justified in tolerating or conniving at a custom that in the name of religion condemns young innocent girls to a life of degradation and vice?

Don't you think that as the result of social tyranny, Indian women, with a few exceptions, have lost the spirit of strength and courage, the power of independent thinking and initiative, which actuated the women of ancient India, such as Mai- treyi, Gargi, and Savitri, and even today actuate a large number of our own women belonging to the liberal creeds like the Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj, Theosophy, which is only Hinduism freed of all its meaningless customs, rites and rituals ?

Should not the members of the Nationalist Party, we mean the Congress, burn with a desire and enthusiasm to find an immediate remedy for all these social evils, the source of our national weakness and the cause of our present degradation, or at least educate the masses to liberate their women from the servile bondage to which they are subject, that they may develop to their full 'physical, mental, moral and spiritual height, so that they may set an example of courage and wisdom, and above all that they may as wives and mothers rightly and truly fulfil the sacred task of training, guiding, and forming the daily habits and character of the future administrators of India?

If the members of the Congress believe that freedom is the birthright of every nation and individual, and if they are determined to achieve that at any cost, should they not first liberate their women from the evil customs and conventions that restrict their all-round healthy growth, which remedy lies in their own hands?

Our poets, saints and sages have sung in the same tune. Swami Vivekanand has said, "That country and that, nation, which do not respect women, have never become great, nor will ever be in future. The principal reason why your race is so much degraded is that you had no respect for these living images of *Shakti*. If you do not raise the women who are the living embodiments of the Divine Mother, don't think that you have any other way to rise."

The late Subrahmanya Bharati, the gifted Tamil poet, has echoed the same idea.

So would you kindly in your tour advise our men to follow the right and the surest way to attain freedom?

Dr. Muthulakshmi has a perfect right to expect Congressmen to shoulder this responsibility. Many Congressmen are doing great work in this direction individually as also corporately. The root of the evil however lies far deeper than would appear on superficial observation. It is not the education merely of women that is at fault. It is the whole of our educational system that is rotten. Again it is not this custom or that which needs condemnation, it is the inertia which refuses to move even in the face of an admitted evil that needs to be removed. And lastly the condemnation is true only of the middle class, the town dwellers, i.e. barely 15 per cent, of the vast millions of India. The masses living in the villages have no child marriage, no prohibition against widow remarriage. It is true that they have other evils which impede their growth.

Inertia is common to both. What is however necessary is to overhaul the educational system and to devise one in terms of the masses. No system will be even passable that does not lay stress on adult education equally with that of children. Moreover no system will touch even the fringe of the question that does not give the vernaculars their natural place of supremacy. This work can only be done through the existing educated class such as it is. Before therefore reform on a large scale takes place, the mentality of the educated class has to undergo transformation. And may I suggest to Dr. Muthulakshmi that the few educated women we have in India will have to descend from their Western heights and come down to India's plains. Men are undoubtedly to blame for their neglect, nay their ill use of women, and they have to do adequate penance, but those women who have shed superstition and have become conscious of the wrong have to do the constructive work of reform. This question of liberation of women, liberation of India, removal of un- touchability, amelioration of the economic condition of the masses and the like resolve themselves into penetration into the villages, reconstruction, or rather reformation of the village life.

*Young India*, 23-5-1929, p. 173

### **35. EDUCATING THE WIFE**

(From "Untouchability, Women and Swaraj".)

I have . . . repeatedly suggested that every patriotic husband should become the wife's own teacher and prepare her for work among her less fortunate sisters. I have also drawn attention to the implications of the suggestion. One of them is for husbands to cease to treat their wives as objects of their enjoyment but to regard them as copartners in their work of nation-building. We cannot have Rama without Sita. And Sita got her schooling under the gentle care of her partner during those terrible years of exile and probation. Well, we are all exiles in our own land and need to imitate Rama and Sita to the best of our abilities and opportunity.

*Young India*, 10-3-1927, p. 76

## 36. KARVE JUBILEE

(From "Notes")

It gives me joy to publish the following appeal by Sjt. V. M. Joshi, President of Karve Jubilee Committee:

Professor Karve, who will see his 71st birthday on the 18 th of April next, is not only a founder of institutions like the Widows' Home and the Indian Women's University but is in himself an institution. His name is honoured not only in Maharashtra but in the whole of India, not only by the rich (to whom by the by this appeal is addressed) but also by the poor (for whose daughters and sisters he has been selflessly and zealously working for more than thirty years), not only by this or that political party but by *all* parties, not only by the heterodox but also by the orthodox section of the people. This unique position he did not attain in a day, nor without the difficulties and the trials which are the inevitable lot of all who attempt to do something good and great, against the prejudices and deep-rooted sentiments of the common people, especially when these attempts are not backed by wealth or position. Himself a poor man, without much help or even appreciation from the rich during the first decade of his work, hated and caluminated by the uneducated for his heterodoxy in educating the widows and supported very lukewarmly by the educated because of what they considered to be his cowardice in not going as far as they wanted him to go, he has succeeded after years of strenuous, patient and self-abasing work in converting his enemies into admirers and his lukewarm sympathizers into zealous adherents. Men of his stamp are rare anywhere, but especially in a country like India which, through the conjunction of a number of circumstances, does not, or cannot recognize and encourage its heroes. That such a man should be among us for many a year to come is naturally the wish of all who know him or have heard of him (which means practically the whole of literate India), and one of the best ways of prolonging the lives of such men is to let them feel by our actions that after all we do recognize their worth and that we are desirous of helping forward causes they have so selflessly made their own. Some of his friends and admirers have already started a Fund with a view to instituting scholarships in his name, the scholarships to be utilized for the education of helpless widows. It is hoped that the aristocracy as well as the intelligentsia will gladly help forward this movement and enable the organizers of this Fund to announce on his

seventy-first birth day the collection of a sum which will gladden him on that day and add to the health, enthusiasm and optimism which he still retains, thanks not only to his regular and temperate habits but also to the invigorating and energising nature of noble thoughts and aspirations, coupled with unblemished character.

Professor Karve is not an ordinary man who is satisfied if he satisfies an indulgent public which, if it proves itself exacting and imperious at times, issues a certificate of merit ninety-nine times, out of hundred if some little service is rendered to it during recreation hours. Prof. Karve has obeyed a master that is never generous, never indulgent and ever exacting though invariably just. This master is his own conscience. His self-effacement, his single minded devotion to duty, his exhaustless energy, his honesty in all circumstances, his faith in the midst of opposition, his irrespressible optimism are a national asset of the first magnitude. There may be two opinions about the work to which he has devoted his great gifts but there can be only one opinion about the gifts themselves. And the latter are any day far more valuable and lasting than the work itself. The organizers of the jubilee have set before themselves a very modest task to collect Rs. 25,000 to be presented to Prof. Karve for his work. It is a sum that should readily come forth from the numerous men and women who have come under the influence of this giant among silent and selfless workers or who have profited by his labours of a life-time.

*Young India*, 5-4-1928, p. 111 at p. 112

### 37. WOMEN'S UNIVERSITY

Gandhiji presided over a public lecture given by Prof. D. K. Karve, founder of the Indian Women's University at Ahmedabad on 23-2-1916. Speaking in Gujarati, he introduced the speaker, of which following is the translation:

Everyone here knows the gentleman who will soon address us. Hence I need not speak at length by way of introducing him. He has taken up the mission of founding a university for Indian women. The task will entail the revival of different regional languages. He proposes to start in June an examining and teaching university. It is said that in our society as it is today men suffer from *ardhangavqyu*\* and this charge is by and large well founded because we are not able to make our "better halves" keep pace with us. Circumstances are chiefly responsible for this state of affairs. Prof. Karve has undertaken this work in order to improve the condition of women and has set about it briskly. I must indeed admit that his enthusiasm is matchless. If I may introduce him in the words of Mr. Gokhale, he is truth incarnate. We are therefore confident that, even if his work is not crowned with all the success one may hope for, no harm is likely to result from it any time. He has devoted twenty years of service to the Fergusson College and has been managing a widows' home for as many years. Now, at the age of 59, he has started on a new venture, a mark of the highest self-sacrifice and zeal. In Gujarat, we do not have the spirit of self-sacrifice that we find in Poona. This should make us feel ashamed of ourselves; Gujarat has, therefore, much to learn from the life of Prof. Karve.

Concluding the proceedings, Gandhiji again spoke in Gujarati of which the following is a translation in English:

Mrs. Vidyagauri's speech invites some comments. We shall accept equality of rights for women, but I think their education should differ from men's, as their nature and functions do. In progressive countries, women receive the very highest education but, after it is over, they do not have to perform the same duties as men and in our

country women have never to compete with men for a livelihood. The help this institution receives from us, whatever it will be, will not go unavailing to us. When we start a school or a college here, we shall get back a part of what we donate. It is my earnest request, therefore, that we should give the best help we can to this institution.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. XIII, p. 245*

1 Paralysis of one side of the body

### 38. MESSAGE TO EDUCATED WOMEN OF GUJARAT

(The following message to "Gujarati Hindu Stree Mandal" was sent on or before 14-11-1917 in Gujarati from which it is translated in English.)

The women whom this message reaches are likely to have had some measure of education. I wish, therefore, to consider one thing. What should educated women do for their illiterate sisters? This is a very important issue. Beyond question, if women choose, they can attain a far greater measure of success in this field than men can ever do. At present, we do not find many women taking to this work. That is, I believe, not their fault but that of their education. The first thing, therefore, which educated women must do is to try and see that their sisters do not fall a victim to it. Modern education fails utterly to prepare women for their distinctive role; this is not questioned by anyone. I do not wish here to examine the shortcomings of modern education or to bother you with the question how they may be overcome. All that I desire is that educated women should make this question their own and that those of them with some experience should dedicate their all to rouse Gujarat over it and focus attention on the right lines (of reform.)

Educated women have no contact with those not educated; often they don't welcome such contacts. This disease must be cured. It is necessary that educated women are made conscious of their most obvious duty. Men also are not free from faults of this kind, but women need not follow in their footsteps. They have the power, denied to men, of creating new ideals and translating them into action. By comparison, man is thoughtless, impatient and given to the pursuit of novelty. Woman, it is observed, is serious minded, patient and inclined generally to cling to old ways. When, therefore, she has a new idea, it seems to have its birth in the tender depths of her heart. An idea born in this manner commands her unshakable faith and, for that reason, it is capable of being rapidly propagated. I believe therefore that, if educated women give up copying the ways of men and think independently about the important questions affecting their sex, we shall find it quite easy to solve many a knotty problem.

The problem of widows is not quite a simple one. It is a worthy cause to which quite a few women can dedicate their lives. It is one thing for a widow to marry again, if she so desires, quite another to waste one's time over persuading a child-widow to do so. If women were to resolve, instead, and induce others to resolve, not to marry a widower or offer one's daughter in marriage to one, and not to sacrifice one's daughter to a child bridegroom, fit enough to be rocked in a cradle, I am confident the fruits will be sweet for India. It is worth considering carefully in what way the country can avail itself of the services of hundreds of widows, young and old; if educated women will not think about this, who else should? I have had an idea for many years; I may as well mention it here. Only a few years ago, our women used to spin cotton and even weave. Today, the art is about to disappear. India has had to suffer much because of its decline. Millions of rupees have been lost to foreign countries. At present, widows spend their time going to temples or in the service of those claiming to be holy men, or in idle gossip. It does not seem to me that one can live a religious life only by going to a temple, though, of course, I do not wish to suggest that thoughtful visits to a temple may not be profitable. The idea, however, that spending time in a temple, unmindful of other tasks, is the farthest limit of selflessness is sheer superstition. Likewise, to wait on men of holy life, who stand in no need of services from others, and to serve them in all manner of ways, is unwholesome for both parties and waste of one's time. To draw widows away from such activities and induce them to take up the task of serving India, work which will promote their ultimate good, is to help them to remarriage of the purest kind. Why do not the educated women embark upon this mission? Those of them who might think of doing so should themselves take the first lesson in the school of industry, namely, spin cotton and weave.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. XIV, p. 86*

### 39. AT WOMEN'S UNIVERSITY

(From "Weekly Letter-No. 30" by V. G. D.)

From Harijan quarters Gandhiji drove to the Nathibai College for women at Yerandavana and then to the Mahila Ashram at Hingne. These institutions are the creation of Professor Karve's genius and passion for women's service. In 1933, 23 girls passed the degree examination and 97 girls the entrance examination of the University, besides nine who obtained the Primary school-mistress' diploma. Mahila Ashram conducts a primary school, a high school and a training college for school-mistresses with 74, 76 and 46 students respectively on their roll. At the Ashram Gandhiji was garlanded by Harijan girls, and in the course of his address to the girls, said that he owed his first acquaintance with Professor Karve and the great work he was doing for the women of India to the late Mr. Gokhale who desired him to see for himself what one man could do in the cause of women's progress. Since then his ship had long sailed on troubled waters, with the result that he could pay them a second visit only after about 20 years, and that, too, by accident. He did not have time enough for his immediate work, but still he was glad to be in their midst. He hoped that the girls, when they grew up, would so regulate their lives as to be worthy of the great sacrifices of the Karves in their interest. With such an example before them, they dare not lead lives of luxury and self-indulgence. There was an old saying in Sanskrit that learning is not learning, if it does not lead to deliverance from everything petty and selfish. He would, therefore, expect the girls to spend themselves in the service of their less fortunate sisters.

*Harijan, 6-7-1934, p. 161*

## 40. KASTURBA SMARAK TRUST

I

There were two meetings at Uruli Kanchan on the 28th, 29th and 30th March: one of the Agents of this Trust and the other of the Executive. The meeting of the Agents was the first of its kind. The Agents had many interesting questions. Why could not the Agents be members of the legislatures? The obvious answer is that if they are to do justice to their work, they should have no time for legislative duties. The decisive reason is that the villages will have a wrong example set to them, if they have members of legislatures to look up to.

Whatever the sphere of work they choose they should not be nonentities. It should be remembered that the Agents have displaced the committees that were appointed for the last year. If they cover the whole province, they have their work cut out for them. If they cannot cope with it, they have to run model *shibirs* in one or more places to prepare women workers for villages. They may be teachers, nurses, spinners, weavers, sanitarians, etc. Work by women among women in the villages of India is an unbeaten track. Men are hardly fit for it. But the women have so long remained without experience of such work that it is difficult, specially in the initial stages. If the Agents attempt at intensity and confine their activity to certain centres, they will find the work to be simple and instructive.

Then they have their advisers. They are not meant to be ornamental. Their advice should always be at the disposal of the Agents. If they are well-chosen, they must prove towers of strength to the Agents in their difficult task.

The experiment of having women only as Agents is new. It can only succeed if they are wisely guided by the Centre and ably advised by the advisers. Much as it is to be wished that they too were women, the fear is that in the beginning they will be mostly men. The advisers should never aspire to be more than such and never be less. It should be their proud privilege to give the Agents their advice whenever it is

sought. The members of the defunct committees, it is hoped, will never feel that they have been displaced for any other reason save the patent and potent one of manning the organization with women from top to bottom. The secret of success in this as in any other organization lies in the spirit of service actuating its every limb and self being subordinated to the organization.

On the train to Delhi, 31-3-1946

*Harijan*, 7-4-1946, p. 76

II

*(From Harijansevak)*

It is alleged by some that the funds collected with much speed for this Trust are not being spent at the same pace and that the general public are unaware of how the money is being spent. Both allegations are baseless. While it is true that for the most part the donations to the Trust came from city-dwellers, it is equally true that the aim of the collectors was that the money should be spent in the villages for the benefit of village women and children. Those who do not see the Trust accounts cannot be aware of how the money is being spent. The critics are all city-dwellers. Villagers do not read newspapers nor do they care about how the money is spent. Those who live in the villages, where work, if any, is being done, see the same for themselves.

Any work done for city-dwellers is broadcast at once. A building or a statue is advertised in the papers. Its foundation stone is laid or its opening ceremony performed with due pomp and ceremony. Any such propaganda is impossible for village work among village women. The reader will today have to be content with knowing through whom Kasturba Trust work is being done. When work has been accomplished in even a few thousand out of the seven lakhs of our villages and the women and children of those areas have become ready to play their proper part in life, then will all become *ipso facto* await of the work. Today it is enough for all to know that village midwives and nurses are being trained.

At the last meeting of the Executive Committee held recently in Poona, it was resolved to sanction money for the holding of training camps in several out of the twenty- one provinces. But since all the workers trained here will go to the villages, city-dwellers will know nothing about them unless they were to be paraded in the cities. And it is neither the intention of the Committee nor would it be proper to do so. Another point to be borne in mind is that the work undertaken is of a new kind and can only be tackled in new ways. Therefore, progress must perforce be slow just as was and is the case with khadi and other village industries. Scant attention has so far been and is even now being paid to the villages. Only when the town- dwellers become village-minded, will any real change take place. Until then neither newspapers nor city-folk will take much interest in village organizations.

Sometimes, quite rightly, the money collected for a specific purpose is expended on it straightaway. But in the case of the Kasturba Fund, it was necessary to proceed with caution. The donors may be numbered in thousands but the field in which the money is to be spent is 1900 miles long and the population to be served numbers 40 crores. How to work, where to commence, are matters that require thought and time. Workers could not be found at once and now time is required for their training too. Therefore, donors must have confidence that the Trustees will neither waste money nor will they lazily refuse to spend where it is necessary.

Ever since committees were formed in various centres, there have been complaints that these should have been composed solely of donors and that the latter have been taken in very small numbers. It does not follow that donors are always the best judges of how the money should be spent. Several persons may, for example, donate 10 crores for the construction of an artificial lake. What can they do without the help of engineers in whose hands the expenditure of money and work must naturally go? Many similar instances may be cited in support of the argument. In the first instance, provincial committees were formed in the manner described. Later, it was felt that it was women's work and should be run, as far as possible, by woman agents. By such a course of action it is sought to give the requisite confidence to woman workers, so that the responsibility of running the organization eventually comes into their hands.

All this must take time. There are difficulties to surmount. But it is hoped that ultimately the work will grow and women will be prepared to shoulder the burden. Results will show whether the experiment is worth while.

Panchgani, 14-7-1946

*Harijan*, 21-7-1946, p. 225

## 41. WITH THE KASTURBA TRAINEES

(By N. K. Bose)

The Kasturba trainees came to meet Gandhiji from their camp in Saheb nagar the other day. They were twenty-three in number and were accompanied by three of their teachers. Gandhiji invited them to ask questions. One of the teachers had submitted a statement about her experiences with regard to the method of training itself. But Gandhiji did not wish to enter into the actual details of the training course; he was sure this had to be adjusted to the conditions and needs of rural Bengal and the details must naturally be worked out by the teachers from their own experience.

The question which Gandhiji took up for discussion was asked by one of the trainees. In view of the resistance encountered from the rural people and the numerous disappointments which they had to face, how would Gandhiji advise them to proceed, so that success could be ensured? Gandhiji began by saying that he was glad that a very fundamental question had been raised. He had, however, only one answer for it.

The education through which India had passed for over a century was essentially designed for a particular purpose. In order to feed the interests of capitalism, the entire economic life of India had been changed, the city had become the centre of gravity and not the village; the village had been dethroned from its position of supremacy and virtually been converted into a slum, kept as far away from the city as practicable. The educational system had been planned to supply needs of this lopsided economy. If, now, we wanted to create a new India, our outlook must be changed altogether. Democracy has to be built up inch by inch in economic, social and political life. Considering the magnitude of the task, it would naturally require a very stout heart to grapple with the problem.

To the trainees, his advice was one. They *must* be brave, intelligent and persevering. The villagers might not readily respond. They might even prove hostile. Many interests would have to be disturbed before the necessary change could be effected. But non-

violent workers should choose the line of least resistance. They should suffer in their own person before they could aspire to gain the co-operation of the inert or hostile villagers. Day in and day out, they must persevere at their chosen task, whether it was village sanitation or the imparting of education to a few children, whom perhaps nobody else would care to touch. They might not have the resources to supply their own bread. But even then, through hunger, they must persist without resentment, without bitterness. *Then* only will their conduct strike the imagination of the villagers; and this element of surprise will open the way into their hearts. Once the inert mass has begun to yield, work will make rapid progress.

Another trainee then said that there were no signs of response from the villagers even after a year of patient work. Gandhiji comforted her by saying that one year's work was not enough. We had to sweep aside the accumulated debris of centuries of subjugation. Even a lifetime might not prove enough. If our education had been otherwise, we might not have perhaps yielded so readily to despondence. We had to steel our hearts and look towards the bright future to enable us to get out of the slough of despond. So long as we persevered, the struggle itself was victory. It was only courage of this kind which could lead India to the New Age.

Calcutta, 25-8-1947

*Harijan*, 7-9-1947, p. 313

## 42. A WORD TO KASTURBA WORKERS

(From "Gandhiji's Post-prayer Speeches")

Referring to his own talk to the woman workers of the Kasturba Trust that afternoon he said that the Trust was meant for the service of women and children in the villages of India. The workers had been mostly drawn from the cities. The cities upto now had exploited the villages. The right thing would be that the cities should be there to be exploited for the villages. But today the capitalists brought raw materials from the villages and used them to make money. If these *sevikas* wanted to serve the villages, they had to become villagers at heart. They had to cease to be city-minded. They should take to the villages the good things of the cities, as for instance cleanliness and sanitation, but even these had to be given a rural garb. Then alone they would be able to check the exploitation of the villages and improve the lot of women and children there.

Birla House, New Delhi, 9-12-1947

*Harijan*, 21-12-1947, p. 477

## 5. WOMEN AND FINERY

### 43. HANDSOME IS THAT HANDSOME DOES

(Originally appeared in "Notes" under the title "One More Recruit")

The army of my sweet-hearts is daily increasing. The princess among them is, of course, Gulnar, my deputy who was to occupy the autocratic chair in my absence as His Majesty's guest as often as I received the invitation. But the lesser stars are too numerous to mention. The latest recruit is Ranibala of Burdwan, a darling perhaps 10 years old. I dare not ask her age. I was playing with her as usual and casting furtive glances at her six heavy gold bangles. I gently explained to her that they were too heavy a burden on her delicate little wrists and down went her hand on the bangles. "Yes, yes, give up the bangles to Mahatmaji" said her grandfather Shyam Babu of the *Servant* fame. I thought this was generosity at somebody else's expense. 'Oh, you do not know my daughter and my son-in-law. My daughter will be glad to hear that the girl has given her bangles to you and my son-in-law can well afford to do without them. He is a most generous-hearted man. He helps the poor.'" All the while he was speaking he was helping Ranibala to remove the bangles and encouraging her. I must confess I was embarrassed. I was merely joking as I always do when I see little girls and jokingly create in them a distaste for much ornamentation and a desire to part with their jewellery for the sake of the poor. I tried to return the bangles. But Shyam Babu cut short all such attempt by telling me that her mother would regard it as an ill- omen to take back the bangles. I had made known my condition of acceptance viz., that the girl should not ask for new gold bangles in the place of those given to me. She might have the beautiful snow-white conch-shell bangles if she liked. The girl and her grandfather accepted the condition. Well, whether the gift was a good omen for the family or not, I do not know. It proved one for the poor and me. For, the example proved contagious and at the ladies' meeting I addressed at Burdwan I got quite a dozen bangles and two or three pairs of ear-rings all unasked. Needless to say, these will be utilized for khaddar and charkha *prachar* in Bengal. I notify to all the

young girls and their parents and grandparents that I am open to have as many sweet-hearts as would come to me on Ranibala's terms. They will be handsomer for the thought that they gave their prized ornaments to be used for the service of the poor. Let the little girls of India treasure the proverb "handsome is that handsome does".

*Young India*, 11-6-1925, p. 201

## 44. WOMEN AND ORNAMENTS

(From "Weekly Letter" by M. D.)

It was at Tuticorin that Gandhiji for the first time saw Christian women with heavy ornaments hanging down the huge holes in the lobes of their ears. He successfully persuaded some of them to put them off, but a noticeable instance of failure showed how difficult it is for a slave to throw off the gilded chains of slavery. An Adi Dravida woman came forward in the Tuticorin public meeting with a gift of Rs. 11, and as she was leaving the platform Gandhiji noticed the heavy pendants in her ear-holes. He tugged at one of them and tried to convince her of the barbarity of her ornaments. "Won't you put these off?" he gently asked. There was some hesitation. "Look at Mrs. Gandhi, she has no ornaments on her ears. You see small holes in my ears, but I long outgrew the ornaments. Won't you put yours off?" "I will henceforth", she said. Gandhiji tried to fortify his argument by citing the instance of Sita. "Now, tell me what made Sita beautiful? Her form or her virtues?" "Of course her form", said the unsophisticated woman cheating Gandhiji, of his expected reply. It took him some time to make her feel that beauty is in its essence moral rather than physical but, she did not seem convinced of the necessity of shedding her ornaments.

At Nagercoil in Travancore our hostess an elderly lady put forward a novel plea in defence of the ear-ornaments. "Little girls and women may wear diamonds and similar other delicate ornaments, but what are old women like me to wear? These heavy ornaments just become our age." "But why should old women wear ornaments?" Gandhiji enquired. It appeared to her a strange question. "The Travancore Maharani does not wear ornaments. Why should you?" There was no reply, but she must have felt that Gandhiji was here trenching on ground which was scarcely his! To her surprise, however, her daughter who had been following the argument had run to her husband and got his permission to give away all her gold bangles, which she did.

*Young India*, 27-10-1927, p. 362 at p. 364

## 45. A SISTER'S DIFFICULTY

A sister writes:

A year ago I heard you speaking on the supreme necessity of every one of us wearing khadi and thereupon decided to adopt it. But we are poor people. My husband says that khadi is costly. Belonging as I do to Maharashtra, I wear a *sadi* 9 yards long. Now if I reduced the length of my *sadi* to 6 yards, there would be a great saving, but the elders will not hear of any such reduction. I reason with them that wearing khadi is the more important thing and that the style and length of the *sadi* is absolutely immaterial, but in vain. They say it is my youth that puts all these new-fangled notions into my head. But I expect they will agree to the proposed reduction in length, if you are good enough to write to me, saying that khadi ought to be used, even at the cost of the style of clothing.

I have sent the desired reply to the sister. But I take note of her difficulty here, as I know that the same difficulty is encountered by many other sisters as well.

The letter in question bears witness to the strong patriotic feeling of the writer, for there are not many sisters who like her are ready to give up old styles or old customs on their own initiative. The number of such sisters and brothers is legion, as would gladly have Swaraj if it could be attained without suffering any discomfort or incurring any expenditure and in spite of their sticking to old customs regardless of their propriety or the reverse. But Swaraj is not such a cheap commodity. To attain Swaraj implies the cultivation of a spirit of self-sacrifice, including the sacrifice of provincialism.

Provincialism is a bar not only to the realization of national Swaraj, but also the achievement of provincial autonomy. Women perhaps are more responsible than men for keeping up this narrow spirit. Variety is worth cherishing up to a certain limit, but if the limit is exceeded amenities and customs masquerading under the name of variety are subversive of nationalism. The Deccani *sadi* is a thing of beauty, but the beauty must be let go if it can be secured only by sacrificing the nation. We should consider the Kachchhi style of short *sadi* or the Punjabi *odhani* to be really artistic if

the wearing of khadi can be cheapened and facilitated by their means. The Deccani, Gujarati, Kachchhi and Bengali styles of wearing *sadi* are all of them various national styles, and each of them is as national as the rest. Such being the case, preference should be accorded to the style which requires the smallest amount of cloth consistently with the demands of decency. Such is the Kachchhi style, which takes up only 3 yards of cloth that is, about half the length of the Gujarati *sadi*, not to mention the saving of trouble in having to carry a smaller weight. If the *pachhedo* and the petticoat are of the same colour, one cannot at once make out whether it is only a *pachhedo* or full *sadi*. The mutual exchange and imitation of such national styles is eminently desirable.

Well-to-do people might well keep in their wardrobes all possible provincial styles of clothing. It would be very courteous and patriotic on the part of a Gujarati host and hostess to put on the Bengali style of dress when they entertain Bengali guests, and *vice versa*. But such procedure is open only to the patriotic rich. Patriotic people of the middle and poorer classes should take pride in adopting that particular provincial style which cheapens as well as facilitates the wearing of khadi. And even there they should fix their eye upon the clothing style of the poorest of the poor.

Swadeshi does not mean drowning oneself in one's own little puddle but making it tributary to the ocean that is the nation. And it can claim to contribute to the ocean only if it is and keeps itself pure. It is, therefore, clear that only such local or provincial customs should have a nationwide vogue as are not impure or immoral. And when once this truth is grasped, nationalism is transmuted into the enthusiasm of humanity.

*Young India*, 2-2-1928, p. 40

## 46. WOMEN AND JEWELS

(From "Notes")

A lady doctor in Tamil Nadu sends a letter accompanying her gift referred to in it. As the letter, in my opinion, enhances the value of the gift and is likely to serve as an example to others, I compress its contents as follows, omitting the names of the donor, the Raja and the place.

Just a few lines to tell you that I sent you yesterday a parcel of diamond ring and a pair of ear-rings which were given to me about 12 years ago in remembrance of service in the palace . . . when the heir was born to the Raja. It grieved me much when I came to know that the Raja did not have even the courage to invite you to his palace when you passed by and I was told that it was due to fear of the Government. You can imagine my feeling when after your visit I looked at these jewels which before used to travel with me. Now when I looked at them, bitterness rose in my breast and then it turned into deep sympathy for the starving millions about whom you spoke when you were here. I said to myself^ "Are not these jewels made out of the people's money? And, what claim have I to keep them as my own?" I then made up my mind to send them on to you. You could use them for khadi service and so help some of the starving millions. I feel sure that it is a better use to make of them than that they should remain in a corner of my box. A friend has valued them at Rs. 500/-. They are, therefore, insured for that amount. I only hope that some generous person will give you more than the actual price, knowing the circumstances in which these things are being sent to you. You may make what use you like of this letter.

It is remarkable how we imagine fears even when there is no cause. There are many Rajas who have openly and willingly supported khadi and there through the cause of the poor from whom, after all, as my correspondent correctly puts it, they derive their riches. It is true that khadi has a political significance; but we have not yet come to the stage when support of khadi can be safely declared by the Government to be criminal. Every philanthropic movement can be turned to political use, but it would be a sad day when on that account it is boycotted even as to its philanthropic aspect. But is it only fair to state that the Raja to whom reference has been made by

the lady doctor is not the only one who is afraid of supporting khadi or showing ordinary courtesy to a public servant like me. It is well however that the Raja's boycott of me has stimulated the gift. But I would like all the sisters who may chance to see this note to realize that it is not necessary to be able to emulate the fair donor to have occasions like the one that set her a thinking about her duty to the starving millions. Surely it is easy enough to realize that so long as there are millions of men and women in the country starving for want of food because of want of work, the sisters have no warrant for possessing costly jewels for adorning their bodies or often for the mere satisfaction of possessing them. As I have remarked before now in these pages if only the rich ladies of India will discard their superfluities and be satisfied with such decoration as khadi can give them, it is possible to finance the whole of the khadi movement, not to take into consideration the tremendous moral effect that such a step on the part of the rich daughters of India will produce upon the nation and particularly the starving masses.

*Young India*, 5-4-1928, p. 111

## 47. VISIT TO A YOUNG WIDOW

(From "In Andhradesha")

When we were going from Bezwada to Ellore I was told that a girl who had just been widowed wanted to give me all her jewellery valued at Rs. 1,400 and that she wished me to go to her house in a village only less than two miles from Pedapadu where we had to go. Her caste people observed the purdah and in no case could a girl recently widowed venture out especially to a public meeting. The jewellery had little attraction for me. In fact I did not believe my informants when they told me that the girl- widow could possibly wish to give up all her costly jewellery. But the fact of her being young and only recently widowed (I was told she was a virgin-widow) was enough to take me to her house. And I was glad I went. The girl's name is Satyavatidevi. She is under 20. Her husband was a well-educated nationalist. She knows Telugu well. I found her to be a girl of courage and decision. She has both the parents alive. She placed into my hands all her ornaments so far as I am aware. And they did appear to me to be worth fully Rs. 1,400. She put into my hands also a note which asked me to take her to the Ashram. The parents were present when I met Satyavatidevi. And they were agreeable to her surrendering her ornaments for khadi work. I suggested to the parents that they should not keep her confined to the house and that she should be treated just like the other girls in the family. I told the girl that she had no need to discard her ornaments merely because she was widowed. But she was firm. She had no longer any use for them. I told her I would gladly take her to the Ashram if the parents consented. The latter have promised to give the matter their consideration and have given the girl every hope of her being sent with me at the end of the tour. The father, though he was undoubtedly cautious and reticent, appeared to me to be generously inclined towards his daughter. I was sorry I was unable to bring any greater consolation to the widow. It was with a very heavy heart I parted from her.

At Pedapadu therefore my speech was devoted to Satyavatidevi. I told the audience that it was their duty to break down the purdah and to help the parents of the widow to remarry her if she was at all so inclined. If a young man of 18 being widowed could remarry, why should not a widow of that age have the same right? Voluntary enlightened widowhood is a great asset for any nation as enforced ignorant widowhood is a disgrace. The audience listened with respect and great attention. The father of the widow was present at the meeting. I subsequently learnt that the idea of parting with the ornaments was the widow's own original idea and that she had no desire whatsoever of remarrying. Her great desire is, I was told, to give herself to study with a view ultimately to dedicate her life to national service. All honour to Satya- vati, if such is really her mature decision. Hindu society must make the way absolutely open for such widows to remarry whenever they like. The story of Satyavati is enacted in hundreds of Hindu homes every day. The curse of every widow who is burning within to remarry but dare not for fear of a cruel custom descends upon Hindu society so long as it keeps the widow under an unforgivable bondage.

*Young India*, 2-5-1929, p. 137 at p.138

## 48. KAUMUDPS RENUNCIATION

It has been my privilege to witness many 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 that of the Harijan cause. 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 speaking and was selling the presents when gently walked up to the platform Kaumudi, a girl 16 years old. She took out one 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."

She replied by taking off her golden necklace. This was no easy performance. It had to be disengaged from her long plait of hair. But the Malabar girl that she is, she had no false modesty about performing the whole process before a wondering public counting several thousands of men and women. "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 parents' consent to the sacrifice. Before I could extract any answer from the shy girl, some one told me that her father was present at the meeting, that he himself was helping me by bidding for the addresses 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 you have discarded." May her renunciation prove to have been an earnest of her being a true Harijan Sevika.

*Harijan, 19-1-1934, p. 4*

## 49. KAUMUDPS SACRIFICE

(From "Weekly Letter-No. 11<sup>M</sup> by C. S.)

Gandhiji has written in the *Harijan* about the renunciation of Kaumudi, a little Malabari girl of 16. On the last day of Gandhiji's stay at Calicut, she came to see Gandhiji along with her father. Not having accompanied Gandhiji to Badagara, I saw Kaumudi for the first time. There was no guile about her. She spoke gently and was very reticent. She had studied up to the Intermediate and followed the conversation well. Gandhiji wanted to know more about her sacrifice. He asked whether she had come to the meeting with her mind made up to make the sacrifice or she made the decision instantaneously at the meeting.

"She had made up her mind at home," replied the father, "and had obtained our permission."

"But will the mother not feel sorry to see you without any jewellery?"

"She will," said Kaumudi, "but I am sure she will not compel me to wear it again."

"But when you get married, as in due course you will, your husband will, perhaps, not like to see you without any ornaments. What will you do then? I have a moral difficulty before me. I have written an article for the *Harijan* about your sacrifice, which is indeed wonderful. I have said in that article that you would never wear any ornaments again. If you are not prepared for that, I shall have to alter that part of the article; or you will have to stand adamant against the wishes of your prospective husband. That you a Malabari girl may be capable of doing. Or, you will have to select a husband who will be satisfied to have you without ornaments. You may tell me frankly what you feel".

Kaumudi slowly took in the full import of what Gandhiji said. It was a great thing she was called on to do. She had to make a momentous decision. She cogitated for a

while, and then uttered only one sentence, "I will select a husband who will not compel me to wear ornaments."

Gandhiji's eyes beamed with delight. "I had Anna- purna," he said. "She was married and yet she discarded all her jewellery, and she kept her pledge till the moment of her death. Now I have you." And he has never tired since then of speaking to women of Kaumudi's noble sacrifice.

*Harijan*, 26-1-1934, p. 4 at p. 5

## 50. A TOUCHING SCENE

(From "Weekly Letter-No. 12" by G. S.)

At Trivandrum, among the many visitors was a girl of seventeen. As she came and stood before Gandhiji, he asked, "Who are you?"

"A little girl", she replied.

"What has a little girl to do with jewellery?"

Gandhiji had seen the many ornaments she was wearing.

"Because I want to remain a girl", replied Meenakshi.

"Then you must not wear jewellery." And Gandhiji narrated the story of Kaumudi's sacrifice. "Kaumudi was sixteen, younger than you by an year, yet she discarded all her jewellery."

Meenakshi's eyes brightened. "I, too, would like to give my jewellery", she said.

"Have you your parents' permission?"

"I will get it."

"I know Malabar girls are free."

"Shall I give it to you?"

"Yes, to Harijans."

"That is what I mean."

"If you think I am a bona fide Harijan, then give it to me. If you think I am a humbug, do not give it to me. I know it is a hard thing for a girl to do. There are all sorts of fashions today in society. I say, handsome is that handsome does."

"If I give myself to you?"

"Yes, I have your cousin, and now I have you."

"That is settled."

"Even then I give you one night to consider."

Next morning, when I saw Meenakshi, I could not easily recognize her. All her ornaments had gone. "Where are your ornaments?" I asked her.

"I have given them up!"

"To Gandhiji?"

"No, that I could not do", she said. "My father has debts and I cannot give away the ornaments. But I have; made up my mind never to wear them again."

"Are your parents reconciled to the change you have made?"

"Father is. But mother finds it difficult to do so."

Later in the day, Meenakshi with her parents came to Gandhiji and gave him a gold bangle and a necklace for the Harijan cause. Gandhiji had known beforehand of the debt. He said to the parents, "You may not give me these articles. Discharge whatever part of the debt you can with the ornaments that Meenakshi has discarded. She is never to ask for them again."

Tears flowed down Meenakshi's cheeks. Her emotion was too deep for words. She had made a life-long decision. Gandhiji then asked the mother why she could not bless her daughter in her noble decision.

"She will have to be married," replied the mother, "and it will be difficult for us to find out a husband who will be contented to have her without ornaments."

"You may have no anxiety on that score," said Gandhiji, pacifying her fears, "I shall find you, when the time comes, not one but fifty candidates for Meenakshi's hand, and you may select any one of them."

The mother blessed Meenakshi's decision. It was a touching scene. It is example of noble sacrifices like these that sustain one and make life liveable in the midst of trials. May the renunciation of Kaumudi and Meenakshi act as a leaven and help to dispel the darkness of ignorance that keeps a sin like unlouchability alive.

*Harijan*, 2-2-1934, p. 3 at p. 4

## 6. THE EVIL OF PURDAH

### 51. IN DEFENCE OF THE PURDAH!

(Originally appeared under the title "To a Reader of *Young India*".)

I do not propose to publish your letter in defence of the purdah. I am of opinion that the purdah in India is a recent institution and was adopted during the period of Hindu decline. In the age when proud Draupadi and spotless Sita lived there could be no purdah. Gargi could not have held her discourses from behind the purdah. Nor is the purdah universal in India. It is unknown in the Deccan, Gujarat and the Punjab. It is unknown among the peasantry and one does not hear of any untoward consequences of the comparative freedom which women in these provinces and among peasantry enjoy. Nor will it be just to say that the women or men in the other parts of the world are less moral because of the absence of the purdah system. "A reader of *Young India*" seeks to defend every thing that is ancient. Whilst I hold that the ancients gave us a moral code which is not to be surpassed, I am unable to subscribe to the doctrine of their infallibility in every detail. And who shall say what is really ancient? Are all the hundred and eight *Upanishads* of equal sanctity? It seems to me that we must test on the anvil of reason everything that is capable of being tested by it and reject that which does not satisfy it even though it may appear in an ancient garb.

*Young India*, 24-3-1927, p. 95

## 52. TEAR DOWN THE PURDAH

Whenever I have gone to Bengal, Bihar or the United Provinces, I have observed the purdah system more strictly followed than in the other provinces. But when I addressed a meeting at Darbhanga late at night and amid calm surroundings free from noise and bustle and unmanageable crowds, I found in front of me men, but behind me and behind the screen were women of whose presence I knew nothing till my attention was drawn to it. The function was in connection with the laying of the foundation-stone of an orphanage, but I was called upon to address the ladies behind the purdah. The sight of the screen behind which my audience whose numbers I did not know was seated made me sad. It pained and humiliated me deeply. I thought of the wrong being done by men to the women of India by clinging to a barbarous custom which, whatever use it might have had when it was first introduced, had now become totally useless and was doing incalculable harm to the country. All the education that we have been receiving for the past 100 years seems to have produced but little impression upon us, for I note that the purdah is being retained even in educated households not because the educated men believe in it themselves but because they will not manfully resist the brutal custom and sweep it away at a stroke. I have the privilege of addressing hundreds of meetings of women attended by thousands. The din and the noise created at these meetings make it impossible to speak with any effect to the women who attend them. Nothing better is to be expected so long as they are caged and confined in their houses and little courtyards. When therefore they find themselves congregated in a big room and are expected all of a sudden to listen to some one, they do not know what to do with themselves or with the speaker. And when silence is restored it becomes difficult to interest them in many everyday topics, for they know nothing of them having been never allowed to breathe the fresh air of freedom. I know that this is a somewhat exaggerated picture. I am quite aware of the very high culture of these thousands of sisters whom I get the privilege of addressing. I know that they are capable of rising

to the same height that men are capable of, and I know too that they do have occasions to go out. But this is not to be put down to the credit of the educated classes. The question is, why have they not gone further? Why do not our women enjoy the same freedom that men do? Why should they not be able to walk out and have fresh air?

Chastity is not a hot-house growth. It cannot be protected by the surrounding wall of the purdah. It must grow from within, and to be worth anything it must be capable of withstanding every unsought temptation. It must be as defiant as Sita's. It must be a very poor thing that cannot stand the gaze of men. Men, to be men, must be able to trust their women-folk, even as the latter are compelled to trust them. Let us not live with one limb completely or partially paralysed. Rama would be nowhere without Sita, free and independent even as he was himself. But for robust independence Draupadi is perhaps a better example. Sita was gentleness incarnate. She was a delicate flower. Draupadi was a giant oak. She bent mighty Bhima himself to her imperious will. Bhima was terrible to every one, but he was a lamb before Draupadi. She stood in no need of protection from any one of the Pandavas. By seeking today to interfere with the free growth of the womanhood of India we are interfering with the growth of free and independent spirited men. What we are doing to our women and what we are doing to the untouchables recoil upon our heads with a force thousand times multiplied. It partly accounts for our weakness, indecision, narrowness and helplessness. Let us then tear down the purdah with one mighty effort.

*Young India*, 3-2-1927, p. 37

## 53. PURDAH IN BIHAR

(From Notes)

The organized demonstration against the purdah that was held in many important centres in Bihar on the 8th instant was, a Bihari friend's letter tells me, successful beyond the expectations of the organizers. The *Searchlight* report of the Patna meeting opens thus:

A unique spectacle was witnessed at the mixed meeting of ladies and gentlemen of the 8th July held at Patna in the Radhika Sinha Institute on Sunday last. In spite of heavy rains that fortunately stopped just at the time of the meeting, the gathering was unexpectedly large. In fact half of the spacious hall of the Radhika Sinha Institute was crowded with ladies, three-fourths of whom were such as had been observing purdah a day before, nay, an hour before.

The following is the translation of the resolution adopted at the meeting:

We the men and women of Patna, assembled hereby declare that we have today abolished the pernicious practice of purdah, which has done and is doing incalculable harm to the country, and particularly to women, and we appeal to the other women of the province, who are still wavering, to banish this system as early as they can and thereby advance their education and health.

A provisional committee was formed at the meeting to carry on an intensive propaganda against purdah and for the spread of women's education in the province of Bihar. A third resolution advised the formation of Mahila Samitis in every town and every village of the province. And a fourth resolution was passed to the effect that Mahila Ashrams should be started at different places where ladies might stay for certain periods and receive a training so as to become "good wives", "worthy mothers" and "useful servants" of the country. Over 5000 rupees were promised on the spot for the purpose and I see many ladies among the donors, giving anything between Rs. 250 and 25. The paper publishes reports of similar meetings in several places in Bihar. If

the campaign is well organized and continued with zeal, the purdah should become a thing of the past. It should be noted that this is no anglicizing movement. It is an indigenous conservative effort made by leaders who are conservative by nature and are yet alive to all the evils that have crept into Hindu society. Babu Brajkishore Prasad and Babu Raje- ndra Prasad who from far off London is keenly watching and supporting the movement are no westernized specimens of Indian humanity. They are orthodox Hindus, lovers of Indian culture and tradition. They are no blind imitators of the West and yet do not hesitate to assimilate whatever is good in it. There need therefore be no fear entertained by the timid and the halting ones that the movement is likely to be in any shape or form disruptive of all that is most precious in Indian culture and especially in feminine grace modesty so peculiar to India's womanhood.

*Young India*, 26-7-1928, p. 254

## 54. DOOM OF PURDAH

A reasoned appeal signed by many most influential people of Bihar and almost an equal number of ladies of that province advising the total abolition of the purdah has been just issued in Bihar. The fact that over fifty ladies have' signed the appeal shows that if the work is carried on with vigour, the purdah will be a thing of the past in Bihar. It is worthy of note that the ladies who have signed the appeal are not of the anglicized type but orthodox Hindus. It definitely states:

We want that the women of our province should be as free to move about and take their legitimate part in the life of the community in all particulars as their sisters in Karnatak, Maharashtra and Madras in an essentially Indian way, avoiding all attempts at Europeanization, for while we hold that a change from enforced seclusion to a complete anglicization would be like dropping from frying pan into fire, we feel that purdah must go, if we want our women to develop along Indian ideals. If we want them to add grace and beauty to our social life and raise its moral tone, if we want them to be excellent managers at home, helpful companions of their husbands and useful members of the community, then the purdah, as it now exists, must go. In fact no serious step for their welfare can be taken unless the veil is torn down and it is our conviction that if once the energy of half of our population, that has been imprisoned artificially, is released, it will create a force which, if properly guided, will be of immeasurable good to our province.

I know the evil effects of the purdah in Bihar. The movement has been started none too soon.

The movement has a curious origin. Babu Ramanan- dan Mishra, a khadi worker was desirous of rescuing his wife from the oppression of the purdah. As his people would not let the girl come to the Ashram, he took two girls from the Ashram to be companions to his wife. One of them, Radhabehn, Maganlal Gandhi's daughter, was to be the tutor. She was accompanied by the late Dalba hadur Giri's daughter Durgadevi. The parents of the girl-wife resented the attempt of the Ashram girls to wean young Mrs. Mishra from the purdah. The girls braved all difficulties. Meanwhile Maganlal

Gandhi went to see his daughter and steel her against all odds and persist in her efforts. He took ill in the village where Radhabehn was doing her work and died at Patna. The Bihar friends therefore made it a point of honour to wage war against the purdah. Radhabehn brought her charge to the Ashram. Her coming to the Ashram created additional stir and obliged the husband who was already prepared for it to throw himself in the struggle with greater zeal. Thus the movement having a personal touch promises to be carried on with energy. At its head is the seasoned soldier of Bihar, the hero of many battles, Babu Brijkishore Prasad. I do not remember his having headed a movement that has been allowed to die.

The appeal fixes the 8th of July next as the date on which to inaugurate an intensive campaign against the system which puts a cruel ban on social service by one half of Bihar humanity and which denies it freedom in many cases and even the use of light and fresh air. The sooner it is recognized that many of our social evils impede our march towards swaraj, the greater will be our progress towards our cherished goal. To postpone social reform till after the attainment of swaraj is not to know the meaning of swaraj. Surely we must be incapable of defending ourselves or healthily competing with the other nations, if we allow the better half of ourselves to become paralysed.

I therefore congratulate the Bihar leaders on their having earnestly taken up the struggle against the purdah. The success of such a reform especially, as of all reform generally depends upon the purity of the workers. A great deal will rest with the ladies who have signed the appeal. If notwithstanding their having given up the purdah, they retain the original modesty of India's womanhood and show courage and determination in the face of heavy odds, they will find success quickly awaiting their effort. The campaign against the purdah if properly handled means mass education of the right type for both men and women of Bihar.

*Young India*, 28-6-1928, p. 216

## 55. ON PURDAH

(From "Gandhiji's Walking Tour Diary")

Q.: Do you not think that a strict enforcement of the *purdah* system would improve the moral condition of women?

A.: He was warned by some Muslim critics against speaking on the *purdah*. He had therefore some hesitation in speaking about it. But he took heart when he turned round and saw that many Hindu women observed it and that numerous Malaya Muslim women of whom he had many friends did not observe the *purdah*. He also knew many distinguished Muslim women of India who did not observe it. Lastly the real *purdah* was of the heart. A woman who peeped through the *purdah* and contemplated a male on whom her gaze fell violated the spirit behind it. If a woman observed it in spirit, she was truly carrying out what the great Prophet had said.

*Harijan*, 23-3-1947, p. 78

## 7. THE FALLEN SISTERS

### 56. THE SHAME OF MAN

(From the article "Orissa & Andhra")

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

*Young India*, 13-4-1921, p. 116

II

(From "Mr. Gandhi's Ellore Speech".)

.... It was at about ten o'clock last night in Coco- nada that 'dancing girls paid me a visit when I understood the full significance of what they were. I felt like sinking in the earth below. I ask you to blot that sin out of us. It is not right that for our lust a single sister should have to live a life of shame and humiliation. In this movement of purification we are in duty bound to regard these girls as our sisters and daughters. Let us who feel the pricks of violence that this insolent government inflicts on us not commit worse violence by ruining the life of a single girl in India. I ask you, brothers and sisters, to send me assurance, as early as possible, that there is not a single dancing girl in this part of the land. I charge these sisters who are sitting behind me to go about from place to place, find out every dancing girl and shame the men into shunning the wrong they are doing.

*Young India*, 11-5-1921, p.150

## 57. OUR FALLEN SISTERS

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

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

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

precedents. We should cease to grow the moment we cease to discriminate between virtue and vice, and slavishly copy the past which we do not fully know. We are proud heirs to all that was noblest and best in the by-gone age. We must not dishonour our heritage by multiplying past errors. In a self-respecting India, is not every woman's virtue as much every man's concern as his own sister's? Swaraj means ability to regard every inhabitant of India as our own brother or sister.

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

Here is work for the citizens of Barisal. Here is work for all true servants of India, men as well as women. If there are 350 unhappy sisters in a population of 20,000 there may be 52,50,000 in all India. But I flatter myself with the belief that four-fifths of the population of India, which live in the villages and are purely agricultural, are not touched by the vice. The lowest figure for all India would therefore be 10,50,000 women living on the sale of their own honour. Before these unfortunate sisters could be weaned from their degradation, two conditions have to be fulfilled. We men must learn to control our passions, and these women should be found a calling that would enable them to earn an honourable living. The movement of non-co-operation is nothing, if it does not purify us and restrain our evil passions. And there is no occupation but spinning and weaving which all can take up without overcrowding. These sisters, the vast majority of them, need not think of marriage. They agreed that they could not. They must therefore become the true *sanyasinis* of India. Having

no cares of life but of service, they can spin and weave to their heart's content. One million fifty thousand women diligently weaving everyday for eight hours means that number of rupees per day for an impoverished India. These sisters told me they earned as much as two rupees per day. But then they admitted, that they had many things needed to pander to man's lust, which they could discard when they took to spinning and weaving, reverting to a natural life. By the time I had finished with my interviews, they knew without my telling them, why they could not be office-bearers in Congress Committees if they did not give up their sinfulness. None could officiate at the altar of Swaraj, who did not approach it with pure hands and a pure heart.

*Young India*, 15-9-1921, p. 292

## II

(Originally appeared in "Notes" under the title "Fallen Sisters".)

The reader will be glad to learn that the work of reclaiming the fallen sisters of Barisal has been taken up in right earnest. Dr. Rai writes, saying that many of them have been visited, and spinning is being introduced among them. Jagadish Babu who has been in charge of Babu Ashvinikumar Dutt's school for years has promised to guide the young workers who have undertaken this responsible service. I hope that those who have taken up this much-needed service will not leave it half-finished. They must be prepared for disappointments, they must expect slow progress. It is only in such work that is free from excitement or immediate promise of renown that one's love of service for its own sake is tested. I commend the example of Barisal to the other cities also. This purifying work has to be done even after swaraj. Not everyone is qualified for it. Those therefore who feel the call and have the requisite purity should turn their attention to the eradication of this growing vice. The movement naturally has two branches, the reclamation of fallen sisters and the weaning of men from the degrading vice which makes man look upon his sister with lust and tempts him to make her a prey to it. The qualities required for both the branches of work are the same, and the work should be simultaneously done in both the branches if it is to bear fruit.

*Young India*, 17-11-1921, p. 367 at p. 368

## 58. FOR FALLEN HUMANITY

It was at Barisal that I had the privilege of meeting our fallen sisters, victims of our lust, now nearly three years ago. Some of them said, "We earn from two to three rupees per day. You must give us some occupation that would give us as much." For a moment I sank within me but immediately came to myself and said, "No my dear sisters, I cannot suggest anything that would give you two or three rupees per day but I must ask you to give up your calling even though you have to starve. There is the spinning wheel however. If you take it it will be your salvation."

The fallen sisters are only a small part of the fallen humanity of India. The skin and bone of Orissa are also in a sense part of that humanity. They are the victims of our ignorance as the first are of our lust. In their case it is not our animal lust but the lust for wealth that reduces them skin and bone. They bleed so that we may become rich.

But now, thank God, we the educated middle class are hungering to identify ourselves with our fallen sisters and our starving brothers. We desire Swaraj so that they may live. We cannot all go to the villages and help the villagers. The fallen sister is a perpetual reminder to us to become pure. How then can we think of and feel for them from day to day? What may we all do for them everyday? We are so weak that we want to do as little as possible. What is that little? I can think of nothing else but the spinning wheel. The work must be easy, capable of being done by all the learned and the ignorant, the good and the bad, young and old, men and women, boys and girls, the strong and the weak, no matter to what religion they belong. The work to be effective must be the same for all. The spinning wheel satisfies all these conditions. Therefore he or she who spins for half an hour everyday serves the masses in the most efficient manner possible. And he renders whole-hearted conscious service to the fallen humanity of India and thus brings, swaraj nearer for that service.

The spinning wheel for us is the foundation for all public corporate life. It is impossible to build any permanent public life without it. It is the one visible link that

indissolubly binds us to the lowest in the land and thus gives them a hope. We may or must add many things to it but let us first make sure of it even as a wise mason makes sure of his foundation before he begins to build the superstructure and the bigger the structure the deeper and stronger the foundation. For the result to be obtained therefore spinning should become universal in India.

But spinning will be not only the connecting link between the masses and the classes, it will be the link between the different political parties. It will become common to all the parties. They may disagree on all other things if they like, but they can agree on this at the least.

I ask therefore everyone who loves the country, loves the poorest and the fallen, to give half an hour's labour daily to spinning even and well twisted yarn for their sake, and in the name of God. As this must be a gift to the nation, it must be delivered to the All-India Khadi Board with religious regularity.

*Young India*, 4-9-1924, p. 292

## 59. THIS MORAL LEPROSY

(Originally appeared under the title "Our Unfortunate Sisters".)

Of all the addresses I received in the South the most touching was one on behalf of the *Devadasis*—a euphemism for prostitutes. It was prepared and brought by people who belong to the class from which these unfortunate sisters are drawn. I understood from the deputation that brought the address that reform from within was going on but that the rate of progress was still slow. The gentleman who led the deputation told me that the public in general was apathetic to the reform. The first shock I received was at Goconada. And I did not mince matters when I spoke to the men of that place. The second was at Barisal where I met a large number of these unfortunate sisters. Whether they known as *Devadasis* or by any other name, the problem is the same. It is a matter of bitter shame and sorrow, of deep humiliation, that a number of women have to sell their chastity for man's lust. Man the law-giver will have to pay a dreadful penalty for the degradation he has imposed upon the so-called weaker sex. When woman, freed from man's snares, rises to the full height and rebels against man's legislation and institutions designed by him, her rebellion, no doubt nonviolent, will be nonetheless effective. Let the Indian man ponder over the fate of the thousands of sisters who are destined to a life of shame for his unlawful and immoral indulgence. The pity of it is that the vast majority of the men who visit these pestilential haunts are married men and therefore commit a double sin. They sin against their wives to whom they have sworn allegiance and they sin against the sisters whose purity they are bound to guard with as much jealousy as that of their own blood sisters. It is an evil which cannot last for a single day, if we men of India realise our own dignity.

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

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

*Young India*, 16-4-1925, p. 133

## 60. WILL HUMANITY EVER RISE AGAINST THIS CURSE?

(Originally appeared in "Notes" under the title, "Fallen sisters spinning".)

At Noakhali I was told that two fallen sisters were not only spinning but that they were entirely supporting themselves by spinning. These were not young girls but women over forty who could no longer sell their shame but who would, but for spinning, have lived on begging. They were, therefore, strictly speaking, weaned from begging and not from their original trade. It is, however, a great thing for Noakhali to come in touch with these sisters and interest itself in their welfare. I was also told that some of them, though they had not given up their calling, had taken to spinning. I do not know it could be considered a gain for such sisters to spin if they would not give up their calling. It may well be used to cover their shame. At the same time there is no doubt that spinning could not be recommended to them as a means of livelihood. They are used to earning so much as one to two rupees per day if not even more. They must have either weaving or even embroidery or other fancy work which would bring them a fair remuneration. It is, too, not a question that man can tackle. It must be reserved for the fair sex to rise to the occasion. Not until a woman of exceptional purity and strength of character rises and devotes herself to the task of redeeming this portion of fallen humanity, will the problem of prostitution be tackled. No doubt, man can do much among men who degrade themselves by enticing young women to sell themselves for their lust. Prostitution is as old as the world, but I wonder if it was ever a regular feature of town life that it is today. In any case, time must come when humanity will rise against the curse and make prostitution a thing of the past, as it has got rid of many evil customs, however, time-honoured they might have been.

*Young India*, 28-5-1925, p. 186 at p. 187

## 61. AN UNHEALTHY DEVELOPMENT

(Originally appeared under the title "Fallen Sisters".)

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

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

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

The document before me says further that they have been enrolled as Congress members and have also been allowed to "do other national work befitting their humble position". They have been even elected as delegates. I have seen what I regard as an obscene manifesto written in their name.

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

I wish that my words could reach them. I would urge them to withdraw their names from the Congress, forget that they had an association, but quickly and resolutely give up their immoral trade. Then and not till then, they may take up spinning as discipline, and weaving or any other remunerative occupation for a living.

*Young India*, 25-6-1925, p. 224

## 62. ARE FALLEN SISTERS DEBARRED?

Q.: Are our fallen sisters to be returned as delegates to the district and provincial conferences or the like representative bodies? If not, how could such delegates be sent from Barisal to the conferences at Perojpur and Jessore?

A.: Under the present constitution of the Congress, even a moral leper is *entitled* to be returned as a delegate, if he can find electors to elect him. But I should not elect "fallen sisters" knowing them to be such and whilst they are carrying on their sinful trade. I know nothing of the conferences mentioned.

*Young India*, 25-6-1925, p. 224

## 63. PAINFULLY ILLUMINATING

As you are now making a tour over many of the towns and rural areas of Bengal, I avail myself of the opportunity to draw your kind notice to a very dark side of the Bengal social life with the fervent hope that a word of advice and an appeal from you will have a great salutary effect. I have not the slightest desire to cast aspersion on any particular community, caste or sect. My only intention is to draw your kind attention to the actual state of things now prevalent in Bengal.

I believe your attention has been certainly drawn to the amazing number of abduction cases now happening every day in Bengal. These moral eruptions are an unmistakable indication that there is something wrong in the inner working of our social life.

Prevalence of prostitution and corruptions in some of the Bengal districts is simply amazing. In most of the districts of Western Bengal and in many of the jute areas of Northern and Eastern Bengal brothels are considered to be a necessary part of even a village bazar. One can easily guess the condition that obtains in big marts or as they are called "Bundars". During busy season most of the important jute markets have their prostitute quarters by floating brothels! Numerous prostitutes infest these places and ply on their infernal trade in boats which remain moored along side the market. In many parts of Western Bengal almost all fairs

are infested with these unhappy women. They erect temporary sheds on the *Mela* grounds and cater for the people who visit the *Mela*. In some of the districts quite a number of prostitutes are found settled round a Zamindar's house or his kutchery. For they are generally patronized by the Zamindar and his officers. Districts of Mymensingh, Pabna and Rajshahi are particularly notorious in this respect. As is naturally to be expected cases of abduction and molestation of women occur in largest number in these districts. Bengal has nearly 4 lakhs of Vaishnab or Bairagi population (exact number male, 1,74,497, female, 2,03,610). Most of these people live by begging and singing. In short, Bengali people spend more than 3 crores of rupees a year for the maintenance of these parasites. What is most unfortunate is that this Vaishnab community is regarded as a waste paper basket of the Hindu Society. Majority of the abduction cases are in connection with the Vaishnab women. Under the garb of religion these unfortunate people lead a most sordid and corrupt life. I only ask you to make confidential enquiry about my statement and find for yourself how far it is correct. Introduction of charkha coupled with stoppage of indiscriminate charity would save these 4 lakhs of people and turn them into a valuable asset

Conditions prevailing in and round Calcutta are as bad as can be imagined. Crushing poverty of many of the Western Bengal districts, Midnapur, Bankura, Birbhum, Burdwan, etc. induces hundreds of women to forsake their village homes and flock to Calcutta and suburbs. Here they lead a dubious life by working as maid servants (jhee), betel leaf sellers (Panwali), etc. A very low standard of morality amongst the masses is another cause of widespread prevalence of venereal diseases and leprosy in these districts. Of 15,451 lepers of Bengal 7,240 (nearly half) hail from Burdwan division alone. (*Bengal Census Report, 1921, Part II, page 162*). Again these are the most decaying districts of Bengal and have suffered greatest reduction in population. Strangely enough, drinking is more widespread in these districts than anywhere else in Bengal.

Theatres of Calcutta are chiefly run by fallen women. These are resorted to by large number of students and even by noted public men. Important meetings are held in these theatre halls. Lengthy appreciations of actresses and dancing girls find a place in the columns of our daily papers (unfortunately some of the most influential nationalist papers). Besides, there are vernacular illustrated magazines especially devoted to the subject of drama and dancing, etc. Out turn of debasing literature in Bengali language is perhaps more now than it was ten years ago.

All these things make one's heart sink within him and cannot but overpower him with a feeling of despair.

Sir, as the matter stands I cannot but in all humility ask for a public expression of your opinion on the following points:

Whether a Congress member or volunteer or any one aspiring to be a nationalist worker should visit theaters run by women or cinema houses where pictures rousing carnal desires are exposed in all seducing form.

Whether any public meetings be held in any of these theatre houses.

Whether any Indian nationalist paper should publish advertisements of opera and dancing houses run by women or appreciation of actresses, etc. as well as advertisements of wines and intoxicants.

Should not all students and Congress workers strictly abstain from smoking and drinking? I am reliably informed by the traders themselves that Rs. 50,000 worth of cigarettes and *bidis* are sold every month in the town of Chittagong (population of the town 36,030 and of the district 16,11,422)!!

Should not all municipalities and local boards try their utmost to suppress drinking and brothels and should not these bodies exert their utmost to maintain a propaganda to eradicate these social evils?

This letter was handed to me at Chittagong and has been in my jacket awaiting attention at the first opportunity. The reader is aware how the attempt to wean the fallen sisters from their error has apparently resulted in giving a passport to vice. Prostitution I knew was a tremendous and growing evil. The tendency to see virtue in vice and excuse evil in the sacred name of art or some other false sentiment has clothed this debasing indulgence with a kind of subtle respectability which is responsible for the moral leprosy which he who runs may see. But I was unprepared for the terrible state the correspondent declares to exist. I fear that he has not exaggerated the evil. For during my tour, I have had corroboration from various sources. Great as the evil is in this age of unbelief or a mere mechanical belief in God and an age of multiplicity of comforts and luxuries almost reminding one of the

degradation to which Rome had descended when she was apparently at the zenith of her power, it is not easy to prescribe a remedy. It cannot be remedied by law. London is seething with the vice. Paris is notorious for its vice which has almost become a fashion. If law would have prevented it, these highly organized nations would have cured their capitals of the vice. No amount of writing on the part of reformers like myself can deal with the evil in any appropriate form. The political domination of England is bad enough. The cultural is infinitely worse. For whilst we resent and therefore endeavour to resist the political domination, we hug the cultural, not realizing in our infatuation that when the cultural domination is complete, the political will defy resistance. Let me not be misunderstood. I do not wish to imply that before the British rule prostitution was unknown to India. But I do say that it was not so rampant as now. It was confined to the few upper ten. Now it is fast undoing the youth of the middle classes. My hope lies in the youth of the country. Such of them as are prey to the vice are not vicious by nature. They are helplessly and thoughtlessly drawn to it. They must realize the harm that it has done them and society. They must understand too that nothing but a rigorously disciplined life will save them and the country from utter ruin. Above all unless they visualize God and seek His aid in keeping them from temptation, no amount of dry discipline will do them much good. Truly has the seer said in the *Gita* that "desire persists though man may by fasting keep his body under restraint. Desire goes only when one has seen God face to face." Seeing God face to face is to feel that He is enthroned in our hearts even as a child feels a mother's affection without needing any demonstration. Does a child reason out the existence of a mother's love? Can he prove it to others? He triumphantly declares, "It is." So must it be with the existence of God. He defies reason. But He is experienced. Let us not reject the experience of Tulsidas, Chaitanya, Ramdas and a host of other spiritual teachers even as we do not reject that of mundane teachers.

The correspondent has inquired whether Congressmen may do the many things he has enumerated, such as theatre going, etc. I have already remarked that man cannot be made good by law. If I had the power of persuasion I would certainly stop women of

ill-fame from acting as actresses, I would prevent people from drinking and smoking, I would certainly prevent all the degrading advertisements that disfigure even reputable journals and newspapers and I would most decidedly stop the obscene literature and portraits that soil the pages of some of our magazines. But, alas, I have not the persuasive power I would gladly possess. But to regulate these things by law whether of the State or the Congress would be a remedy probably worse than the disease. What is wanted is an intelligent, sane, healthy and pure public opinion. There is no law against using kitchens as closets or drawing rooms as stables. But public opinion, that is, public taste will not tolerate such a combination. The evolution of public opinion is at times a tardy process but it is the only effective one.

*Young India*, 9-7-1925, p. 238

## 64. POPULAR INDIFFERENCE TO MORAL SANITATION

(From "Weekly Letter" by M. D.)

"These two questions, that of the *devadasis* and, have continued to be a terrible oppression, and in speaking to you as I have done this evening, I have endeavoured somewhat to lighten this grief by inviting you to be sharers of it," were words Gandhiji uttered at the public meeting in Mayavaram. Not that Mayavaram itself was particularly at fault for making the two days of Gandhiji's stay sad for him. It was the discovery of. ..and the most painful disclosures during the talk with the *devadasis* that made the days sad. The whole speech was a scathing attack on the popular indifference to municipal and moral sanitation. ...

But the moral filth made a still deeper wound. It was a tragedy to see the women seated amongst men, their own relatives, both not knowing what to do to get out of a situation that the devil of custom had landed them into. 'Not one of us likes it, but how to maintain ourselves" was the helpless cry of all. "Supposing I took you away, and gave you sufficient food and clothing and education and clean surroundings, would you not leave this life of shame and come with me?" asked Gandhiji. They said, "Yes", but Gandhiji had no illusion about the matter. He referred to it in the speech, and branded the drowsy consciences of the criminals with words of fire:" As I was talking to them and understanding the hidden meaning of the thing, my whole soul rose in rebellion against the custom of dedicating minor girls for immoral purposes. Calling them *devadasis* we insult God Himself in the name of religion, and we commit a double crime in that we use these sisters of ours to serve our lust and take in the same breath the name of God. To think that there should be a class of people given to this kind of immoral service, and that there should be another class who should tolerate their hideous immorality, makes one despair of life itself.

And I assure you that as I was talking to them I saw that there was no evil in their eyes, and they were capable of fine feelings and fine character as any other women.

What difference can there be between them and our own blood-sisters? And if we do not allow our own blood-sisters to be used for immoral purposes, how dare we allow these to be so used? Let Hindus who are in any way whatsoever connected with these things purge society of this pest. The majority of them have promised to retrace their steps, if I fulfil the promise I have made to them. But if they cannot, I shall blame not them but the society in which they are passing their lives. It is up to you to extend the hand of fellowship to these sisters, it is up to you to see that they are reclaimed from their life of shame. I know that when they are again face to face with temptation it will become difficult for them to resist it. But if man will restrain his lust and society stands up against the evil, it will be easily possible to rid society of the evil."

*Young India*, 22-9-1927, p. 321 at p. 322

## 65. THE IMMORAL CUSTOM

(M. D. published by stringing together extracts from Gandhiji's many speeches in Chettinad an article under the title "Message to Chettinad". The following excerpts are taken from therein.)

A lady doctor writing to me tells me that I should remind you about the immoral custom that is prevalent in Chettinad and that prevents you from thinking of these things of public usefulness. She tells me that the rich people of Chettinad have a due share in perpetuating the hideous immoral custom of assigning girls of tender age to a life of shame under the name of religion. She tells me that there are many *devadasis* in your midst. If this is true it is really a matter for hanging our heads in shame. Let not possession of wealth be synonymous with degradation, vice and profligacy. And is it not a tragic irony that in spite of these vices, you are also spending money lavishly in erecting what you flatter yourself to believe as temples for gods to reside? Not every structure made by brick and mortar labelled temple is necessarily a temple. There are, I am sorry to say, many temples in our midst in this country which are no better than brothels. Do you know that in our religion it is not possible to call any single place a temple unless an elaborate ceremonial of purification has been made inside that building and unless the spirit of God has been invoked by men full of piety, so that God may reside in it? And so I would urge upon you to restrain yourselves and not lavishly spend in building temples, but in the first place dedicate your own bodies to the service of God, and for that reason first of all purify by ridding yourselves of the evils to which I have drawn attention. But I am glad to be able to inform you that I received only today a gratifying letter in which whilst the writer admits most of the evils to which I have referred just now tells me...with hope and pride that several young men are conducting against heavy odds a reform movement and I assure the young men that whilst the path of reforms is not all roses and whilst it is bestrewn with countless thorns, success is their's if they will persevere prayerfully and with a pure heart.

*Young India*, 6-10-1927, p. 334 at p. 335

## 66. SLOW PROGRESS

(From "Almoda Impressions")

Just as there is in the South a caste which dedicates to a life of shame girls euphemistically called *devadasis*, so is there in Almoda a caste called Nayak that similarly brings up its girls without any euphemism. Nevertheless it too defends the practice on religious grounds and thus drags with the girls religion too in the mire. If God was a capricious person instead of being the changeless and unchangeable living law, He would in sheer indignation wipe out all those who in the name of religion deny Him and His law. The Servants of India Society is trying to wean the Nayak parents from the sin of degrading their daughters. The progress made is slow, because the public conscience is asleep and man's lust provides material reward for the indecency.

*Young India*, 11-7-1929, p. 226

## 67. THE DEVADASI

The indefatigable Dr. S. Muthulakshmi Reddi writes:

As you have been openly denouncing the *devadasi* system in the Hindu temples, I make bold to appeal to you for help in the great task of getting rid of that evil. In this Presidency, I find it an up-hill task, as the so-called educated men and even some of the most prominent Congressmen oppose my reform measures and defend that infamous institution.

My *Devadasi* Bill, which has now become an Act, deals only with the Inam-holding *devadasis*, but there is a section of that community which practise dedication under the cloak of religion simply to make a living out of prostitution. This is nothing but traffic in children; because children are even bought and adopted (adoption by *devadasi* is allowed by our Hindu Law), and at an age when they are innocent and cannot judge or act for themselves, are led into this abominable life from which they rarely escape. I have had many memorials and petitions from the enlightened section of that community asking me to bring about legislation to punish such wicked people who trade upon the children's souls and bodies.

The Penal Code Sections 372 and 373 have proved ineffective. Hence, I have given notice of another Bill for the success of which I want your blessings. Some may argue the legislation is no good so long as the people do not realize the evil in that custom; but my contention is that a good section of our people perceive the injustice. Now I myself feel that I could rescue many of these girls if I had some legal power to take away children from such criminal parents.

Among the *devadasi* community itself there is a great awakening, and they have been doing propaganda on a large scale, but I am pained to observe that the high-caste people do not help them in that community's efforts to reform themselves. And further, our laws for the protection of children are almost nil in this Presidency compared with the protection that exists for the children of other countries and even the children of other provinces such as Bombay and Bengal.

We know that in the advanced countries, health and moral reform always preceded the formation of public opinion in their favour as they were themselves educative factors. In this Presidency, we cannot blame the Government so much as the high-caste people who do not

sufficiently realize that all children, irrespective of caste or creed, need our care and sympathy, and in this matter of rescuing innocent children from the prospect of a dreadful life, they should rise above their communal and caste prejudices.

I heartily endorse the writer's proposal. Indeed I do not think that the proposed legislation will be in advance of public opinion. The whole of the enlightened public opinion that is vocal is against the retention of the system in any shape or form. The opinion of the parties concerned in the immoral traffic cannot count, just as the opinion of keepers of opium dens will not count in favour of their retention, if public opinion is otherwise against them. The *devadasi* system is a blot upon those who countenance it. It would have died long ago but for the supineness of the public. Public conscience in this country somehow or other lies dormant. It often feels the awful-ness of the wrong, but is too indifferent or too lazy to move. But if some active spirit like Dr. Reddi moves, that conscience is prepared to lend such support as indifference can summon up. I am therefore of opinion that Dr. Reddi's proposal is in no way premature. Such legislation might well have been brought earlier. In any case I hope that she will receive the hearty support of all lovers of purity in religious and general social life.

*Young India*, 29-8-1929, p. 288

## 68. ALMOST LIKE HARIJAN

An Andhra graduate who has married a *devadasi* writes:

I wanted to write to you long ago. But I was awfully shy. Thank God! I am at last confiding my burden to you.

I come from the *devadasi* community. My life was socially a torture. Mahatmaji, do you think there is any other profession worse than that of the dancing girls in the universe? Is it not a blot on India that prostitution should personify in a community?

Andhradesha, I think is, the heart of this evil. Hindu society here engages dancing girls—especially during marriages and festivals of the Deity—to sing obscene songs accompanied by obscene gestures before the pious deity and sets a bad example before the newly-wed couple.

The misery of a whole community consigned to a life of prostitution is great. Young men here are trying their best to root out this evil. But they badly need help and guidance. Won't you kindly take up this matter as equally important and emergent as the "Harijan" movement? Please have this affair always in a corner of your heart and give it publicity. You have not only the Congress, but the whole public opinion at your back. What the Brothels Bill and the I.P.C. could not do I am confident that a word from your mouth would do.

I am legally and religiously married to a girl of my own community and I am a father of two daughters. My wife is as pious in my eyes as any other Hindu wife. Still society looks down upon us. The sins of our ancestors are wreaking vengeance on us. The stigma of prostitution is attached to us, though both of us are free from the vice.

Harijans and *devadasis* are the only two communities which are almost in the same degree of depravity. Of course, they will have to help themselves to moral elevation. Still a teacher like you would educate them and the society more quickly than they can do it for themselves. These are two sister movements. Please don't forget the sister community in your enthusiasm for the Harijans.

I wish I had the ability he ascribes to me. I am painfully conscious of my limitations. The correspondent is perhaps unaware that when I was editing *Young India*, I used

constantly to refer to the *Devadasis* institution and prostitution in general. But my effort did not root out the evil. It would only bring relief in individual cases. If I now refer to the question in the pages of *Harijan*, it is not because I have any hope of faring better than I did during the *Young India* days. I shall be pleased if this fresh effort brings relief in individual cases.

The correspondent is quite right in likening *devadasis* to Harijans. Nevertheless, he will recognize the difference there is between the two. But it is waste of time to measure the degree of difference in wretchedness. Like untouchability, this institution for the perpetuation of vice must go, if Hinduism is to be purified. Those who are engaged in the noble task of ridding society of the evil will have to work in a systematic manner and not become dispirited if they do not find their effort crowned with success at once. Let them concentrate on the evil immediately surrounding them. There are two ways of working at the problem. There should be work amongst those who employ *devadasis* for their base end and the *devadasi* community itself. If the latter will refuse to serve society's vice, the system ends at once. But the process is not quite so simple. Hunger knows no sin. Even like Drona and Bhishma, *devadasis* point to their bellies in justification of sin. Habit has dulled their sense of sin regarding their calling. Therefore, they have to be found an innocent source of livelihood in the place of prostitution. Then, there is work in the society. Festival and marriage parties in which *devadasis* are employed have to be sought out and those in charge reasoned with. Reformers may not dictate reform to society. They will have to appeal to its reason and heart. In a way, all reform is a kind of education, just as essential as the education which is commonly known as such. Hence it is a science by itself and yields results only when systematically pursued.

The correspondent who has dared to marry a *devadasi* deserves to be congratulated. He should be satisfied with the approbation of his own conscience and live down the prejudice against him and his wife.

*Harijan*, 14-9-1934, p. 244

## 69. ABOLITION OF DEVADASI SYSTEM

(Originally appeared in "Notes" under the title "Legalized Prostitution".)

Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi furnishes one more proof of the very high expectations formed of Congress Ministries. People have a right to form such expectations. Even opponents of the Congress have admitted that they are standing the test well. The Congress Ministries seem to be vying with one another in adopting ameliorative measures so as to make their administrations respond to the real Indian environment. Dr. Muthulakshmi has issued a public appeal to the Madras Ministry to pass her bill which puts a stop to the immoral custom of dedicating *devadasis* to a life of shame. I have not examined the bill. But the idea behind it is so sound that it is a wonder that it has not yet found a place in the statute book of the Southern Presidency. I wholly agree with Dr. Muthulakshmi that the reform is as urgent as prohibition. She recalls the fact that the present Premier spoke out many years ago in strong terms against the evil practice. I know that he is no less eager now that he has some power to deal with it legally. And I hope with her that before many months have passed the *devadasi* system will cease to have legal sanction.

*Harijan*, 25-9-1937, p. 273

## 70. LIMITATIONS OF THE LAW

(Originally appeared in "Notes" under the title "The *Devadasi* System".)

A correspondent writes:

It is a well-known fact that you are trying your best to uplift the Harijan community and even spending your most precious time in the Harijan Colony. But may I assure you that there are thousands of *devadasi* girls of the Harijan community residing at Poona and Bombay and are leading a life of public prostitution. Why should this be so? Is it because these girls belong to low-caste community and are induced to lose their moral character that they are neglected by the public and put to the shameful life of prostitution?

May I be justified in stating that this is a most important and urgent problem. Is it not possible to stop this illegal practice in the Bombay Province as in Madras and Madras by the Madras Government under the ruling of Sections 366 A, 366 B, 372 and 373 of the Indian Penal Code, page No. 574?

I have on more than one occasion, written about the shame attached to the *devadasi* system, whether in temples or in other places. "Prostitutes" is commonly supposed to apply to women of lewd character. But the men who indulge in vice are just as much, if not more, prostitutes than the women who, in many instances, have to sell their bodies for the sake of earning a livelihood. The evil practice should be declared illegal. But the law can only help up to a point. The evil exists clandestinely in every country in spite of the law. Vigorous public opinion can help the law as it also hinders.

New Delhi, 2-9-1946

*Harijan*, 15-9-1946, p. 310

## 8. MISCELLANEOUS

### 71. IN REPLY TO AN INVITATION TO KASTURBA

(Letter to Rasikmani, Secretary, Hindu Stri Mandal. The letter was in reply to her invitation to Kasturba Gandhi to preside over the annual function of the Mandal and the Dadabhai Naoroji birthday celebrations.)

(Nadiad)

August 12, 1918

I could read your letter to my wife only yesterday and hence the delay in replying. Kindly foregive me. Though we two are independent and have equal rights, we have divided our spheres of work for the sake of convenience. Moreover, at the time of our marriage, my wife was altogether illiterate. I gave her some education with great effort but, for, several reasons, I have not been able to do so to my satisfaction. It is not possible, therefore, for her to accept your proposal. I don't think my wife can read out her speech from the chair. She will certainly not be able to prepare her own speech. She is not at all conversant with your activities and hence cannot say anything extempore either. Very regretfully, therefore, we have both to request you all to excuse us.

*Vandemataram from*

MOHANDAS

(From Gujarati)

[*Mahadevbhaini Diary*, Vol. IV]

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. XV, p. 18

## 72. SEVA SADAN SOCIETY

(Originally appeared under the title "Mission to the Women of India".)

When I paid my humble tribute to the memory of the late Mrs. Ramabai Ranade, I had occasion to mention the great work of the Poona Seva Sadan Society of which Sjt. G. K. Devadhar is the soul. He has however sent me literature about the work of this society and asks me to review it in the hope that the readers of *Young India* might help the institution which has an annual income of nearly 2 lakhs but whose total expenditure is estimated at lakhs. I rarely review the work of any institution which I do not know intimately. I cannot claim to know this great society intimately, but I do know Sjt. G. K. Devadhar intimately. We have political differences between us but they have never blinded me to his devotion to the country and his indefatigable energy which he has sustained now for nearly a generation. This is his own claim for the Seva Sadan Society's work:

By gradual steps the Seva Sadan, Poona, has developed now into a big organization of the nature of a mission to the women of India. It promotes, through a widespread net-work of its branches and other allied institutions, education—literary, industrial, medical and musical in character, specially among poor and grown up women of all castes and creeds in India.

This is how the origin of the institution is described:

While engaged in the famine relief campaign in the United Provinces in 1907-8, the conviction that was dawning in my mind grew deeper and stronger every day that India needed just as much an army of trained women workers in various fields of national advance for benefit to their sisters as she needed a band of devoted and trained men to lead her courageously in her onward march at almost every stage. This thought had such a powerful sway on my mind that soon after my return to Poona and even before the completion of the Plague-relief and Inoculation campaign in the city which was being directed by me then, I arranged to call half a dozen small meetings of such of my friends, both ladies and gentlemen, as would feel interested in this idea. These meetings resulted in a resolve to undertake the education and

training of half a dozen poor widows as social workers. Thus the small seed has steadily developed today into a mighty growth.

It has eight branches conducting 94 classes in which 1234 girls and women drawn from all classes receive instruction. 48 is the percentage of widows attending these classes. It is interesting to note that there are 3 women belonging to the suppressed class. There are 8 Jews, 24 Christians and 7 Mahomedans. The percentage of non- Brahmins is 40. There are 270 women residing in the 13 hostels maintained by the society. There are 92 receiving nursing and medical education. It has turned out already 125 certified teachers, 42 fully qualified nurses, 31 mid- wives, 19 doctors, 17 matrons and governesses, 30 craft- mistresses and 9 music teachers. The institution is ever growing. It is the largest of its kind in India.

For an institution that caters for the needs of poor women it certainly lacks one thing—hand-spinning and use of khaddar. But there probably Sjt. Devadhar does not see eye to eye with me. I can bide my time, for time always runs with the poor who have or have to have inexhaustible patience, and since the general secretary's heart is with the poor, he will not fail one day to recognize that if his hand of fellowship is to reach out to the poorest in the land, it will do so only through hand-spun yarn. To look at, it is a flimsy cotton thread but it is stout enough to bind all the millions of India together in its gentle and loving coil. No doubt, embroidery work and such other things taught at the Seva Sadan are more paying than spinning but surely everything need not be reduced into rupees, annas, pies. The 1234 girls and women can be induced to give to their less fortunate fellow-sisters half an hour of their time every day and they can well afford to wear and carry the weight of somewhat heavier khadi *sarees* when they have the knowledge that these *sarees* have helped to fill the hungry mouths of some of their unfortunate sisters.

*Young India*, 4-3-1926, p. 83

## 73. CHITTARANJAN SEVA SADAN

I

(From "Notes")

The hospital that was to be opened as an All Bengal Memorial is at last opened in the ancestral property of the late Deshabandhu which he gave away to a trust. One of its objects was to establish a hospital for women. The readers are aware that nearly eight lacs of rupees were collected out often that the trustees had expected to be able to collect. Here are the particulars sent to me by Sjt. Naliniranjan Sirkar, one of the trustees:

The house has been completely repaired and renovated to suit the purposes of the hospital. Furniture and all hospital requisites have been bought. Doctors, nurses and a matron have been appointed and they have taken up their duties. Dr. Mrs. Pateman, an Anglo-Indian Lady, graduate of the Calcutta Medical College and also an L.R.C.P. of London has been appointed the Resident Medical Officer in charge. Dr. Kedar-nath Das of all India repute in female diseases, and Dr. Bamandas Mukherjee, a renowned specialist next to Dr. Kedarnath Das, have agreed to be the consulting physicians, the latter who is taking a special interest in the institution, having also been taken into the managing committee. Arrangements are being made to open the hospital on the 21st March, the birth day of our late lamented Deshabandhu. Up till now we have not taken a rupee from the fund that was with Sir Rajendranath. We are managing with about 20 thousand rupees that we raised since the closing of Sir Rajendranath's fund.

Mr. N. N. Sircar and Sir Nilaratan Sircar have been formally appointed additional trustees and the necessary document in connection therewith has been executed.

Mattresses, bed-covers, napkins, screens, cases, in fact all the necessary drapery has been made of khaddar procured from the Khadi Pratisthan.

We have named the hospital "Chittaranjan Seva Sadan". We shall try our best to make the institution a success and invoke your blessings on our endeavours.

The hospital started under such auspices with fairly ample funds at the disposal should grow day by day and supply the need of the middle-class women of Bengal. This hospital reminds us of the fact that social work was as dear to the Deshabandhu as political. When it was open to him to give away his properties for political work he deliberately chose to give them for social service in which women's service had a prominent part.

*Young India*, 25-3-1926, p. 109

## II

Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy, the celebrated physician of Calcutta and one of the trustees of the All-Bengal Deshabandhu Memorial Trust, has issued an appeal for 5 lakhs of rupees for the Seva Sadan. It will be remembered, that this institution is situated on the ground which Deshabandhu in his life-time had made over to the trustees. The ground was partly encumbered. It was redeemed out of the memorial funds that were collected immediately after Deshabandhu's death, and for over a year, a well-equipped and well-managed hospital and a dispensary have been going on there. The total number of the cases treated at the out-door during the year was 22,000, new cases being 7,023. The total number of in-door patients was 579 with only 23 beds. The trustees now propose to add 32 beds. There can be no doubt, that the institution supplies a felt want, and that it needs expansion. Expansion means more money. Those who, revere the memory of Deshabandhu, and who appreciate the necessity of rendering aid to ailing, will not lose time in responding to an appeal issued on behalf of the Board of Trustees. A full report of the institution, containing a certified account of income and expenditure, and an analysis of cases treated at the institution accompanies the report, which can be had from Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy, 148 Russa Road South, Calcutta. Subscriptions can be sent to the Secretary, Deshabandhu Memorial Trust, 36 Wellington Street, Calcutta, or to the account of Deshabandhu Memorial Trust, Central Bank of India Limited, 100 Clive Street, Calcutta.

*Young India*, 30-6-1927, p. 212

## 74. TO A YOUNG HEART

(From "A Young Heart")

A correspondent who signs himself "A Young heart" has addressed me a long letter dealing with a number of subjects. This anxiety to keep the writer's name secret betrays cowardice or lack of moral courage, alas, fast becoming but too common amongst us. It ill becomes those who aspire after Swaraj. I would appeal to our young men to shed this moral weakness and speak out their thoughts with courage and yet with humility and restraint. Even if they cannot be sure of their sense of discrimination and courtesy, let them express their thoughts in the language that comes to them naturally. Cowardly silence will not only not teach them discrimination or courtesy but it will demoralize them into the bargain.

*Young India*, 3-1-1929, p. 6

## 75. A TRAGEDY

The longer I live the more do I realize that the happiness which I enjoy and which so many friends envy persists in spite of tragedies of which I have always had my due share. The latest is the disappearance of Nila Nagini Devi, alias Miss Nellie Cram Cook. I have no doubt that her repentance was sincere. She struggled bravely against her past, but it did appear to me on my coming to Wardha that the struggle was getting too severe for her. She was becoming unhinged and losing control over herself. Previously, in one of her letters from Wardha, she had hinted that she might become insane. All the affection that could be shown to her was shown. She was never insensible to it. She was most responsive. But she was also most impulsive. She has gone away without any money or belongings. The reports published about her in the Delhi press are sensational manufactures and do her grave injustice. She cannot be held responsible for her actions in her present mental state. Her proper place is in a philanthropic institution or in an asylum. Those who will throw a few silver pieces at her out of false compassion, or in order to get rid of her, will do her no kindness. Being irresponsible, she has been squandering what she has received. I would esteem it a favour if those who may come in contact with her will give me her address and show this writing to her.

*Harijan, 27-10-1933, p. 2*

## 76. A FITTING REMEMBRANCE

(Originally appeared under the title "Kamla Nehru Memorial".)

On the 19th instant I had the privilege of laying the foundation stone of the Kamala Nehru Memorial Hospital in Allahabad before a large gathering. This hospital will be not only a fitting remembrance of the memory of a true devotee of her country and a woman of great spiritual beauty, it will be a redemption of the promise made to her by me that I would do what lay in my power to see that the work for which she had made herself responsible was carried on even after her death. She was going to Europe in search of health. The visit proved to be a search of death. As she was going she had invited me, if I could, either to join her for a brief talk during part of her journey to Bombay or to see her in Bombay. I went to Bombay. During the time that I was able to give her she asked me, if she died in Europe, to try to see that the hospital which Jawaharlal had commenced in Swaraj Bhavan and which she had laboured to keep alive was put on a permanent footing. I told her I would do what I could. That promise was partly the foundation for the appeal to which I had become party, for funds for the Memorial. Owing to circumstances beyond my control I was not able to take much active part in collecting the funds. The appeal was made for five lacs and only half the amount has come in. At the ceremony of foundation laying, I made an appeal to the large audience composed of the wealthy as also the poor to share the burden of making up the deficit. By judicious organization it ought to be easy to make the collection for a cause so worthy and for a memory so sacred. Able doctors of all-India reputation like Jivaraj Mehta and Bidhan Chandra Roy are among the trustees. They have made themselves responsible for the proper construction, organization and management of the hospital. I hope that not only will the deficit be soon made up but the doctors will have no difficulty in securing a suitable staff for the efficient management of the hospital.

*Harijan*, 25-11-1939, p. 349

## 77. A WOMAN'S DILEMMA

Q.: What is a woman to do when attacked by miscreants? To run away or resist with violence? To have boats in readiness to fly or prepare to defend with weapons?

A.: My answer to this question is very simple. For me there can be no preparation for violence. All preparation must be non-violent if courage of the highest type is to be developed. Violence can only be tolerated as being preferable always to cowardice. Therefore I would have no boats ready for a flight in emergency. For a non-violent person there is no emergency, but quiet dignified preparation for death. Hence whether it is a man or a woman he or she will defy death even when he or she is unassisted; for the real assistance is from God. I can preach no other thing and I am here to practise what I preach. Whether such an opportunity will occur to me or be given to me I do not know. If there are women who when assailed by miscreants cannot resist themselves without arms they do not need to be advised to carry arms. They will do so. There is something wrong in this constant enquiry as to whether to bear arms or not. People have to learn to be naturally independent. If they will remember the central teaching, namely, that the real effective resistance lies in non-violence, they will model their conduct accordingly. And that is what the world has been doing although unthinkingly. Since it is not the highest courage, namely, courage born of non-violence, it arms itself even unto the atom bomb. Those who do not see in it the futility of violence will naturally arm themselves to the best of their ability.

In India since my return from South Africa, there has been conscious and constant training in non-violence with the result we have seen.

Q.: Can a woman be advised to take her own life rather than surrender?

A.: This question requires a definite answer. I answered it in Delhi just before leaving for Noakhali. A woman would most certainly take her own life rather than surrender. In other words, surrender has no room in my plan of life. But I was asked in what way to take one's own life. I promptly said it was not for me to prescribe the means and

behind the approval of suicide under such circumstances was and is the belief that one whose mind is prepared even for suicide will have requisite courage for such mental resistance and such internal purity that her assailant will be disarmed. I could not carry the argument any further because it does not admit of further development. It requires positive proof which, I own, is lacking.

Q.: If the choice is between taking one's own life or that of the assailant, which would you advise?

A.: When it is a question of choice between killing oneself or the assailant, I have no doubt in my mind that the first should be the choice.

Palla, 27-1-1947

*Harijan*, 9-2-1947, p. 13

## SECTION THREE: THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE

### 1. THE MARRIED ESTATE

#### 78. THE MARRIED ESTATE

(From "Notes"—Originally appeared in *Harijan Sevak*.)

A sister, who is a good worker and was anxious to remain celibate in order better to serve the country's cause, has recently married having met the mate of her dreams. But she imagines that in doing so she has done wrong and fallen from the high ideal which she had set before herself. I have tried to rid her mind of this delusion. It is no doubt an excellent thing for girls to remain unmarried for the sake of service, but the fact is that only one in a million is able to do so. Marriage is a natural thing in life, and to consider it derogatory in any sense is wholly wrong. When one imagines, any act a fall it is difficult, however hard one tries, to raise oneself. The ideal is to look upon marriage as a sacrament and therefore to lead a life of self-restraint in the married estate. Marriage in Hinduism is one of the four Ashrams. In fact the other three are based on it. But in modern times marriage has unfortunately come to be regarded purely as a physical union. The other three Ashrams are all but non-existent.

The duty of the above-mentioned and other sisters who think like her is, therefore, not to look down upon marriage but to give it its due place and make of it the sacrament it is. If they exercise the necessary self-restraint, they find growing within themselves a greater strength for service. She who wishes to serve will naturally choose a partner in life who is of die same mind, and their joint service will be the country's gain.

It is a tragedy that generally speaking our girls are not taught the duties of motherhood. But if marriage life is a religious duty, motherhood must be so too. To be an ideal mother is no easy task. The procreation of children has to be undertaken with a full sense of responsibility. The mother should know what is her duty from the

moment she conceives right up to the time the child is born. And she who gives intelligent, healthy and well- brought-up children to the country is surely rendering a service. When the latter grow up they too will be ready to serve. The truth of the matter is that those who are filled with a living spirit of service will always serve whatever their position in life. They will never adopt a way of life which will interfere with service.

*Harijan; 22-3-1942, p. 88*

## 79. THE MARRIAGE IDEAL

(Slightly abridged and translated by P. from *Harijan Sevak*.)

A friend writes:

"In the current issue of *Harijan Sevak* in your article entitled "A Moral Dilemma" you have observed, "Many marriage taboos appear to have grown out of social customs. They are nowhere seen to rest on any vital, moral or religious principle." My own instinct based upon my experience tells me that probably these taboos were promulgated out of eugenic considerations. It is a well-known principle of the science of eugenics that the issue resulting from the crossing of exogamous elements is eugenically fitter than the product of endogamous unions. That is the reason why in Hinduism *sagotra* and *sapinda* marriages are interdicted. On the other hand if we admit social custom with all its kaleidoscopic variety and change to be the sole reason for these taboos, we are left with no strong reason why marriages between paternal uncle and niece, or for the matter of that between brother and sister, should absolutely be tabooed. If, as you say, the begetting of progeny be the only legitimate object of marriage, then the choice of partners would become purely a question of eugenic harmony. Are all other considerations to be ruled out of court as relatively unimportant? If not, what should be their order of precedence? I would set it down as follows:

- (1) Mutual attraction or love;
- (2) Eugenic fitness;
- (3) Approval and consent of the respective families concerned; and consideration for the interest of the social order to which one belongs;
- (4) Spiritual development.

What do you say to it?

The Hindu shastras have emphatically set down procreation as the sole end of marriage, as the ancient benediction that is pronounced upon the prospective housewife by her elders at the time of marriage, viz. "May you be blessed with eight children", shows. This bears out your contention that cohabitation in marriage should only be for the purpose of begetting offspring, never for sensual gratification. But, then, would you expect a married couple to be

satisfied with only one offspring irrespective of whether it is male or female? Besides the longing to perpetuate one's line which you have very properly recognized, there also has existed amongst us a strong feeling that this can be properly done only through a male issue. And the birth of a girl, therefore, is less welcome than that of a boy. In view of this very wide-spread craving for a male issue, don't you think that your ideal of having only one offspring should be modified so as to include the begetting of a male issue in addition to the possibly female ones?

I entirely agree with you that a married person who confines the sex act strictly to the purpose of procreation should be regarded as a *brahmaehari*. I also hold with you that in the case of a married couple who have practised the rule of purity and self-control before and after marriage a single act of union must lead to conception. In support of your first point there is in our shastras the celebrated story of Vishwamitra and Arundhati, the wife of Vasishtha who in spite of her one hundred sons was greeted by Vishwamitra as a perfect *brahmacharini*, whose command even the elements were bound to obey because her connubial relations with her husband were purely directed to the attainment and discharge of the function of motherhood.

But I doubt whether even the Hindu shastras would support your ideal of having only one offspring irrespective of whether it is male or female. It seems to me, therefore, that if you liberalize your ideal of married life so as to include the begetting of one male offspring in addition to the possible female ones, it would go a long way towards satisfying many married couples. Otherwise, I am afraid, most people would find it to be harder to limit sexual relationship to the procreation of the first child and then irrespective of its sex practise complete abstention for the rest of life than never to marry at all. I am being slowly forced to the view that sexuality is man's primitive nature, self-control is a cultivated virtue representing a step in his upward evolution towards religion and spirituality which is the natural law of his development. That is why self-control has been held in such high regard. I honour the person who lives up to the ideal of regarding sexual union only as a means for procreation. I also agree that coming together under any other circumstance would be sexual indulgence. But I am not prepared to condemn it as a heinous sin or to regard a husband and wife who cannot help their nature as fallen creatures to be treated with cheap pity or high-brow contempt."

I do not know what the scientific basis for the various taboos in respect of marriage relationships is. But it seems to me clear that a social custom or usage that helps the practice of virtue and self-control should have the sanctity of a moral law. If it is eugenic considerations that are at the root of interdiction of marriages between brother and sister, then they ought to apply equally to cousin marriages. A safe rule of conduct, therefore, would be as a rule to respect such taboos where they exist in a particular society. I accept generally the conditions for an ideal marriage enumerated by my correspondent. But I would change their order of importance and put "love" last in the list. By giving it the first place, the other conditions are liable to be overshadowed by it altogether and rendered more or less nugatory. Therefore, spiritual development ought to be given the first place in the choice for marriage. Service should come next, family considerations and the interest of the social order should have the third place, and mutual attraction or "love" the fourth and the last place. This means that "love" alone, when the other four conditions are not fulfilled, should not be held as a valid reason for marriage. At the same time, marriage where there is no love should equally be ruled out even though all the other conditions are fully complied with. I should score out the condition of eugenic fitness, because the begetting of offspring being the central purpose of marriage eugenic fitness cannot be treated merely as a "condition", it is the *sine qua non* of marriage.

Hindu shastras certainly show a marked bias in favour of the male offspring. But this originated at a time when physical warfare was the order of the day and adequate man-power was a *sine qua non* of success in the struggle for existence. This number of sons that a man had was therefore then looked upon as a mark of virility and strength, and to facilitate the begetting of numerous offspring even polygamy was sanctioned and encouraged. But if we regard marriage as a sacrament, there is room in it for one offspring, and that is why in our shastras the first offspring is described as *flifa* i.e. "duty born", all subsequent issues being referred to as *w*, i.e., "lust born". I make no distinction between son and daughter. Such distinction is in my opinion invidious and wrong. The birth of a son or a daughter should be welcome alike.

The story of Vishwamitra and Vasishtha is good as an illustration of the principle that the sexual act performed solely for the purpose of begetting offspring is not inconsistent with the highest ideal of *brahmachaiya*. But the whole of that story need not be taken literally. Sexual intercourse for the purpose of carnal satisfaction is reversion to animality, and it should therefore be man's endeavour to rise above it. But failure to do so as between husband and wife cannot be regarded as a sin or a matter of obloquy. Millions in this world eat for the satisfaction of their palate; similarly millions of the husbands and wives indulge in the sex act for their carnal satisfaction and will continue to do so and also pay the inexorable penalty in the shape of numberless ills with which nature visits all violations of its order. The ideal of absolute *brahmacharya* or of married *brahmachrya* is for those who aspire to a spiritual or higher life; it is the *sine qua non* of such life.

*Harijan*, 5-6-1937, p. 131

## 80. SOME KNOTTY QUESTIONS

(Originally appeared under the title "Tough question".)

A fair friend who has some faith in my wisdom and sincerity asks some knotty questions which I would fain avoid for fear of raising an indignant controversy on the part of some husbands jealous of their rights. But jealous husbands would spare me, for they know that I happen to be one myself having led a fairly happy married life for the past forty years in spite of occasional jars.

The first question is apposite and timely. (The original is in Marathi. I have given a free rendering.)

Can a man or woman attain self-realization by mere recitation of Ramanama and without taking part in national service? I ask this question because some of my sisters say that they do not need to do anything beyond attending to family requirements and occasionally showing kindness to the poor.

This question has puzzled not only women but many men and has taxed me to the utmost. I know that there is a school of philosophy which teaches complete inaction and futility of all effort. I have not been able to appreciate that teaching, unless in order to secure verbal agreement I were to put my own interpretation on it. In my humble opinion effort *is* necessary for one's own growth. It has to be irrespective of results. Ramanama or some equivalent is necessary not for the sake of repetition but for the sake of purification, as an aid to effort, for direct guidance from above. It is therefore never a substitute for effort. It is meant for intensifying and guiding it in proper channel. If all effort is vain, why family cares or an occasional help to the poor? In this very effort is contained the germ of national service. And national service, to me, means service of humanity, even as disinterested service of the family means the same thing. Disinterested service of the family necessarily leads one to national service. Ramanama gives one detachment and ballast and never throws one

off one's balance at critical moments. Self-realization I hold to be impossible without service of and identification with the poorest. The second question is:

In Hinduism devotion of wife to her husband and her complete merger in him is the highest aim, never mind whether the husband is a friend or an embodiment of love. If this be the correct conduct for a wife, may she in the teeth of opposition by her husband undertake national service? Or must she only go as far as the husband will permit her to go?

My ideal of a wife is Sita and of a husband Rama. But Sita was no slave of Rama. Or each was slave of the other. Rama is ever considerate to Sita. Where there is true love, the question asked does not occur. Where there is no true love, the bond has never existed. But the Hindu household of today is a conundrum. Husbands and wives when they are married know nothing of one another. Religious sanction fortified by custom and the even flow of the lives of the married people keep the peace in the vast majority of Hindu households. But when either wife or husband holds views out of the ordinary, there is danger of jars. In the case of the husband he has no scruples. He does not consider himself under any obligation to consult the partner's wishes. He regards his wife as his property. And the poor wife who believes in the husband's claim often suppresses herself. I think there is a way out. Mirabai has showed the way. The wife has a perfect right to take her own course and meekly brave the consequences when she knows herself to be in the right and when her resistance is for a nobler purpose. The third question is:

If a husband is, say, a meat-eater and the wife considers meat-eating an evil, may she follow her own bent? May she even try by all loving ways to wean her husband from meat-eating or the like? Or is she bound to cook meat for her husband or worse still, is she bound to eat it, if the husband requires her? If you say that the wife may take her own course, how can a joint household be run when the one compels and the other rebels?

This question is partly answered in the answer to the second. A wife is not bound to be an accomplice in her husband's crimes. And when she holds anything to be wrong she must dare to do the right. But seeing that the wife's function is to manage the household and thus to cook, as the husband's is to earn for the family, she is bound to cook meat for the family if both have been meat-eaters before. If on the other hand,

in a vegetarian family, the husband becomes a meat-eater and seeks to compel the wife to cook for him, the wife is in noway bound to cook what offends her sense of right. The peace of a household is a most desirable thing. But it cannot be an end in itself. For me, the married state is as much a state of discipline as any other. Life is duty, a probation. Married life is intended to promote mutual good both here and hereafter. It is meant also to serve humanity. When one partner breaks the law of discipline, the right accrues to the other of breaking the bond. The breach here is moral and not physical. It precludes divorce. The wife or the husband separates but to serve the end for which they had united. Hinduism regards each as absolute equal of the other. No doubt a different practice has grown up, no one knows since when. But so have many other evils crept into it. This however I do know that Hinduism leaves the individual absolutely free to do what he or she likes for the sake of self-realization for which and which alone he or she is born.

*Young India*, 21-10-1926, p. 364

## 81. SIMPLIFYING MARRIAGE

A correspondent sends me an account of a marriage ceremony performed in Karachi. At the time of the marriage of a girl 16 years old, the daughter of a monied man Sheth Lalchand, the father is reported to have curtailed the expenditure to a minimum and given the marriage ceremonial a religious and dignified form; The report before me shows that the whole ceremony did not take more than two hours whereas generally it involves a wasteful expenditure spread over many days. The religious ceremony was performed by a learned Brahman who explained to the bride and the bridegroom the meaning of what they were called upon to recite. I congratulate Sheth Lalchand and his wife who actively supported her husband upon initiating this belated reform, and hope that it will be copied largely by other monied men. Khadi lovers will be glad to know that Sheth Lalchand and his wife are thorough believers in khadi, and that both the bride and the bridegroom were clothed in khadi and are themselves convinced khadi wearers. This marriage ceremony calls to my mind the scene I witnessed at the Agra students' meeting. They confirmed the information that was given to me by a friend that in the United Provinces young men studying in the colleges and schools were themselves eager to be married early, and expected their parents to go in for a lavish expenditure involving costly gifts, and equally costly and sometimes even more costly entertainments. My informant told me that even highly educated parents were not free from the pride of possession, and that so far as expenses went they beat the comparatively uneducated wealthy merchants. To all such the recent example of Sheth Lalchand and the less recent example of Sheth Jamnalal Bajaj should serve as a stimulus in cutting down expenditure. But more than the parents it is the duty of young men firmly to resist premature marriage, more especially marriage during student life, and at all cost to resist all expenditure. Indeed not more than Rs. 10 should be required for the performance of the religious ceremonial, and nothing beyond the ceremonial should be considered a necessary part of marriage rites. In this age of democracy, when the distinction between the rich and

the poor, the high and the low, is sought to be abolished, it is for the rich to lead the poor to a contented life by exercising self-restraint in all their enjoyments and indulgences, and let them remember the verse in the *Bhagavad Gita*, "Whatever leaders of society do, the others will follow." The truth of this statement we see daily verified in our experience, and nowhere more vividly than in marriage ceremonies and rites in connection with the dead. Thousands of poor people deprive themselves for this purpose of necessities of life, and burden themselves with debts carrying ruinous rates of interest. This waste of national resources can be easily stopped if the educated youths of the country, especially sons of rich parents, will resolutely set their faces against every form of wasteful expenditure on their account.

*Young India*, 26-9-1929, p. 316

## 82. ABOLISH MARRIAGE

(Condensed translation from *Navajivan* by M.D.)

A correspondent, whom I know well, raises an issue, I take it, for purely academic interest, because I know the views he has set out are not his. "Is not our present day morality unnatural?" he asks. If it was natural it should have been the same everywhere in all ages, but every race and community seems to have its own peculiar marriage laws and in enforcing them men have made themselves worse than beasts. For diseases which are unknown amongst animals are quite common amongst men; infanticide, abortions, child-marriages, which are impossible in the brute creation, are the curse of the society that holds up marriage as a sacrament, and no end of evil results have sprung up from what we uphold as laws of morality. And the miserable condition of Hindu widows—what is it due to, but to the existing marriage laws? Why not go back to nature, and take a leaf out of the book of the brute creation?

I do not know whether the advocates of free love in the West resort to the argument summarized above or have any stronger reasons to put forth, but I am sure that the tendency to regard the marriage-bond as barbarous is distinctly Western. If the argument is also borrowed from the West, there is no difficulty about meeting it.

It is a mistake to institute a comparison between man and the brute and it is this comparison that vitiates the whole argument. For man is higher than the brute in his moral instincts and moral institutions. The law of nature as applied to the one is different from the law of nature as applied to the other. Man has reason, discrimination, and free will such as it is. The brute has' no such thing. It is not a free agent, and knows no distinction between virtue and vice, good and evil. Man, being a free agent, knows these distinctions, and when he follows his higher nature shows himself far superior to the brute, but when he follows his baser nature can show himself lower than the brute. Even the races regarded as the most uncivilized on earth accept some restriction on sexual relations. If it be said that the restriction is

itself barbarous, then freedom from all restraints should be the law of man. If all men were to act according to this lawless law, there would be perfect chaos within twenty-four hours. Man being by nature more passionate than the brute, the moment all restraint is withdrawn, the lava of unbridled passion would overspread the whole earth and destroy mankind. Man is superior to the brute inasmuch as he is capable of self-restraint and sacrifice of which the brute is incapable.

Some of the diseases that are so common at the present day are the result of infringement of marriage laws. I should like to know a single instance of a man strictly observing the restraint of the marriage bond having suffered from the diseases the correspondent has in mind. Infanticide, child-marriages and the like, are also the result of the breach of marriage laws. For the law lays down that a man or woman shall choose a mate only when he or she has come of age, is healthy, and capable of restraint, and desires to have progeny. Those who strictly obey this law, and regard the marriage bond as a sacrament, have never an occasion to be unhappy or miserable. Where marriage is a sacrament, the union is not the union of bodies but the union of souls indissoluble even by the death of either party. Where there is a true union of souls, the remarriage of widow or widower is unthinkable, improper and wrong. Marriages, where the true law of marriage is ignored, do not deserve the name. If we have very few true marriages nowadays, it is not the institution of marriage that is to blame, but the prevailing form of it, which should be reformed.

The correspondent contends that marriage is no moral or religious bond but a custom, and a custom which is opposed to religion and morality and hence deserves to be abolished. I submit that marriage is fence that protects religion. If the fence were to be destroyed religion would go to pieces. The foundation of religion is restraint and marriage is nothing but restraint. The man who knows no restraint has no hope of self-realization. I confess it may be difficult to prove the necessity of restraint to an atheist or a materialist. But he who knows the perishable nature of flesh from the imperishable nature of the spirit, instinctively knows that self-realization is impossible without self-discipline and self-restraint. The body may either be a play

ground of passion, or a temple of self- realization. If it is the latter, there is no room there for libertinism. The spirit needs must curb the flesh every moment.

Woman will be the apple of discord where the marriage bond is loose, where there is no observance of the law of restraint. If men were as unrestrained as the brutes they would straightway take the road to destruction. I am firmly of opinion that all the evils that the correspondent complains of can be eradicated not by abolishing marriage but by a systematic understanding and observance of the law of marriage.

I agree that whereas amongst some communities marriage is permitted among very near relations, it is prohibited among other communities, that whereas some communities forbid polygamy some permit it. Whilst one would wish that there was a uniform moral law accepted by all communities, the diversity does not point to the necessity of abolishing all restraint. As we grow wise in experience our morality will gain in uniformity. Even today the moral sense of the world holds up monogamy as the highest ideal and no religion makes polygamy obligatory. The ideal remains unaffected by the relaxation of practice according to time and place.

I need not reiterate my views regarding re-marriage of widows, as I consider re-marriage of virgin widows not only desirable but the bounden duty of all parents who happen to have such widowed daughters.

*Young India*, 3-6-1926, p. 204

### 83. ONLY TWO WAYS

(The following letter was written by Gandhiji to Shri K. V. Mehta in Gujarati from which it has been translated into English.)

MOTIHARI,

*January 18*

I have your letter. I can see only two ways. One, the better of the two, is this: the woman should put her education to die right use and try to improve the husband to whom fate has joined her. Women have done this before now and, if this one shows such a spirit today, all concerned will soon be happy. She must be wise in spirit, to succeed in this task. If she is not so well equipped, she should make bold and plainly refuse to go and live with her husband. If there is reason to fear pressure on her in her parent's home, she will have every right to leave it. In that case, some friend should give her shelter. If this cannot be done in a village, she may be removed from there. I should like you to put your friendship to some use by protecting the woman. Please try the better way first.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. XIV, p. 159*

## 84. REMNANT OF BARBARISM

We know by painful experience of what is daily happening in India that there are husbands enough who regard their wives as their property like their cattle or household furniture, and therefore think they have the right to beat them as they would their cattle. But I was unprepared for a judicial endorsement of the brutal habit till a friend put into my hands a newspaper cutting reporting a decision of the Sessions Judge of Madura recognizing the legal right of a husband of beating his wife. Fortunately an English judge on going through the calendar detected this extraordinary judgment of the Madura Sessions Judge and issued notice to the accused husband to show cause. In due course the case was heard by Justices Pandurang Row and K. S. Menon, whose judgment I make no apology for quoting below:

The accused was acquitted on the first charge of causing hurt to his wife by the Sessions Judge and the local Government did not file an appeal against the acquittal. The only reference that has to be made to this charge is necessitated by the learned Sessions Judge's insistence in more than one place of what he calls the right of the husband to beat the wife for impudence or impertinence. The learned Sessions Judge was so much obsessed with the right of the husband to beat his wife that he went to the length of criticizing the police for having included the charge of causing hurt to the wife in the charge-sheet and even the sub-Magistrate for including it in the charges sent by him for trial in the Sessions Court.

It is perhaps enough to say that though the learned Judge may be entitled to have his own views on the subject in a private capacity, yet he was not justified in laying down the law in this manner from his seat on the Bench declaring that the husband has the right of punishing his wife by beating her for impudence or impertinence. No such right is recognized by the Indian Penal code and wife-beating is not one of the exceptions in the chapter of "General Exceptions".

One can easily imagine the serious consequences of such a declaration being made from the Bench of a Sessions Judge unless the declaration is declared to be wrong and unfounded by this Court. That is the reason why we thought it necessary to state in unmistakable terms that

the learned Sessions Judge's declaration of the rights of husbands in this regard has no foundation, so that no one may rely upon that in future in any justification or excuse for beating wives.

It has to be confessed with shame that even educated husbands are not free from the belief in the right of husbands to treat their wives as cattles and beat them whenever they feel the impulse to do so. Would that this judgment would show them that such treatment of wives is a remnant of barbarism.

*Harijan*, 3-10-1936, p. 265

## 85. AN UNNATURAL FATHER

A young man has sent me a letter which can be given here only in substance. It is as under:

I am a married man. I had gone out to a foreign country. I had a friend whom both I and my parents implicitly trusted. During my absence he seduced my wife who has now conceived of him. My father now insists that the girl should resort to abortion; otherwise, he says, that the family would be disgraced. To me it seems that it would be wrong to do so. The poor woman is consumed with remorse. She cares neither to eat nor drink, but is always weeping. Will you kindly tell me as to what my duty is in the case?

I have published this letter with great hesitation. As everybody knows such cases are by no means unfrequent in society. A restrained public discussion of the question therefore does not seem to me to be out of place.

It seems to me clear as daylight that abortion would be a crime. Countless husbands are guilty of the same lapse as the poor woman, but nobody ever questions them. Society not only excuses them but does not even censure them. Then, again, the woman cannot conceal her shame while man can successfully hide his sin.

The woman in question deserves to be pitied. It would be the sacred duty of the husband to bring up the baby with all the love and tenderness that he is capable of and to refuse to yield to the counsels of his father. Whether he should continue to live with his wife is a ticklish question. Circumstances may warrant separation from her. In that case he would be bound to provide for her maintenance and education and to help her to live a pure life. Nor should I see anything wrong in his accepting her repentance if it is sincere and genuine. Nay, further, I can imagine a situation when it would be the sacred duty of the husband to take back an erring wife who has completely expiated for and redeemed her error.

*Young India*, 3-1-1929, p.7

## 86. A TWENTIETH CENTURY SATI (?)

(Translated from *Navajivan* by P.—A lady correspondent from Ghatkopar having invited Gandhiji to express his opinion on an alleged case of Sati was recently reported in a Bombay vernacular paper Gandhiji has delivered himself on the subject in an article in the *Navajivan* as follows.)

I hope that the incident as reported in the press is not true and that the lady in question died through illness or through some accident not by suicide. A *sati* has been descrided by our ancients, and the description holds good today as one who ever fixed in her love and devotion to her husband signalises herself by her selfless service during her husband's life-time as well as after, and remains absolutely chaste in thought, word and deed. Self-immolation at the death of the husband is not a sign of enlightenment but of gross ignorance as to the nature of the soul. Hie soul is immortal, unchangeable and immanent. It does not perish with the physical body but journeys on from one mortal frame to another till it completely emancipates itself from earthly bondage. The truth of it has been attested to by the experience of countless sages and seers and can be realized by any one who may wish to even today. How can suicide be then justified in the light of these facts?

Again true marriage means not merely union of bodies. It connotes the union of the souls too. If marriage meant no more than a physical relationship the bereaved wife should be satisfied with a portrait of a waxen image of her husband. But self-destruction is worse than futile. It cannot help to restore the dead to life, on the contrary it only takes away one more from the world of the living.

The ideal that marriage aims at is that of spiritual union through the physical. The human love that it incarnates is intended to serve as a stepping stone to the divine or universal love. That is why immortal Mirasang: "God alone is my husband—none else."

It follows from this that a *sati* would regard marriage not as a means of satisfying the animal appetite but as a means of realizing the ideal of selfless and self- effacing

service by completely merging her individuality in her husband's. She would prove her *satihood* not by mounting the funeral pyre at her husband's death but she would prove it with every breath that she breathes from the moment that she plighted her troth to him at the *sapta- padi* ceremony, by her renunciation, sacrifice, self-abnegation and dedication to the service of her husband, his family and the country. She would shun creature comforts and delights of the senses. She would refuse to be enslaved by the narrow domestic cares and interests of the family, but would utilize every opportunity to add to her stock of knowledge and increase her capacity for service by more and more cultivating renunciation and self-discipline, and by completely identifying herself with her husband, learn to identify herself with the whole world.

Such a *sati* would refuse to give way to wild grief at the death of her husband but would ever strive to make her late husband's ideals and virtues live again in her actions and thereby win for him the crown of immortality. Knowing that the soul of him whom she married is not dead but still lives she will never think of remarrying.

The reader will here be perhaps tempted to ask, "The *sati* that you have pictured is a being untouched by passion or animal appetite. She can have no desire for offspring. Why should she marry at all?" The reply is that in our present day Hindu Society, marriage, in a vast majority of cases is not a matter of choice. Again, there are some who believe that in our ramshackle age marriage is necessary as a shield to virtue and as an aid to self-restraint. And as a matter of fact, I personally know several instances of persons who, though at the time of marriage were not free from animal passion later on became imbued with the ideal of absolute chastity and found in their married life a powerful means for realizing their ideal. I have cited these instances to show that the ideal of *sati* that I have depicted is not merely a counsel of perfection that has no place outside the world of theory but something that has to be lived up to and realized in this very matter of fact world of ours.

But I really concede that the average wife who strives to attain the ideal of *sati* will be a mother too. She must therefore add to her various other qualities mentioned

above a knowledge of rearing and bringing up children so that they might live to be true servants of their country.

All that I have said about the wife applies equally to the husband. If the wife has to prove her loyalty and undivided devotion to her husband so has the husband to prove his allegiance and devotion to his wife. You cannot have one set of weights and measures for the one and a different one for the other. Yet we have never heard of a husband mounting the funeral pyre of his deceased wife. It may therefore be taken for granted that the practice of the widow immolating herself at the death of her husband had its origin in superstitious ignorance and the blind egotism of man. Even if it could be proved that at one time the practice had a meaning, it can be regarded as barbarous in the present age. The wife is not the slave of the husband but his comrade, otherwise known as his better half, his colleague and his friend. She is a co-sharer with him of equal rights and of equal duties. Their obligations towards each other and towards the world must, therefore, be the same and reciprocal.

I therefore regard the alleged self-immolation of this sister as vain. It certainly cannot be set up as an example to be copied. Don't I appreciate at least her courage to die, I may perhaps be asked. My reply is "no" in all conscience. Have we not seen even evil-doers display this sort of courage? Yet no one has ever thought of complementing them on it. Why should I take upon me the sin of even unconsciously leading astray some ignorant sisters by my injudicious praise of suicide? *Satihood* is the acme of purity. This purity cannot be attained or realized by dying. It can be attained only through constant striving, constant immolation of the spirit from day to day.

*Young India*, 21-5-1931, p. 115

## 87. A MORAL DILEMMA

(Abridged from *Harijan Sevak* by P.)

A friend writes:

About two and a half years ago this city was convulsed by a social tragedy. A Vaishya gentleman had a sixteen years old daughter. She had a maternal uncle aged twenty-one years studying in a college in the same city. The two fell secretly into love with each other. The girl is said to have become pregnant. When the true state of affairs at last became known, the lovers committed suicide by taking poison. The girl died immediately but the boy died a couple of days afterwards in the hospital. The incident raised a storm of controversy and set all tongues wagging, so much so that it became difficult for the bereaved parents of the hapless girl to dwell in the city. In the course of time the storm blew over. But the memory of the event still lingers in the people's minds and is raked up every now and then whenever a similar topic arises. At the same time when the storm was at its height and nobody had a kind word to say about the deceased unfortunate lovers, I shocked everybody by expressing my opinion that under the aforementioned circumstances the young lovers ought to have been allowed to have their way. But mine remained a voice in the wilderness. What is your opinion in the matter?

I have deliberately kept back the name of the correspondent and the place at the request of the writer as he did not want old sores to be reopened by a revival of an old controversy. All the same I feel that a public discussion of this delicate topic is necessary. In my opinion such marriages as are interdicted in a particular society cannot be recongnized all at once or at the will of an individual. Nor has society or relatives of parties concerned any right to impose their will upon and forcibly curtail the liberty of action of the young people who may want to contract such marriages. In the instance cited by the correspondent both the parties had fully attained maturity. They could well think for themselves. No one had a right forcibly to prevent them from marrying each other if they wanted to. Society at the most could refuse to recognize the marriage, but it was the height of tyranny to drive them to suicide.

Marriage taboos are not universal and are largely based on social usage. The usage varies from province to province and as between different divisions. This does not mean that the youth may ride roughshod over all established social customs and inhibitions. Before they decide to do so, they must convert public opinion to their side. In the meantime, the individuals concerned ought patiently to bide their time, or if they cannot do that calmly and quietly to face the consequences of social ostracism.

At the same time it is equally the duty of society not to take up a heartless, step-motherly attitude towards those who might disregard or break the established conventions. In the instance described by my correspondent the guilt of driving the young couple to suicide certainly rests on the shoulders of society if the version that is before me is correct.

*Harijan, 29-5-1937, p. 125*

## **88. A YOUNG MAN'S DILEMMA**

(From "Question Box")

Q.: I am a young man of 22 years. Is it legitimate for me to refuse to oblige my father in the matter of marriage if I do not wish to marry?

A.: According to the shastras and also reason, children when they reach the age of discretion, which the former prescribe as 16, become their parents' friends, i.e., are free from parental dictation. They are still bound to consult them and defer to their wishes wherever they can. You are full-grown, and in a matter so vital as marriage you should respectfully refuse to marry if the match is not to your liking or for any other valid reason.

*Harijan, 9-3-1940, p. 29*

## 89. SHALL I COMPEL HER?

(Originally appeared in the "Question Box" under the title "A Domestic Difficulty".)

Q.: I am a young man of 23 years. For the last two years I have been using pure khadi only. For the last 28 days I have been spinning regularly in my leisure time. But my wife refuses to wear khadi. She says it is too coarse. Should I compel her to use khadi? I may also mention that I find our temperaments are incompatible.

A.: This is the common lot of life in India. I have often said that the husband, being the stronger and more educated party, has to act as tutor to his wife and put up with her defects, if any. In your case you have to bear the incompatibility and conquer your wife by love, never by compulsion. It follows that you cannot compel your wife to use khadi. But you should trust your love and example to make her do the right thing. Remember your wife is not your property any more than you are hers. She is your better half. Treat her as such. You will not regret the experiment.

*Harijan, 9-3-1940, p. 29*

## 90. BEAR WITH YOUR WIFE'S RELUCTANCE

(Originally appeared in "Question Box" under the tide "Another Domestic Difficulty".)

Q.: I am married. My wife is a good woman. We have children. We have lived together in peace hitherto. Unfortunately she came across someone whom she has adopted as her *guru*. She has received *gurumantra* from her, and her life has become a close book for me. This has given rise to coolness between us. I do not know what I should do. Rama, as portrayed by Tulsidas, is my ideal hero. Should I not do what Rama did, and cut off all connection with my wife?

A.: Tulsidas has taught us that we may not indiscriminately imitate the great. What they may do with impunity we may not. Think of Rama's love for Sita. Tulsidas tells us that before the appearance of the golden deer the real Sita at the behest of Rama disappeared in the clouds and the mere shadow remained. This fact was a close secret even from Lakshmana. The poet further tells us that Rama had a purpose which was divine. It was with this shadow of Sita that Rama dealt after the appearance of the golden deer on the scene. Even so Sita never resented any single act of Rama. All such data would be lacking in any mundane case, as they are lacking in yours. Therefore my advice to you would be to bear with your wife and not interfere with her so long as you have no cause of complaint against her conduct. If you adopted someone as your *guru* and had your *gurumantra* and if you did not impart the secret to your wife, I am sure you would not relish her resenting your refusal to disclose the secret. I admit that between husband and wife there should be no secrets from one another. I have a very high opinion of the marriage tie. I hold that husband and wife merge in each other. They are one in two or two in one. But these things cannot be regulated mechanically. All things considered, therefore, since you are a liberal-minded husband, you should have no difficulty in respecting your wife's reluctance to share the secret with you.

*Harijan*, 9-3-1940, p. 29

## 91. LET HER GO HER WAY

(Originally appeared in "Question Box" under the title "A Domestic Difficulty".)

Q.: You have rightly said that no one who has not renounced untouchability in every shape and form can take part in satyagraha. Supposing a Congressman's wife does not share his convictions in this regard and won't let him bring Harijans into his house, what should he do—coerce his wife into conformity with his views, renounce her, or renounce the satyagraha struggle?

A.: No occasion for coercing your wife. You should let her go her way and you should go yours. This would mean her having a separate kitchen for herself and, if she likes, also a separate room. Thus there is no question of renouncing the struggle.

*Harijan*, 13-4-1940, p. 89

## 92. ENFORCED MARRIAGE

(From "Question Box")

A sister writes:

What is an unwilling girl to do when her parents insist either upon her marriage or leaving the parental home? Where is she to go, if she has not been educated enough to earn her own living? Whose protection is she to seek?

The question makes sad reading. It is wholly wrong of parents to force marriage on their daughters. It is also wrong to keep their daughters unfit for earning their living. No parent has a right to turn a daughter out on to the streets for refusal to marry. Let us hope that such cruel specimens are rare. To the girl concerned, my advice would be not to look on any labour with her hands, down to scavenging, as beneath her dignity. Women may not look for protection to men. They must rely on their own strength and purity of character and on God as did Draupadi of old.

New Delhi, 6-9-1946

*Harijan*, 15-9-1946, p. 311

## 2. INTER-CASTE AND INTER-RELIGIOUS MARRIAGES

### 93. AN EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW

(Originally appeared under the title "How?") A correspondent writes:

You are aware of the backward States of the Simla Hills. The Raja Saheb of Rampur Bushahr is a man of orthodox views. Recently a young man of a high caste Hindu family married a *koli* girl. The Lambardar of the village (Man dhol) brought the matter to the notice of the ruler. The Raja Saheb has sentenced both husband and wife to six months' imprisonment and a fine of Rs. 100/- each. Such action is intolerable and retards progress. Some others who were contemplating inter-caste marriages have been deterred.

Must we wait till autocracy is wiped out?

The rule of one man over many is intolerable. It must end. "How" is the question. The way is for the many to begin to live. To cut off the head of one ruler is easy enough. Remember the legend of Ravana. He had ten heads. As soon as one was cut off, another popped up in its place. The moral is that no cutting off of heads becomes necessary in the presence of a living demon. The one will respond and submit. In the given instance the couple will cheerfully undergo the sentence. Only many should follow their example, if the tie is not lustful bondage but a bond of love born out of the zeal for reform. If the reformers do not wish to suffer imprisonment, they should migrate to a free place where they can live without hindrance.

New Delhi, 30-9-1946 *Harijan*, 6-10-1946, p. 341

## 94. INTER-CASTE MARRIAGES

(From "Gandhiji's Walking Tour Diary")

Q.: As you are an advocate of the abolition of caste, are we to take it that you favour inter-caste marriages? Many occupations are now the monopoly of specific castes. Should not this be abolished?

A.: He was certainly in favour of inter-caste marriages. The question did not arise when all became caste-less. When this happy event took place, monopoly of occupations would go.

*Harijan*, 16-3-1947, p. 61 at p. 63

## 95. FOLLY OF EXCOMMUNICATION

(From "Bihar Notes")

Then there was a Provincial Marwadi *Sammelan* where I spoke on the question of social boycott and on the crying need of social reform. I told the Marwadi friends that excommunication was a lawful weapon in the hands only of those who deserved to be classed as *mahajan*, which meant pure men who were real representatives of their respective groups or castes and who declared excommunication not from personal spite but from the selfless motive of conserving the interest of fellow-beings. It was an immoral abuse of power to put under the ban of excommunication a person who for the sake of learning or legitimate gain crossed the waters or who for the sake of obtaining a suitable match for his son or daughter went outside his sub-caste or who dared to remarry his widowed daughter of tender age. If *varnashram* which had a useful and proper place in the Hindu social system was to be rescued from destruction, it was high time that the innumerable sub-divisions were fused into one. There was, for instance, no reason why a Marwadi Brahmin or Vaishya should not seek

marriage relations with a Bengali Brahmin or Vaishya. The *mahajan* to be truly great will have to encourage rather than suppress tendencies towards fusion.

If excommunication was ever deserved nowadays, it was deserved by those who gave away their daughters in marriage before they were fullgrown, at least before they were sixteen, and if secret immorality was to be discountenanced, it was the duty of parents of child-widows to encourage their remarriage.

*Young India*, 15-10-1925, p. 349

## 96. INTER-CASTE MARRIAGE NOT A MATTER FOR RELIGIOUS REGULATION

### I

(From "Confusing the Issue")

The *Vedas* and the *Mahabharata* are filled with illustrations both of inter-dining and inter-marriage. But these are matters of choice, not a matter of religious regulation. No one can be compelled or required to dine with any other or contract marital relations. No doubt social habits will grow up and regulate these things more or less rigidly. But it would be wrong to dignify them by the name of religious observances. Therefore inter-dining and intermarriage can form no part of the campaign against un-touchability. In so far as they are a matter for reform, they must be treated, in my opinion, as an absolutely separate subject, unconnected... with untouchability.

*Harijan*, 4-3-1933, p. 5

### II

(From comments in "Notes" which appeared under the heading "Inconsistencies".)

I would say that inter-dining and inter-caste marriage are in no way essential for the promotion of the spirit of brotherhood or for the removal of untouchability. At the same time, a super-imposed restriction would undoubtedly stunt the growth of any society, and to link these restrictions to *Varnadharma* or caste is undoubtedly prejudicial to the freedom of the spirit and would make *Varna* a drag upon religion.

*Harijan*, 29-4-1933, p. 2

## 97. UNTOUCHABILITY NO GROUND FOR RESTRAINT ON INTER-MARRIAGE

(From "Implications of Untouchability")

Q.: Are inter-dining and inter-marriage necessary for the removal of untouchability?

A.: My answer is, no and yes. "No", because it is no part of the programme of the Harijan Sevak Sangh. Generally, too, marrying and dining are matters of individual concern. No one has a right to ask another to choose a girl for wife or to dine with anybody against his will. But my answer is at the same time "yes", because if a person refuses to take food touched by another person on the ground of untouchability or inferiority, he is observing untouchability. In other words, untouchability cannot constitute any ground for restraint on inter-dining or marriage.

*Harijan, 23-3-1934, p. 44*

## 98. INTER-MARRIAGE AND INDIVIDUAL CHOICE

(From "The Cawupore Speech" at a public meeting held on 22-7-1934)

Let me repeat the implications of this movement.\* It is limited to the removal of the feeling of superiority and inferiority and has nothing to do with inter-dining and inter-marriage. I personally inter-dine with *Bhangis* and Musalmans. I am not ashamed of this. On the other hand, I think my conduct in this respect is fully in consonance with the shastras. But it has nothing to do with this movement. Inter-dining and inter-marriage are matters of individual choice. There is no need, nor can I spare time, for such propaganda. I only place the essentials of religion before the people for their acceptance. The movement claims for the Harijans the same social, civic and religious rights as belong to any other Hindu.

*Harijan, 3-8-1934, p. 194*

\* For removal of untouchability

## 99. MARRIAGES BETWEEN HARIJANS AND NON-HARIJANS

(From *Harijanbandhu*)

A friend from Patidar Ashram, Surat writes to Shri Narhari Parikh:

In India the movement for removal of untouchability has received great impetus since Gandhiji's entry into politics. If he can find an educated Harijan girl to marry a caste Hindu it will help the movement in a way. But the question should be considered from another aspect also. Our country is still backward in female education and amongst Harijans who are backward in every way, educated girls can be counted on the fingers of one's hand. If they marry caste Hindus they will, as a rule, be cut off from their own society and absorbed by the caste Hindus. They will not be able to work for the uplift of their Harijan sisters from within. I know of one or two such instances.

One might say that in a way such marriages help to keep the Harijans in ignorance. The progress of a community depends on the progress of its women. By giving away the best of their womanhood to the caste Hindus, Bapu will be closing the door on the Harijans getting out of the blackest ignorance in which they are today steeped. I think this should be stopped. If Harijan girls are to marry caste Hindus it should be on condition that the couple will devote their lives to the service of the Harijans. Otherwise, educated Harijan girls should be encouraged to marry educated youths in their own community. If they are educated in the real sense of the term they will set an example to their community to emulate and follow.

You must be knowing that in our Ashram, Harijan and non-Harijan students live together without any distinction whatsoever. Parikshitlal sends to us one or two Harijan students every year. This year we had two. One of them said to me: "Why does not Bapu encourage the marriages of educated caste Hindu girls with educated Harijan boys? This is what he should really encourage. If caste Hindu girls live amongst Harijans as Harijans, Harijan sisters will be able to learn a lot from them and Harijan uplift work will receive great impetus." I could answer the question but I would rather say that Bapu did so himself. It deserves serious thought."

If an educated Harijan girl marries a caste Hindu, the couple ought to devote themselves to the service of Harijans. Self-indulgence can never be the object of such

a marriage. That will be improper. I can never encourage it. It is possible that a marriage entered into with the best of intentions turns out to be a failure. No one can prevent such mishaps. Even if one Harijan girl marries a caste Hindu with a high character it will do good to both the Harijans and caste Hindus. They will set up a good precedent and if the Harijan girl is really worthy, she will spread her fragrance far and wide and encourage others to copy her example. Society will cease to be scared by such marriages. They will see for themselves that there is nothing wrong in them. If children born of such a union turn out to be good, they will further help to remove untouchability. Every reform moves at the proverbial snail's pace. To be dissatisfied with this slowness of progress betrays ignorance of the way in which reform works.

It is certainly desirable that caste Hindu girls should select Harijan husbands. I hesitate to say that it is better. That would imply that women are inferior to men. I know that such inferiority complex is there today. For this reason I would agree that at present the marriage of a caste Hindu girl to a Harijan is better than that of a Harijan girl to a caste Hindu. If I had my way I would persuade all caste Hindu girls coming under my influence to select Harijan husbands. That it is most difficult I know from experience. Old prejudices are difficult to shed. One cannot afford to laugh at such prejudices either. They have to be overcome with patience. And if a girl imagines that her duty ends by marrying a Harijan and falls a prey to the temptation of self-indulgence after marriage, the last state would be worse than the first. The final test of every marriage is how far it develops the spirit of service in the parties. Every mixed marriage will tend in varying degrees to remove the stigma attached to such marriages. Finally there will be only one caste known by the beautiful name *Bhangi*, that is to say, the reformer or remover of all dirt. Let us all pray that such a happy day will dawn soon.

The correspondent must realize that even the best of my wishes cannot come true on the mere expression. I have not succeeded in marrying off a single Harijan girl to a caste Hindu so far after my declaration. I have a caste Hindu girl who at her father's wish has offered to marry a Harijan lad of her father's selection. The lad is at present

under training at Sevagram. God willing, the marriage will take place after a short time.

Poona, 30-6-1946

*Harijan*, 7-7-1946, p. 212

## 100. CASTE HINDU MARRIES HARIJAN GIRL

(From "Notes")

Shri Harekrushna Mahtab writes a letter about a marriage between a caste Hindu and a Harijan girl in Orissa. From it I take the following:

Shri Radhamadhab Mitra of Khurda in Orissa now serving as sub-inspector in the Excise Department of the Orissa Government married a Harijan girl Fulrani named by us on 4th March last strictly according to Hindu rites with Brahmin priests, and the ceremony was attended by about one thousand people of all castes and communities. Radhamadhab is aged about twenty-five. When he was a student in the Khurda school he organized one Harijan boy's football team. During your epic fast for Harijans, Radhamadhab with some of his friends, lived in a Harijan village, and during that period he and his friend promised to marry Harijan girls. His friends forgot their promise but Radhamadhab carried it out. When the proposal for marriage with a Harijan girl was first made all the relatives and friends used all sorts of pressure to dissuade Radhamadhab from his resolve. When he first consulted me, I depicted a very dark future before him. But undaunted by all these forebodings he carried out his resolve. There was opposition from the bride's relatives who were afraid of oppression from higher castes and also of some divine punishment. But ultimately they agreed. Radhamadhab has registered a deed of compensation amounting to Rs. 500 in case he forsakes his wife at any time. In case he dies earlier, he has registered another deed to enable his wife to secure a substantial share from his paternal property. We tried our utmost to secure the attendance of as many high class people as possible, and thank God we could get what we wanted. On the day of the marriage about seven hundred Pans, to which class the girl belonged, assembled and their joy could be seen in their faces. Just imagine several hundreds of high

caste people sitting together with an equal number of Harijans in front of a poor Pan house witnessing the marriage ceremony and receiving betel from the father of the bride.

I congratulate Shri Radhamadhab on his courage in breaking through the rock of caste superstition. I hope his example will be copied by other young men. May the union prove happy. I would advise Shri Radhamadhab to arrange for proper education of his wife who, I understand, has not received any scholastic training.

*Harijan*, 22-6-1940, p. 173

## 101. INTER-RELIGIOUS MARRIAGES

(From "Caste and Communal Question")

Marriage outside one's religion stands on a different footing. Even here, so long as each is free to observe his or her religion, I can see no moral objection to such unions. But I do not believe that these unions can bring peace. They may follow peace. I can see nothing but disaster following any attempt to advocate Hindu-Muslim unions so long as the relations between the two remain strained. That such unions may be happy in exceptional circumstances can be no reason for their general advocacy. There is inter-marriage... in Europe, but the Europeans have fought amongst themselves, as we Hindus and Musal- mans have never fought in all history. Our masses have stood aside.

*Young India*, 4-6-1931, p. 129

## 102. INDIRA NEHRU'S ENGAGEMENT

(From "Notes")

I have received several angry and abusive letters and some professing to reason about Indira's engagement with Firoz Gandhi. Not a single correspondent has anything against Firoz Gandhi as a man. His only crime in their estimation is that he happens to be a Parsi. I have been, and I am still, as strong an opponent of either party changing religion for the sake of marriage. Religion is not a garment to be cast off at will. In the present case there is no question of change of religion. Firoz Gandhi has been for years an inmate of the Nehru family. He nursed Kamala Nehru in her sickness. He was like a son to her. During Indira's illness in Europe he was of great help to her. A natural intimacy grew up between them. The friendship has been perfectly honourable. It has ripened into mutual attraction. But neither party would think of marrying without the consent and blessing of Jawaharlal Nehru. This was given only after he was satisfied that the attraction had a solid basis. The public know my connection with the Nehrus. I had also talks with both parties. It would have been cruelty to refuse consent to this engagement. As time advances such unions are bound to multiply with benefit to society. At present we have not even reached the stage of mutual toleration, but as toleration grows into mutual respect for religions such unions will be welcomed. No religion which is narrow and which cannot satisfy the test of reason will survive the coming reconstruction of society in which the values will have changed and character, not possession of wealth, title or birth will be the sole test of merit. The Hinduism of my conception is no narrow creed. It is a grand evolutionary process as ancient as time, and embraces the teachings of Zoroaster, Moses, Christ, Mohammed, Nanak and other prophets that I could name. It is thus defined:

विद्वाभिः सेवितः सद्भिर्नित्यम् द्वेषरागिभिः।

हृदयेनाभ्यनुज्ञातो यो घर्मस्तं निबोधत ॥

[Know that to be (true) religion which the wise and the good and those who are ever free from passion and hate follow and which appeals to the heart.]

If it is not that, it will perish. My correspondents will pardon me for not acknowledging their letters. I invite them to shed their wrath and bless the forthcoming marriage. Their letters betray ignorance, intolerance and prejudice—a species of untouchability, dangerous because not easily to be so classified.

*Harijan*, 8-3-1942, p. 65

## 103. INTER-RELIGIOUS MARRIAGES

(From "Gandhiji's Walking Tour Diary")

I

Q. You advocate inter-caste marriage. Do you also favour marriages between Indians professing different religions? Should they declare themselves as belonging to no denomination, or can they continue their old religious practices and yet inter-marry? If so what form should the marriage ceremony take? Is it to be a purely civil function or a religious function?

A: Though he admitted that he had not always held the view, he had come to the conclusion long ago that an inter-religious marriage was a welcome event whenever it took place. His stipulation was that such connection was not a product of lust. In his opinion it was no marriage. It was illicit inter-course. Marriage in his estimation was a sacred institution. Hence there must be mutual friendship, either party having equal respect for the religion of the other. There was no question in this of conversion. Hence the marriage ceremony would be performed by the priests belonging to either faith. This happy event could take place when the communities shed mutual enmity and had regard for the religions of the world.

*Harijan*, 16-3-1947, p. 61 at p. 63

II

Q. You say that you are in favour of inter-religious marriages but at the same time you say that each party should retain his or her own religion and, therefore, you said, you tolerated even civil marriages. Are there any instances of parties belonging to different religions keeping up their own religions to the end of their lives; and is not the institution of civil marriage a negation of religion and does it not tend towards laxity of religion?

A: Gandhiji said that the questions were appropriate. He had no instances in mind where the parties had clung to their respective faiths up to death because these friends whom he knew had not yet died. He had, however, under his observation men and women professing different religions and each clinging to his or her own faith without abatement. But he would go so far as to say that they need not wait for the discovery of past instances. They should create new ones so that timid ones may shed their timidity.

As to civil marriages he did not believe in them but he welcomed the institution of civil marriage as a much needed reform for the sake of reform.

*Harijan, 16-3-1947, p. 61 at p. 67*

## 104. CHILDREN OF MIXED PARENTAGE

(From "Question Box")

Q.: I quite agree that as society advances marriages between the different communities will increase and should be welcomed. You rightly advocate no change of religion for the parties concerned. But what do you advocate for the children? In which religion should they be brought up, the father's or the mother's?

A.: Presumption in such marriages is that the parents respect each other's religion. If they are religiously minded, children will unconsciously imbibe what they think is best for them and choose their own faith without let or hindrance from the parents. If the latter are indifferent, the children will also be probably indifferent and label themselves anyhow. This is what I have observed in such marriages. The difficulty crops up when there is a serious difference arising between the parents as to the upbringing of the children.

*Harijan, 29-3-1942, p. 94*

### 3. FAMILY PLANNING

#### 105. A MORAL STRUGGLE

I am a husband aged 30. My wife is about the same age. We have five children, of which two are fortunately dead. I know the responsibility for the rest of our children. But I find it difficult, if not impossible, to discharge that responsibility. You have advised self-restraint. Well, I have practised it for the last three years, but that is very much against my partner's wish. She insists on what poor mortals call the joy of life. You from your superior height may call it a sin. But my partner does not see it in that light. Nor is she afraid of bearing more children to me. She has not the sense of responsibility that I flatter myself with the belief I have. My parents side more with my wife than with me and there are daily quarrels. The denial of self-satisfaction to my wife has made her so peevish and so irritable that she flares up on the slightest pretext. My problem now is how to solve the difficulty. The children I have are too many for me. I am too poor to support them. The wife seems utterly irreconcilable. If she does not have the satisfaction she demands, she may even go astray or go mad or commit suicide. I tell you, sometimes I feel that if the law of the land permitted it, I would shoot down all unwanted children as you would stray dogs. For the last three months I have gone without the second meal, without tiffin. I have business obligations which prevent me from fasting for days. I get no compassion from the wife because she considers I am a humbug. I know the literature on birth-control. It is temptingly written. And I have read your book on self-restraint. I find myself between the devil and the deep blue sea.

The foregoing is a faithful paraphrase of a heartrending letter from a young man who has given me his full name and address and whom I have known for some years. Being afraid to give his name, he tells me he wrote twice before anonymously hoping that I would deal with his communications in the pages of *Young India*. I receive so many anonymous letters of this type that I hesitate to deal with them, even as I have

considerable hesitation in dealing with this letter, although I know it to be perfectly genuine and know it to be a letter from a striving soul. The subject matter is so delicate. But I see that I may not shirk an obvious duty claiming as I do claim a fair amount of experience of such cases and more especially because my method has given relief in several similar cases.

The condition in India, so far as English educated Indians are concerned, is doubly difficult. The gulf between husband and wife from the point of view of social attainments is almost too wide to be bridgeable. Some young men seem to think that they have solved it satisfactorily by simply throwing their wives over-board, although they know that in their case there is no divorce possible and therefore no re-marriage on the part of their wives possible. Yet others—and this is the far more numerous class—use their wives merely as vehicles of enjoyment without sharing their intellectual life with them. A very small number—but daily growing—has a quickened conscience and are faced with the moral difficulty such as my correspondent is faced with.

In my opinion, sexual union to be legitimate is permissible only when both the parties desire it. I do not recognise the right of either partner to compel satisfaction. And if my position is correct in the case in point, there is no moral obligation on the part of the husband to yield to the wife's importunities. But this refusal at once throws a much greater and more exalted responsibility on the husband's shoulders. He will not look down upon his wife from his insolent height but will humbly recognize that what to him is not a necessity is to her a fundamental necessity. He will, therefore, treat her with the utmost gentleness and love and will have confidence in his own purity to transmute his partner's passion into energy of the highest type. He will therefore have to become her real friend, guide and physician. He will have to give her his fullest confidence and with inexhaustible patience explain to her the moral basis of his action, the true nature of the relationship that should subsist between husband and wife and the true meaning of marriage. He will find in the process that many things that were not clear to him before will be clear and he will draw his partner closer to him if his own restraint is truthful.

In the case in point I cannot help saying that the desire not to have more children is not enough reason for refusing satisfaction. It appears almost cowardly to reject one's wife's advances merely for fear of having to support children. A check upon an unlimited increase in the family is a good ground for both the parties jointly and individually putting a restraint upon sexual desires, but it is not sufficient warrant for one to refuse the privileges of a common bed to the other.

And why this impatience of children? Surely there is enough scope for honest, hard-working and intelligent men to earn enough for a reasonable number of children. I admit that for one like my correspondent who is honestly trying to devote his whole time to the service of the country it is difficult to support a large and growing family and at the same time to serve a country, millions of whose children are semi-starved. I have often expressed the opinion in these pages that it is wrong to bring forth progeny in India so long as she is in bondage. But that is a very good reason for young men and young women to abstain from marriage, not a conclusive reason for one partner for refusing sexual co-operation to the other. That co-operation can be lawfully refused, it is a duty to refuse, when the call for *brahmacharya* on the highest ground of pure religion is imperative. And when such a call has clearly come, it will have its healthy reaction upon the partner. Assuming, however, that it does not produce such reaction in time, it will still be a duty to adhere to restraint even at the risk of losing the life or the sanity of one's partner. The cause of *brahmacharya* demands sacrifices no less heroic than say the cause of Truth or of one's country. In view of what I have said above, it is hardly necessary to state that artificial control of birth is an immoral practice having no place in the conception of life that underlies my argument.

*Young India*, 26-4-1928, p. 131

## 106. THE QUAGMIRE OF CONTRACEPTIVES

The correspondent's fear about the securing of reasonable comfort for the existing population leads naturally to the fear of over-population. The resort to birth-control becomes then the logical step. Birth-control to me is a dismal abyss. It amounts to playing with unknown forces. Assuming that birth-control by artificial aids is justifiable under certain conditions, it seems to be utterly impracticable of application among the millions. It seems to me to be easier to induce them to practise self-control than control by contraceptives. This little globe of ours is not a toy of yesterday. It has not suffered from the weight of over-population through its age of countless millions. How can it be that the truth has suddenly dawned upon some people that it is in danger of perishing of shortage of food unless birth-rate is checked through the use of contraceptives? My fear is that my correspondent has led himself from one fallacy to another ending in the quagmire of contraceptives on a scale hitherto unknown.

*Harijan*, 14-9-1935, p. 244

## 107. MRS. SANGER AND BIRTH-CONTROL

(By M.D.)

Since the time Mrs. Margaret Sanger, the famous leader of the Birth-control movement, paid a visit to Wardha, I have seen several different aspects of her. First as she Appeared to me there during those remarkable interviews with Gandhiji—interviews in which she appealed to Gandhiji as a great moral teacher "to advise something practical, something that can be applied to solve the problem of too frequent child-bearing," "to give some message for those who are not yet sure but who are anxious to limit their families." She seemed, during those conversations into which Gandhiji poured his whole being, desperately anxious to find out some point of contact with Gandhiji, to find out the utmost extent to which he could go with her. And he did indicate the extent. Her second aspect is revealed in her article in the *Illustrated Weekly of India* in which she ridicules what she calls Gandhiji's "amazing boast" of having "known the experiences and the aspirations of thousands of women in India". Mrs. Sanger approached Gandhiji in Wardha for the solution of a tough problem, because as she herself said, "there were thousands, millions, who regard your word as that of a saint", and yet she ridicules his claim to know these women's "aspirations and experiences", thousands of whom marched to jail at his word. All she is concerned about in this article is to prove that Gandhiji does not know the women of India. She utters not a word about the points of agreement she sought at the interview, and the extent to which Gandhiji said he was prepared to go with her.

### THE INTERVIEW

To come to the interview. As I have already said, Gandhiji poured his whole being into his conversation. He revealed himself inside out, giving Mrs. Sanger an intimate glimpse of his own private life. He also declared to her his own limitations, especially the stupendous limitation of his own philosophy of life—a philosophy that seeks self-realization through self-control, and said that from *him* there could be one solution

and one alone. "I could not recommend the remedy of birth-control to a woman who wanted my approval. I should simply say to her: My remedy is of no use to you. You must go to others for advice." Mrs. Sanger cited some hard cases. "I agree," said Gandhiji, "there are hard cases. Else birth-control enthusiasts would have no case. But I would say, do devise remedies by all means, but the remedies should be other than the ones you advise. If you and I as moral reformers put our foot down on this remedy and said, 'you must fall back on other remedies' those would surely be found." Both seemed to be agreed that woman should be emancipated, that woman should be the arbiter of her destiny. But Mrs. Sanger would have Gandhiji work for woman's emancipation through her pet device, just as believers in violence want Gandhiji to win India's freedom through violence, since they seem to be sure that non-violence can never succeed.

She forgets this fundamental difference in her impatience to prove that Gandhiji does not know the women of India. And she claims to prove this on the ground that he makes an impossible appeal to the women of India— the appeal to resist their husbands. Well, this is what he said: "My wife, I made the orbit of all women. In her I studied all women. I came in contact with many European women in South Africa, and I knew practically every Indian woman there. I worked with them. I tried to show them they were not slaves either of their husbands or parents, not only in the political field but in the domestic as well. But the trouble was that some could not resist their husbands. The remedy is in the hands of women themselves. The struggle is difficult for them, and I do not blame them. I blame the men. Men have legislated against them. Man has regarded woman as his tool, she has learned to be his tool and in the end found it easy and pleasurable to be such, because when one drags another in his fall the descent is easy....I have felt that during the years still left to me if I can drive home to women's minds the truth that they are free, we will have no birth-control problem in India. If they will only learn to say <sup>4</sup> no'to their husbands when they approach them carnally. I do not suppose all husbands are brutes and if women only know how to resist them, all will be well. I have been able to teach women who have come in contact with me how to resist their husbands. The real problem is that

many do not want to resist them.... No resistance bordering upon bitterness will be necessary in 99 cases out of 100 cases. If a wife says to her husband, ' No, I do not want it', he will make no trouble. But she hasn't been taught. Her parents in most cases won't teach it to her. There are some cases, I know, in which parents have appealed to their daughters' husbands not to force motherhood on their daughters. And I have come across amenable husbands too. I want woman to learn the primary right of resistance. She thinks now that she has not got it."

What is there in this to show that Gandhiji did not know the women of India or did not know women, I do not understand. Jesus who set the seal of his own blood upon his precept "love thine enemy", and "resist not evil", would be held to have uttered the precept in ignorance of mankind, simply because we are far away from realization of that principle!

Mrs. Sanger raises the phantasmagoria of "irritations, disputes, and thwarted longings that Mr. Gandhi's advice would bring into the home", of the absence of "loving glances" and of "tender good night kisses" and of "words of endearment", forgetting all the while that birth-control and all its tender or vulgar accompaniments have contributed in America to countless irritations and disputes, divorces and worse. But the America we know through books of a realist reformer like Upton Sinclair would seem to be different from the America that Mrs. Sanger claims to know. She cited cases of great nervous and mental breakdowns as a result of the practice of self-control. Gandhiji spoke from a knowledge of the numerous letters he receives every mail, when he said to her that "the evidence is all based on examination of imbeciles. The conclusions are not drawn from the practice of healthy-minded people. The people they take for examples have not lived a life of even tolerable continence. These neurologists assume that people are expected to exercise self-restraint while they continue to lead the same ill-regulated life. The consequence is that they do not exercise self-restraint but become lunatics. I carry on correspondence with many of these people and they describe their own ailments to me. I simply say that if I were to present them with this method of birth-control they would lead far worse lives."

He told her that when she went to Calcutta she would be told by those who knew what havoc contraceptives had worked among unmarried young men and women. But evidently for the purpose of the conversation, at any rate, Mrs. Sanger confined herself to propagation of knowledge of birth-control among married couples only.

Mrs. Sanger mocks at what she calls Mr. Gandhi's "appalling fear of licentiousness and over-indulgence" following upon a life of unrestrained birth-control, and she pointedly asks: "Has he ever thought that the same frequency can occur during the nine months of a woman's pregnancy?" I must say that in advancing this argument Mrs. Sanger is less than fair to her own sex. None but the most abnormally lewd or suppressed would submit to even legitimate sexual advances during pregnancy.

What was to be done with couples who wanted to resist the impulse of sex and yet could not do so?

#### **SEX-LOVE AND SEX-LUST**

Mrs. Sanger was thus led on to her apotheosis of "sex-love", which she said "is a relationship which makes for oneness, for completeness between husband and wife and contributes to a finer understanding and a greater spiritual harmony". An obviously harmless proposition, but full of confusion when in the same breath one identifies love with lust and then tries to separate the one from the other. The distinction that Gandhiji drew between love and lust will be evident from the following excerpts from the conversation:

G.: When both want to satisfy animal passion without having to suffer the consequences of their act it is not love, it is lust. But if love is pure, it will transcend animal passion and will regulate itself. We have not had enough education of the passions. When a husband says, "Let us not have children, but let us have relations", what is that but animal passion? If they do not want to have more children they should simply refuse to unite. Love becomes lust the moment you make it a means for the satisfaction of animal needs. It is just the same with food. If food is taken only for pleasure it is lust. You do not take chocolates for the sake of satisfying your hunger. You take them for pleasure and then ask the doctor for an antidote. Perhaps you tell

the doctor that whisky befogs your brain and he gives you an antidote. Would it not be better not to take chocolates or whisky?

Mrs. S.: No. I do not accept the analogy.

G.: Of course you will not accept the analogy because you think this sex expression without desire for children is a need of the soul, a contention I do not endorse.

Mrs. S.: Yes, sex expression is a spiritual need and I claim that the quality of this expression is more important than the result, for the quality of the relationship is there regardless of results. We all know that the great majority of children are born as an accident, without the parents having any desire for conception. Seldom are two people drawn together in the sex act by their desire to have children. . . . Do you think it possible for two people who are in love, who are happy together, to regulate their sex act only once in two years, so that relationship would only take place when they wanted a child? Do you think it possible?

G.: I had the honour of doing that very thing and I am not the only one.

Mrs. Sanger thought it was illogical to contend that sex union for the purpose of having children would be love and union for the satisfaction of the sexual appetite was lust, for the same act was involved in both. Gandhiji immediately capitulated and said he was ready to describe all sexual union as partaking of the nature of lust. He made the whole thing abundantly clear by citing facts from his own life. "I know," he said, "from my own experience that as long as I looked upon my wife carnally, we had no real understanding. Our love did not reach a high plane. There was affection between us always, but we came closer and closer the more we or rather I became restrained. There never was want of restraint on the part of my wife. Very often she would show restraint, but she rarely resisted me although she showed disinclination very often. All the time I wanted carnal pleasure I could not serve her. The moment I bade goodbye to a life of carnal pleasure our whole relationship became spiritual. Lust died and love reigned instead."

But Mrs. Sanger probably regards every free embrace an act of love and a married life without sexual relationship and its blandishments a dull lifeless affair. Gandhiji's own personal witness made no impression upon her. She dismissed it as that of an "idealist" as appears from her veiled sneer at "that small group of idealists who have sublimated their sex energies into creative action into the activities of his own National Congress." I do not think during all his conversation Gandhiji even once referred to the Congress or Congressmen. Mrs. Sanger forgets that all moral advancement has proceeded on the practice of a "small group of idealists", and that even the apparent progress of her own movement depends a lot on the clever way in which she idealizes her nostrum and describes it as the upward path "demanding of us who inhabit this globe all that we possess in intelligence, knowledge, courage, vision and responsibility", the road that "leads to the fulfilment of human destiny on this planet"!

#### A POSSIBLE WAY OUT

Mrs. Sanger is so impatient to prove that Gandhiji is a visionary that she forgets the practical ways and means that Gandhiji suggested to her.

"Must the sexual union take place only three or four times in an entire life-time? She asked.

"Why should people not be taught," replied Gandhiji, "that it is immoral to have more than three or four children and that after they have had that number they should sleep separately? If they are taught this it would harden into custom. And if social reformers cannot impress this idea upon the people, why not a law? If husband and wife have four children, they would have had sufficient animal enjoyment. Their love may then be lifted to a higher plane. Their bodies have met. After they have had the children they wanted, their love transforms itself into a spiritual relationship. If these children die and they want more, then they may meet again. Why must people be slaves of this passion when they are not of others? When you give them education in birth-control, you tell them it is a duty. You say to them that if they do not do this thing they will interrupt their spiritual evolution. You do not even talk of regulation. After giving them education in birth-control, you do not say to them, 'thus far and no

further'. You ask people to drink temperately, as though it was possible to remain temperate. I know these temperate people."

And yet as Mrs. Sanger was so dreadfully in earnest Gandhiji did mention a remedy which could conceivably appeal to him. That method was the avoidance of sexual union during unsafe period, confining it to the "safe" period of about ten days during the month. That had at least an element of self-control which had to be exercised during the unsafe period. Whether this appealed to Mrs. Sanger or not I do not know. But therein spoke Gandhiji the truth-seeker. Mrs. Sanger has not referred to it anywhere in her interviews or her *Illustrated Weekly* article. Perhaps if birth-controllers were to be satisfied with this single method, the birth-control clinics and propagandists would find their trade gone.

*Harijan*, 25-1-1936, p. 396

## 108. A VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS

Just lately I read a review of your conference with Mrs. Sanger, the birth-control advocate. I was so deeply moved that I am writing to you to express my appreciation for your stand. God bless you for your courage.

For the past thirty years I have been teaching boys. I have always advocated the control of the body, and urged boys to live unselfishly.

When Mrs. Sanger was in my neighbourhood, the high school boys and girls took advantage of the information to carry on their illicit intercourse with no fear of results. Should Mrs. Sanger have her way, the time would come when the whole world would seek the sensual and love would die. I realize it will take centuries to educate the public to higher ideals, but there is no time like the present to begin.

Dr. Alexis Garrel agrees with you, in that sex control is not harmful except to those who feed their passions and are already unbalanced. Mrs. Sanger is wrong in saying that most doctors believe abstinence is harmful. I find many leading doctors and scientists belonging to the American Social Hygiene Association hold that control is beneficial.

You are doing a noble work. I have followed with interest all the vicissitudes of your long life struggle. You are one of the few who have this higher spiritual viewpoint on the sex question. I want you to know I reach out to you across the great waters in fellowship.

Let us keep up the good work so that youth may know the truth, for the hope of the future is in their hands.

I add a quotation from one of my talks to boys:

Create—always create. To create is noble, uplifting, inspiring. But the moment you seek to gratify the senses by merely enjoying the creative powers, you begin to cheat creation and to destroy all those higher spiritual forces within you. It can end only in disappointment.

Creation, physical, mental, and spiritual is joy and life. If you are merely seeking the sensations of the flesh with no thought of creating, or even trying to avoid the aim of creation, you are perverting nature and killing your spiritual powers.

The result will be passion, uncontrolled,—exhaustion, disappointment and defeat. It can never bring out those finer qualities on which we can build a new race of spiritual men and women.

I know this is like a prophet crying in the wilderness, but I am convinced of the truth of it, and I can but point the way.

This is one of the letters which I occasionally get from America in condemnation of the use of contraceptives. Current literature that India imports weekly from the far West would have us believe that in America none but idiots and imbeciles oppose the use of this modern method of deliverance from the bondage of the superstition which imprisons the body and crushes it by denying it its supreme enjoyment. That literature produces as much momentary intoxication as the act which it teaches and incites us to perform without incurring the risk of its ordinary result. I do not put before the readers of *Harijan* merely letters of individual condemnation received from the West. They have their use for me as a seeker but very little for the general reader. This letter, however, from a teacher of boys with thirty years' experience behind him has a definite value. It should serve as a guide for Indian teachers and the public men and women who are carried away by the overwhelming tide. The use of contraceptives is infinitely more tempting than the whisky bottle. But it is no more lawful than the sparkling liquid for its fatal temptation. Nor can opposition to the use of either be given up in despair because their use seems to be growing. If the opponents have faith in their mission it has to be pursued. A voice in the wilderness has a potency which voices uttered in the midst of "the madding crowd" lack. For the voice in the wilderness has meditation, deliberation and unquenchable faith behind it, whilst the babel of voices has generally nothing but the backing of the experience of personal enjoyment or the false and sentimental pity for the unwanted children and their suffering mothers. Argument of personal experience has as much weight as an act of a drunkard. The argument of pity is a trap into which it is dangerous to fall. Sufferings of unwanted children and of equally unwanted motherhood are punishments or warnings devised by beneficent nature. Disregard of the law of discipline and restraint is suicide. Ours is a state of probation. If we refuse to bear

the yoke of discipline we court failure like cowards, we avoid battle and give up the only joy of living.

*Harijan, 27-3-1937, p. 52*

## 109. TEST-TUBE BABIES

Q.: You say that motherhood is sublime but sex is bad. From the spiritual and eugenic point of view don't you agree that the test-tube technique of begetting babies is ideal since it altogether eliminates lust and carnality from procreation?

A.: I would reconcile myself to your method, if carnality itself can be eradicated thereby. So long as I hold to the view that carnality prevents man or woman from rising to the fullest height possible, so long must I rebel against these artificial methods of procreation. Your methods, as far as I can see, can only result in multiplying idiots or monsters, not human beings, thrown into the sea of passions which it should be their pride to subjugate. But I own I belong to an age that is perhaps dying. The new age to come, when men and women will walk, if they at all do, only for pleasure but go to their work on wheels or fly to it, and when the institution of marriage and all it implies will be abolished, does not enthuse me.

*Harijan, 22-6-1940, p. 176*

## 4. REMARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

### 110. WASTE OF HUMAN WEALTH

(Originally appeared in Gujarati in *Indian Opinion* dated 8-6-1907 from which it was translated into English.)

Everyone can see that in India a great deal of wealth is being wasted. This wealth includes many things. None takes care of the minerals. Our cotton is exported to foreign countries, and cloth is imported from there. Even a pin has to be imported from abroad. What happens to our material wealth seems to be happening to our human wealth also. Many *bavas* and *fakirs* maintain themselves by begging, but serve neither themselves nor the country. For going about begging in this manner, they will not be regarded as having attained true renunciation. In the same way, thousands of widows, mostly among Hindus, spend their whole life to no purpose. And to that extent the wealth of India is being wasted. To prevent this waste, the benevolent Prof. Karve of Poona has dedicated his life to the country. He has been working in the Fergusson College only on a living wage. Not only that, but he has also been running for several years an institution in Poona for the education of widows. There, women are given training in midwifery and nursing. The work of the institution has been expanding. Because he is rendering honorary service himself, he is able to get similar assistance from others too. Mrs. Kashibai Deodhar, Mrs. Namjoshi, Mrs. Athavale and Mrs. Deshpande—all these ladies who have had very good English education have been giving honorary service to the institution. Moreover, he goes about from place to place collecting funds. There are so many things which can be done through sheer self-help and without Government aid. From every point of view, education is the most important thing for us.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. VII, p. 29*

## 111. ON RE-MARRIAGE

(A letter to Shri Mohandas Nagji in Gujarati of which an English translation is given below.)

(Nadiad,)

June 23, 1918

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

*Blessings from*

MOHANDAS GANDHI

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. XIV, p. 449*

## 112. ENFORCED WIDOWHOOD

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

Not many will agree with Sir Ganga Ram about the order in which, according to him, reform should proceed. He gives the order thus: 1st Social Reformation 2nd Economic Reformation 3rd Swaraj or Political Emancipation. Not so thought Sir Ganga Ram's predecessors every whit as keen social reformers as himself. Ranade, Gokhale, Chandavarkar considered Swaraj to be as important as social reform. Lokamanya Tilak felt no less for social reform. But he and his predecessors recognized and realized the necessity of all branches of reform proceeding side by side. Indeed Lokamanya and Gokhale considered political reform to be of greater urgency than the others. They held that our political serfdom incapacitated us for any other work.

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

But one need not quarrel with Sir Ganga Ram about his arrangement of the order of the needed reform. One cannot but acknowledge his zeal for social reform even though one may not agree with his political or economic panaceas. The figures he has given us are truly appalling. "Who will not weep" he asks "over the figures which show the misery caused by child-marriages and enforced widowhood." Here are the figures of Hindu widows according to the census of 1921:

Widows	of	age	upto	5	– 11,892
”	”	”	from	5 to 10	– 85,037

” ” ” from 10 to 15 –2,32,147

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3,29,076

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

And does not this Hindu widowhood stink in one's nostrils when one thinks of old and diseased men over 50 taking or rather purchasing girl-wives sometimes one on the top of another? So long as we have thousands of widows in our midst we are sitting on a mine which may explode at any moment. If we would be pure, if we would save Hinduism, we must rid ourselves of this poison of enforced widowhood. The reform must begin by those who have girl-widows taking courage in both their hands and seeing that the child-widows in their charge are duly and well married—not re-married. They were never really married.

*Young India*, 5-8-1926, pp. 276 and 281

### 113. SUPPRESSED HUMANITY

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

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

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

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

I refrain from reminding you of the love (*Prem*), the saintly *grahastha* life, the *patibraia dharma* and such other things ' which should be taken into consideration in recommending widow re-marriage.

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Young India*, 19-8-1926, p. 292

## 114. WIDOW RE-MARRIAGE

A correspondent pertinently asks whether Sir Ganga Ram's statistics regarding Hindu widows refer to all Hindu widows or only to those whom custom prohibits from marrying. On referring the inquiry to Sir Ganga Ram, I learn that his "statistics are *not* confined to classes in which widow-remarriage is prohibited, they contain Hindu widows of all classes". Sir Ganga Ram adds: "Moreover it was no good to give figures of such classes only. We all know that Musalmans and Christians can remarry, yet there are widows amongst them who will remarry sooner or later. It is the *ban* on Hindu widows which I wish to remove. I don't want to force every widow to remarry."

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

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

*Young India*, 2-9-1926, p. 307 193

## 115. ON WIDOWHOOD

(Originally appeared in "Notes" under the title "To B, Agra".)

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

*Young India*, 23-9-1926, p. 336

## 116. A FURTHER CLARIFICATION

(Originally appeared under the title "Correspondence— A Catechism".)

To

The Editor *Young India*

Sir,

I have been following with keen interest your articles on social reforms amongst the Hindus. I have however not been able to follow the exact line of argument adopted by you on some points, and the conclusions arrived at in some cases have, in my opinion, some doubtful points which require further elucidation. I shall be glad if you will find space in *Young India* to give your views on these points which I briefly mention below.

## 1. CONCERNING WIDOWS

You have constantly been pleading widow-remarriage but only for girls up to a limited age, probably 15. In *Young India* dated August 19th, you wrote "I have never advocated widow-remarriage on a wholesale scale. The statistics by Sir Ganga Ram summarized in these pages deal with widows up to 15 years only." I take these lines to mean that you advocate remarriage of widows up to 15 years of age? But what do you advocate about widows of slightly bigger age than 15, say 16, 17, 18, 20 and 22 years of age? If your limit be accepted as any test of fitness for remarriage, obviously the cases quoted shall have to be termed "undeserving", no matter even if the widow feels unhappy and miserable at her lot and is an object of persecution (as I painfully realise she is in an average Hindu family). Please do let us know clearly, if knowing all this you really advocate an age limit. It were another thing if you were to advocate the limited reform with a view to prevailing upon Hindus, majority of whom are dead against widow-remarriage. But my belief is that you do not limit a good thing for fear of getting unpopular or the reform getting unpopular and thus not having a fair chance of success.

Whilst I think all reformers in this direction may have had in their minds mostly the innocent child-widows, when advocating widow-remarriage, they did not (in my opinion wisely) fix an age limit for such remarriages, as that would have created a *really* awkward barrier in a good many deserving cases as well. Please do make clear what you have in your mind about widows.

Whilst replying to this, I hope you would not forget such a case as that of a girl marrying at an advanced age, say, 20 or 22 years and becoming a widow the next day or three months after marriage and the fact that such cases do occur. Would such girls lose the right of remarrying simply because they are above the age limit and can understand the sanctity of marital relations?

At the same time if an age-limit for widow-remarriage is really felt to be necessary in the welfare of society, should it not be equally necessary to fix an age-limit for remarriage of widowers? Simply because man happens to be stronger than the female sex, let him not always frame laws that may not be just but suit his convenience. Besides the practice of old men's marriages to young girls in their teens is as much a cause of increasing number of widows in society and as horrible a practice as that of child-marriage. Why should you not advocate men not being allowed to remarry beyond a certain age say 30? Of course such limits

should not be necessary in case no limit, is fixed for widow-remarriage, for under such conditions an old widower can marry an old widow without causing much loss to society.

\* \* \*

Yours etc.,

"Assistant Executive Engineer"

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

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

*Young India*, 14-10-1926, p. 356

## 117. WIDOWS AND WIDOWERS

(From "Notes")

A correspondent writes:

I have carefully read the correspondence "A catechism" and your replies published in the *Young India*, dated 14th October, '26. While answering the first question of the correspondent on page 357 in para first of the concluding portion, you say "I should any day subscribe to a reform in the Hindu Law making sinful the remarriage of a widow or a widower who voluntarily marries after maturity."

In my opinion a reform of this kind in the Hindu Law will be disastrous and to a large extent affect the moral standard of the society as a whole. For instance if a man or a woman married after maturity and unfortunately happens to lose either his wife or her husband after some days of married life, do you mean to say that the man or the woman should not be allowed to remarry even though a great desire of enjoying married life is left unfulfilled, for the only reason that the man or the woman concerned married after maturity? If a reform of this kind is made in the Hindu Law I am afraid the man or the woman will find out some immoral way of gratifying his or her unsatisfied desire and there will be a wholesale moral corruption in the society. I therefore think that this question should entirely be left to the discretion of the man or the woman concerned.

My reply to the catechist was a challenge to Man who is the law-giver. He will not allow his liberty to be restricted. My reply, therefore, is an attempt to show that what is considered desirable for man should be equally so for woman and that therefore a widow would have the same discretion as a widower about remarriage. Moreover, the Hindu Law is not inelastic like the laws made under the British constitution. It will be noticed that I have deliberately used the word "sinful" instead of "criminal". A crime carries with it punishment imposed by a man-worked state. A sin is punishable only by God or one's conscience. And I do think that if Hindu society would rise to the level I have aimed at in my answer it will be a great gain for it and humanity.

*Young India*, 18-11-1926, p. 400 at p. 402

## 118. AGE-LONG PREJUDICE

(Originally appeared in "Notes" under the title "Helpless Widows".)

A bereaved friend sends a pathetic letter describing the plight of a 17 years old girl, who has lost in Quetta her husband, two months old child, father-in-law and her husband's younger brother, that is to say everybody in her father-in-law's house. My correspondent adds that she escaped unhurt and returned with only her clothes on. She is his uncle's daughter and he does not know how to console her or what to do with her. She herself is not undamaged. Her leg has been injured, though fortunately the bone remains intact. The correspondent concludes by saying:

I have left her with her mother in Lahore. I gently mentioned to her and other relatives whether the girl might not be remarried. Some listened to me sympathetically and some resented the proposal. I have no doubt that many a girl must have suffered the same fate as this cousin of mine. Will you say a word of encouragement to these unfortunate widows?

I do not know what my pen or voice can do in matters in which age-long prejudices are concerned. I have repeatedly said that every widow has as much right to remarry as every widower. Voluntary widowhood is a priceless boon in Hinduism; enforced widowhood is a curse. And I very much feel that many young widows, if they were absolutely free, not so much from the fear of physical restraint as from the opprobrium of Hindu public opinion, would remarry without the slightest hesitation. All the young widows, therefore, who are in the unfortunate position of this bereaved sister from Quetta should have every inducement given to them to remarry, and should be sure that no blame would be attached to them if they chose to remarry, and every effort should be made to select for them suitable matches. This is not work that can be done by any institution. This work has got to be done by individual reformers whose relatives have become widows, and they have to carry on a vigorous, dignified and restrained propaganda in their own circles, and whenever they succeed they should give widest publicity to the event. Thus, and only thus, there is likely to be tangible relief provided for the girls who might have become widows during the

earthquake. It is possible that the public sympathy can be easily mobilized whilst the memory of the tragedy is fresh in mind, and if once the reform takes place on a large scale, the girls who may have become widows in the natural course will find it easy to get married if they are willing to do so.

*Harijan, 22-6-1935, p. 147*

## 119. REMARRIAGE FOR MALE OFFSPRING

(Originally appeared under the title "Invidious and Unfair".)

A correspondent writes:

There are at present in Cutch in our midst several other wise respectable gentlemen, upright, munificent, deeply religious and high-minded but without any scruple about remarrying merely for the sake of begetting male offspring. I would entreat you to express your opinion as to whether you approve of this practice among the Hindus of deploring the birth of a daughter. Do you too hold with the orthodox that one cannot go to Heaven without a son?

A man noted for his charities has three wives. But he has no male offspring. He has now married for the fourth time. A few months ago he performed a *yajna* when five hundred Brahmins were fed daily. Over a lakh of rupees were spent over this ceremony. I can multiply such instances.

Unfortunately this hankering for male offspring is almost universally prevalent in Hindu society. It is not necessary to trace its origin. It is enough that in the present age of sex-equality, this sort of invidious discrimination against the female sex is an anachronism. I fail to see any reason for jubilation over the birth of a son and for mourning over that of a daughter. Both are God's gifts. They have an equal right to live, and are equally necessary to keep the world going. But such age-old and deep-rooted practices cannot be eradicated all of a sudden. They can be dealt with only by an awakening of the social conscience, and a proper recognition of the true status and dignity of woman. Today both husband and wife are found to be equally agreeable to the former remarrying when they cannot beget a male offspring. Reformers like my correspondent have to cultivate patience and not be angry over such unfortunate occurrences nor lose heart. They have to have faith in the cause and work away in the hope that society will one day realize the evil of making unmeaning and invidious distinction between male and female offspring.

(Somewhat adapted from *Harijanbandhu* by P.)

*Harijan*, 28-5-1938, p. 132

## 120. THE HINDU WIFE AND DIVORCE

(Originally appeared under the title "The Hindu Wife".)

The following is a summary of a long letter of a brother describing the miseries of his married sister:

Sometime ago my sister was married to a man whose character was hidden from us. This man has been discovered to be a rake, and no amount of dissipation and debauchery can satiate him. He has no sense of honour. My unfortunate sister found soon after her marriage that her 'lord' was sinking down more and more deeply day by day. She remonstrated. The man could not brook this, and in order to "teach her a lesson" indulged in his excesses in front of her. He would also whip her, make her stand, starve her etc. She was tied to a post to compel her to witness his debaucheries. My sister is heart-broken. Her lamentations make us feel wretched. We are helpless. What would you advise her and us to do? This is one of the most shameful aspects of Hinduism, where woman is left entirely at the mercy of man and has no rights and privileges. If a man chooses to be cruel and heartless, there is no remedy left to the unfortunate woman. The man may go on making random alliances, and not a little finger can be raised against him; but a woman once married is at the utter mercy of her lord. Thousands of such women are groaning and weeping. As long as Hinduism is not purged of these and such like evils, can there be any hope of progress?

The writer is an educated man. His is a much more graphic description than the summary is of his sister's distress. The correspondent has sent me his full name and address. His condemnation of Hinduism, though pardonable under intense irritation, is based on a hysterical generalisation from an isolated instance. For millions of Hindu wives live in perfect peace and are queens in their own homes. They exercise an authority over their husbands which any woman would envy. It is an authority which love gives. The case of cruelty brought to light by the correspondent is an illustration not of the evil in Hinduism, but of the evil in human nature which has been known to express itself under all climes and among people professing different faiths of the world. The facility for divorce has proved no protection against a brutal husband for a

pliant wife incapable of asserting and at times even unwilling to assert herself. It is therefore in the interest of reform for reformers to avoid hysterics and exaggerations.

Nevertheless the occurrence to which this article draws attention is not an altogether uncommon occurrence in Hindu society. Hindu culture has erred on the side of excessive subordination of the wife to the husband, and has insisted on the complete merging of the wife in the husband. This has resulted in the husband sometimes usurping and exercising authority that reduces him to the level of the brute. The remedy for such excesses therefore lies not through the law but through the true education of women as distinguished from unmarried girls, and through cultivating public opinion against unmanly conduct on the part of husbands. In the case in point the remedy is incredibly simple. Instead of the brother and other relatives feeling helpless and weeping with the distressed girl, they should clothe her with protection, educate her to believe that it is no part of her duty to placate a sinful husband or to seek his company. It is quite evident that the husband himself does not care for the wife. She may therefore without breaking the legal tie live apart from her husband's roof and feel as if she had never been married. Of course there are two legal remedies open even to a Hindu wife for whom a divorce is unobtainable, and that is to have the husband punished for common assault and to insist upon his supporting the wife. Experience tells me that this remedy is in most cases if not in all worse than useless, and it never brings any comfort to a virtuous woman and makes the question of husband's reform more difficult if not impossible which after all should be the aim of society, more so of every wife. In the present instance the girl's parents are well able to support her but where it is not possible, the number of institutions that would give shelter to such ill-treated women is growing in the country. There still remains the question of the satisfaction of the sexual appetite on the part of young women thus leaving the inhospitable roofs of their husbands or being actually deserted by them when the relief given by divorce is unobtainable. But this is really not a serious grievance in point of numbers, for in a society in which custom has discountenanced divorce for ages, a woman whose marriage proves unhappy does not want to be remarried. When public opinion in any social group requires that particular

form of relief, I have no doubt that it will be forthcoming. So far as I understand the correspondent's letter, the grievance is not that the wife cannot satisfy her sexual appetite. The grievance is the gross and defiant immorality on the part of the husband. For this, as I have said, the remedy lies in a revision of the mental attitude. The feeling of helplessness is imaginary as most of our ills are. A fresh outlook, a little original thinking is enough to dispel the grief brought about by defective imagination. Nor should friends and relatives in such cases be satisfied with the mere negative result of isolating the victim from the zone of tyranny. She should be induced to qualify herself for public service. This kind of training would be more than enough compensation for the doubtful privilege of a husband.

*Young India*, 3-10-1929, p. 324

## 121. LOOSE THINKING

A correspondent writes:

In the course of an article you have said at one place: "Where marriage is a sacrament, the union is not the union of bodies but the union of souls indissoluble even by the death of either party. When there is a true union of souls, the remarriage of a widow or widower is unthinkable, improper and wrong."

At another place in the course of the same article you say: "I consider remarriage of virgin widows not only desirable but the bounden duty of all parents who happen to have such widowed daughters."

How do you reconcile the two views?

I find no difficulty in reconciling the two views. In the giving away of a little girl by ignorant or heartless parents without considering the welfare of the child and without her knowledge and consent there is no marriage at all. Certainly it is not a sacrament and therefore remarriage of such a girl becomes a duty. As a matter of fact, the word remarriage is a misnomer in such cases. The virgin was never married at all in the true sense and therefore on the death of her supposed husband it would be the most natural thing, it will be a duty, for the parents to seek for her a suitable companion in life.

*Young India*, 26-9-1929, p. 317

## 5. CHILD-WIVES AND WIDOWS

### 122. AGE OF CONSENT

Mrs. Dorothy Jinarajadasa has issued a circular letter upon a Bill before the Legislative Assembly whose object is to raise the Age of Consent at least to 14. She has favoured me with a copy of the circular letter which I reproduce below:

I am writing to ask you if you can use your influence to obtain support for the Children's Protection Act that is coming up in the Legislative Assembly during the next session. I think very strongly that, if India is to be a great nation honoured and respected among the nations of the world, the blot of child motherhood must be removed from her.

Last time the Bill came up, it received a very great deal of support in the country and in the Assembly, and I think that during the next session, there will not be much difficulty in passing it, if only we get a certain amount of expression of public opinion from the people. To my certain knowledge, there are quite a large number of meetings being held all over the country, especially by women, supporting this Bill, and I am sure that it is in line with the wishes of the majority of women that the age for consummation of marriage for little girls should be raised to at least 14.

I am sure that it would be a considerable help to the passage of the Bill, if you could express your opinion strongly in support of it, and also urge on men and women the importance of both supporting the Bill and living up to its principles in daily practice.

I must confess that I am ignorant of the Bill, but I am strongly in favour of raising the Age of Consent not merely to 14, but even to 16. Whilst, therefore, I can say nothing about the text of the Bill, I should heartily endorse any movement whose object is to save innocent girls of tender age from man's lust. A so-called marriage rite ought no longer to confer legality upon an immoral and inhuman act which consummation even at the age of 14, in my humble opinion, undoubtedly is. Sanskrit texts of doubtful authority cannot be involved to sanctify a practice which is in itself immoral. I have witnessed the ruin of the health of many a child-mother, and when to the horrors of an early marriage is added enforced early widowhood, human tragedy becomes

complete. Any sensible legislation in the direction of raising the Age of Consent will certainly have my approval. But I am painfully conscious of the fact that even the existing legislation has proved abortive for want of public opinion to support it. The task before the reformer in this, as in many other directions, is most difficult. Constant and continuous agitation is necessary if any real impression is to be made on the Hindu public. I wish every success to those who are engaged in the noble task of rescuing Indian girls from premature old age and early death, and Hinduism from being responsible for bringing into being rickety weaklings.

*Young India*, 27-8-1925, p. 295

## 123. CURSE OF CHILD-MARRIAGE

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Young India*, 26-8-1926, p. 301

## 124. DEFENDING CHILD-MARRIAGE

A reader of *Young India* writes:

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

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

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

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

virtue of simple girls. Again if the choice is to be made by parents, the girls must be married young. When they are grown up, they may fall in love and may not like to marry the bridegroom selected by the parents. When a girl is married young, she becomes one with her husband and his family. The union is more natural and more perfect. It is sometimes difficult for grown up girls with fixed ideas and habits to adapt themselves in a new home.

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

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

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

The Madras case reported by you seems to be very peculiar. The jury held that the girl committed suicide. But the girl said that her husband set fire to her clothes. In these conflicting circumstances, it is very difficult to hold that the facts which you consider to be indisputable are really so. There have been millions of cases of girl-wives below 13. Not one

case of suicide due to cruel advances of the husband has been heard before. Probably there were peculiar features in the Madras case and early marriage was not the principal cause of the death.

Well does the Poet say, "It costs very little to fashion a suitable philosophy in order to mitigate the rudeness of facts that secretly hurt one's conscience." This "reader of *Young India*" has gone a step further. He has not only fashioned a suitable philosophy but ignored facts and erected his argument on unsupported statements.

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

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

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

Whether the choice is to be made by girls or their parents is a separate question and is regulated by custom.

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

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

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

*Young India*, 9-9-1926, p. 318

## 125. SORROWS OF GIRL-WIVES

"A Hindu lady from Bengal" writes:

I don't know how to thank you for your speaking on behalf of the poor girl-wives of our Hindu society. The Madras case is not a singular one. One year ago a similar incident took place in Calcutta. The girl was only 10 years old. After living two nights with her husband, she refused to go to him at all. One day, however, she was sent by her mother to give some *pan* to the man. Perhaps the poor girl thought that she could return as soon as she had handed it over to the husband. But the man shut the door and she could not get out of the room. After a while a pitiable groaning was heard. The girl's mother ran up to the room. When the door was opened, the girl was found dead,—so severely was she struck on the head by the "husband".

The man was tried in the Court, and was sentenced to death.

Who knows how many unreported cases of that type take place in our society? I personally know such cases in which the girl-wives until they were grown up, tried to be away from their husbands.

But who will speak on behalf of them? Our women always bear their burden of sorrow in silence, with meekness. They have no power left in them to fight against any evil whatever. And our men, with their unlimited power, always think of their own comfort and never think of the poor women.

A Brahmin lady of my acquaintance was married at 10. She would not go to her husband. So the husband married another—a grown-up one. The poor lady,—now in the prime of youth,—stays at her father's house.

I hear from a lady that in the villages amongst the lower classes, the husbands often beat their girl-wives because they try to be away from them and cannot be easily pushed into the husband's room at night.

Where the sufferers have no voice and opportunity to speak for themselves, it is very easy to defend the monstrous customs.

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

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

*Young India*, 7-10-1926, p. 349

## 126. PROSTITUTION OF IDEALS

I extract the following from a letter on the re-marriage of child widows:

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

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

the mystic language of the *Puranas* and believe in the earth being a flat dish sustained on the hood of a thousand-headed snake and Divinity lying in soft ease on an ocean of milk for his bed.

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

*Young India*, 11-11-1926, p. 388

## 127. IS IT MARRIAGE?

I give the following from a letter received by me while I was hardly able to attend to any correspondence, that is during the first days of my recent illness. I have omitted the names of parties though the correspondent gives every detail.

During this marriage season there has been a heartbreaking marriage ceremony at Sadashivgad, Karwar. The bride is about 12 years old and comes from a very poor family from Goa. The bridegroom is 60 years old. His first wife died about three years ago, leaving two children behind her out of eight or nine. The bridegroom is the founder of an English School. Last year he tried to secure a bride of tender age, but owing to the agitation in his community, the transaction was abandoned. This year he succeeded by offering rupees two hundred to the parents of the bride. What is to be done in the matter? Men like... who are social reformers of the place do not raise their little finger against this inhuman act.

There seems to be no reason to doubt the accuracy of the statement made in the letter from which I have given the foregoing condensation. I wish it were possible to say that this is only a rare instance. Instances of this character occur often enough to call for a drastic remedy. One remedy is undoubtedly to publish every such case and expose it and create a healthy strong public opinion against repetition of such crimes against womanhood. But local agitation whenever such immoral alliances are impending is no doubt the most effective. According to this correspondent, the first attempt on the part of this old progenitor of eight children was frustrated because of timely agitation. I wonder why such an agitation did not take place in the present instance. Surely many people in the locality must have known about the attempt to secure possession of a girl of tender age for the old widower. I wonder why agitation was not set on foot immediately to save the girl from a life of torture and misery. But in my opinion, if local opinion can be mobilized it is not too late even now to help the girl-wife. I gather from the correspondent's letter that the widower seems to have been a kind of philanthropist at one time. May he not be persuaded to put the girl away from him at the Seva Sadan or some such institution for education, and then,

when she is of full age, be given the choice of either living with him or regarding marriage bond as a nullity ? But whether in the present moribund condition of society such a step is possible or not, there is no reason why young men of undoubted character should not form themselves into bands of mercy pledged by all just and legitimate means to prevent child-marriages and to promote wherever possible remarriage of child-widows. The two things appear to me to go hand in hand. These bands of mercy to be able to do effective work must localize their activity. They will find then that in the course of a few years, they would become an irresistible force. The majority of our towns have after all a very small population each, and it is not impossible to know when immoral bargains such as the correspondent has drawn attention to are contemplated, or to know the child widows of their respective towns. There is no doubt however that a great deal of fact and exemplary self-restraint will have to be exercised by these bands of mercy. The slightest impatience or violence on their part will cause revulsion against them and frustrate the very object they have in view.

*Young India*, 1-9-1927, p. 284

## 128. THE TRAGEDY OF A YOUNG COUPLE

(Translated from *Navajivan* by P.)

A young man writes:

I am fifteen years of age. My wife is seventeen, I am in a great fix. I was opposed to this ill-assorted union all along, but my father and my uncle instead of paying heed to my protest only flew into a temper and began to scold me and call me names, and the father of the girl just for the personal satisfaction of securing a rich alliance married his child to me although I was at that time of tender age and younger than she. How stupid! And why could not my father leave me alone instead of forcing an incompatible match upon me and landing me into a pit? Could I have understood at that time the implications of the thing I would never have suffered myself to be married. But that is now all over and done. What would you now advise me to do?

The correspondent has given his name and address in full but wants the reply to be given to him through *Navajivan* as he is afraid that my letter may not be permitted to reach him. This is a deplorable state of things. My advice to this young man is that if he has the courage he should repudiate the marriage. For neither he nor the girl in question could possibly have had any idea of the vows that were administered to them at the *saptapadi* ceremony when they were married. Since their marriage they have never lived together. It is up to the young man therefore to take his courage in both hands and brave the prospect of being driven out of his home as a result of his repudiation of the so-called marriage. And I would beseech the respective parents of the couple, if my words can reach them, to have pity on their innocent children and not to force a cruel tragedy upon them. A boy of fifteen is just a stripling. He should be going to school or attending a workshop, not be saddled with the duties of a householder. I hope the parents of the couple in question will wake up to a sense of their duty. If they do not it will be the clear duty of the boy and the girl respectfully to disregard parental authority and follow the light of reason and conscience.

*Young India*, 3-1-1929, p. 7 at p. 8

## 129. THE TERROR OF THE PENAL CODE

A lawyer friend writes:

I read *Young India* of 3-1-1929, p. 8. You write, "My advice to this young man is that if he has the courage he should repudiate the marriage... If they do not it will be the clear duty of the boy and the girl respectfully to disregard parental authority and follow the light of reason and conscience."

The ties of Hindu marriage once performed are indissoluble. The boy may forsake his wife and marry another when he chooses later in life when he grows up. The girl can never remarry, the marriage once performed being indissoluble among the higher classes. If she does, she commits the offence of "bigamy". So please enlighten us as to what is the fate of the the girl who is once married and who cannot remarry if the boy is allowed to repudiate the so-called marriage as you suggest. Gour's Penal Code, p. 2019: "And since Hindu men are permitted polygamy while women are strickly confined to monogamy it follows that while women may be exposed to the risk of this offence, men are by their personal law exempt from its provisions... Please now correct your advice in accordance with the Penal Code that now guides the couple you advise."

I do not need to correct my advice. The only code that guides a reformer is his own conscience in the last resort. The marriage I had in mind was in reality no marriage at all. But should it be held otherwise in a court of law, the law would be corrected through the righteous suffering of a few if public opinion had not already secured either correction or disuse. If Hindu society were to wait for statutory help in order to get rid itself of its innumerable abuses, it would have to wait for aeons. The history of reforms shows that legal recognition has come after the fact, not before. We know too from experience that where law is imposed upon an unwilling people, it has failed in its purpose. Where the so-called husband who has never even seen the so-called child-wife releases her from a supposed obligation, the sword of the Penal Code need not be hung over the devoted head of the poor girl, who probably does not even know that she was ever married.

Moreover, let people like the lawyer correspondent read the signs of the times. Society bids fair to be disrupted if much needed and over due reform has to be indefinitely delayed by legal pedantries and subtleties.

*Young India*, 7-2-1929, p. 48

## 130. A YOUNG MAN'S DILEMMA

(Translated from *Navajivan* by P.)

A Patidar young man writes:

My parents want me to be married this very year and insist on my obeying their wishes in this respect.... In my community no one can secure a bride without conforming to the condition of *sata*, i.e. without offering a girl of one's family in exchange. Child-marriage is the rule. In my case too girls of nine or ten years of age only are available and that too on the condition that we conform to the condition of *sata*. My father says that even this may not be possible afterwards, if we miss the opportunity this year. If I say "no" my mother weeps and creates no end of trouble in the family. I am a Patidar young man of 22 years of age. My parents will not hear of my marrying a widow or outside my caste. What am I to do in the circumstances?

I know many a youngman who is in the same dilemma as this Patidar youth. According to our shastras, a boy of 16 years and over should be regarded by his parents as a friend whom they should take in their confidence and not as a child whom they can coerce. But some parents in our country seem to think that even their grown-up children are bound to follow every wish of theirs—especially when it relates to such things as marriage as if they could have no will of their own in the matter. And if this is the attitude with regard to the sons, the plight of the daughters may well be imagined. It seems to me that in all such contingencies it is not only the right but the religious duty of young men and young girls not to be afraid of their parents' wrath. It has been my experience that when a grown-up boy or girl takes up a just and right position and adheres to it with absolute firmness there is the least amount of difficulty created by the parents. When once they realize that the resolution of their children is absolutely unalterable, they get reconciled to it. For behind the parents' insistence there is always the ultimate hope that it would bring their children to their view point. But when this hope is destroyed further insistence becomes meaningless and is therefore given up. My advice to the young man in question, therefore, is to refuse to be party to the double sin of marrying a child-girl and of conforming to the

evil practice of *sata*. He must not mind how much domestic trouble he has to face as a result of his refusal. He should consider it a virtue to marry outside his sub-caste or to marry a widow, subject to the necessary limitations.

*Young India*, 11-4-1929, p. 119

### 131. AWFULNESS OF CHILD-MARRIAGE

The Anti Child-marriage Committee has published a useful and instructive bulletin on child-marriage. I copy the main paragraphs below:

The Census report for India of 1931 gave the following figures of the number of girls who are married under the age of 15 by age groups:

<i>Age group</i>	<i>Percentage married</i>
0 to 1	0.8
1 to 2	1.2
2 to 3	2.0
3 to 4	4.2
4 to 5	6.6
5 to 10	19.3
10 to 15	38.1

Thus nearly one girl in 100 girls of less than one year of age is married and the same horrible fact is repeated in all the other age groups under 15.

One consequence of this is the almost unbelievable number of child-widows in the country. The figures are:

<i>Age group</i>	<i>Actual number of widows</i>
0 to 1	1,515
1 to 2	1,785
2 to 3	3,485
3 to 4	9,076
4 to 5	15,019
5 to 10	1,05,482
10 to 15	1,85,339

The evil of child-marriage is often said to be quantitatively small and the custom not universal; but even if the number of child widows revealed in these figures is one-hundredth of the actual figures, no humanitarian public or Government will wait a moment before preventing the source of this misery. In this connection let us also remember that for most of these children re-marriage is impossible.

Another consequence of child-marriage is the number of young mothers who die in child birth. 200,000 deaths in child birth is the yearly average for India. This works up to 20 deaths per hour, and a vast number of these deaths occur to girls in their teens. According to Sir John Megaw, "of every 1,000 young mothers 100 are destined to die in child birth before they cease having babies". We have no accurate figures for maternal mortality. It is estimated at 24.5 per thousand for India whereas it is only 4.5 for England.

Lastly, child-marriage affects not merely the mother but the child and therefore the race. In India out of every 1,000 children born 181, die. This is the average; there are places in India where the average goes up to 400 per 1,000. The very backward condition of India in this respect is evident by a comparison of figures for infant mortality in England and Japan which are 60 and 124 per mille respectively.

The horror is indeed great when we remember that the evil is a preventible one and it is the lack of an educated social conscience which has allowed the evil to flourish unchecked.

The most regrettable fact of all is that in all these respects progress is so slow even if it is existent. For example, in 1921 there were 9,066 wives under the age of 1, in 1931 there were 44,082—an increase of nearly 5 times while the population increased only by one-tenth. Again, in 1921 there were 759 widows under the age of 1 and in 1931 the corresponding number was 1,515. The successive census figures show the most microscopic improvement. The population is increasing far more rapidly than the progress in measures to check these evils. The call for active step to eradicate them is therefore most urgent than ever and the women's movement in India can have no higher or more urgent task than the rousing of the conscience of the public and the Government in this matter.

The figures should cause us all to hang our heads in shame. But that won't remedy the evil. The evil of child-marriage is at least as extensive in the villages as in the cities. It is pre-eminently women's work. Men have no doubt to do their share. But when a man turns into a beast, he is not likely to listen to reason. It is the mothers who have

to be educated to understand their privilege and duty of refusal. Who can teach them this but women? I venture to suggest therefore that the All- India Women's Conference to be true to its name has to descend to the villages. The bulletins are valuable. They only reach a few of the English-knowing city dwellers. What is needed is personal touch with the village women. Even when, if ever, it is established, the task won't be easy. But some day or other the beginning has to be made in that direction before any result can be hoped for. Will the A.I.W.C. make common cause with the A.I.V.I.A.? No village worker, no matter how able he or she is, need expect to approach villagers purely for the sake of social reform. They will have to touch all spheres of village life. Village work, I must repeat, means real education, not in the three R's but in opening the minds of the villagers to the needs of true life befitting thinking beings which humans are supposed to be.

*Harijan*, 16-11-1935, p. 320

## 132. CHILD-MARRIAGE AMONG NAMASUDRAS

(From "Gandhiji's Walking Tour Diary")

Q.: Namasudra girls are usually married at the age of 12 or 13; formerly the usual age was 8 or 9. The bridegroom has to pay a dowry of Rs. 150/- for the bride. The average difference between the two is about 12 to 15 years. As a result of this the number of widows in the *namasudra* society is rather large. Among one section of the caste widow-marriage was prevalent. But in imitation of another section which was looked upon as superior, the former are giving up that practice. What is your advice regarding child-marriage and widow re-marriage?

A.: Dealing with the question Gandhiji said that his opinion was definite. In the first instance there should be no possibility of child-widows. He was averse to child-marriages. It was an evil custom which unfortunately the *namasudras* had perhaps taken from the so-called higher castes.

Gandhiji was also against the system of dowry. It was nothing but the sale of girls. That there should be castes even amongst *namasudras* was deplorable and he would strongly advise them to abolish all caste-distinctions amongst themselves. And in this they should bear in mind the opinion the speaker had often expressed that all caste-distinctions should be abolished, and there should be only one caste, namely, *bhangis* and all Hindus should take pride in being called *bhangis* and nothing else. This applied to the *namasudras* as well.

When child-marriages were abolished, naturally there would be a few, if any, young widows. As a general rule he was for one man one wife for life, and one woman one husband for life. Custom had familiarised women in the so-called higher castes with enforced widowhood. Contrary was the rule with men. He called it a disgrace, but whilst society was in that pitiable condition, he advocated widow-remarriage for all young widows. He believed in equality of the sexes, and, therefore, he could only think of the same rights for women as men.

*Harijan*, 16-3-1947, p. 61 at p. 67

### 133. CHILD-WIDOWS' OUTPOURING

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

We know our *dharma*, but are denied the means which may enable us to preserve it. If we are maintained in some Ashram and given some education, taught how to serve, we are ready to follow the widow's *dharma*. In the absence of this, we are exposed to so many temptations that we feel it necessary for us to have a husband's intimate company—When the path of knowledge declined, Vallabh\* propagated the path of *bhakti*. With the passing of time, customs have changed. This should happen in regard to widows too."

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

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

1. The attempt to end the practice of widowhood is injurious to religion.
2. Marriage is a sacrament. Love can marry only once.
3. A widow deserves to be looked upon with reverence. It is a sin to despise her. The sight of a pure widow is a good omen. It is a sin to count it as an ill omen.
4. If marriage is, or is considered to be a sacrament, and if it is a symbol of pure love, then marrying children and ill-matched partners must be considered a sin. If it is not wrong for a man of fifty to marry a girl of nine, and if such a man is not ex-communicated then it is also a sin to ex-communicate or otherwise punish that girl if, becoming a widow she marries again.

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

(From Gujarati)

[*Navajivan*, 12-10-1919]

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. XVI, p. 232

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

## 134. THE NATURE OF MY CRUSADE

(Originally appeared under the title "An Indignant Protest".)

The Headmaster of a Bengali school writes:

Your advice and utterances to students at Madras asking them to marry widowed girls only, have horrified us, and I send forth my humble but indignant protest.

This kind of advice will tend to destroy the tendency of the widows to observe life-long *brahmacharya* which has given Indian womanhood the greatest or rather the highest place in the world and destroy their chances of attaining salvation, through *brahmacharya* in a single birth, throwing them on the filthy path of worldly happiness. Thus this kind of keen sympathy for widows will do a great disservice to them and an injustice to the maidens whose marriage problem has become at present one of complexity and difficulty. Your theory of marriage will over-turn the Hindu theory of transmigration, rebirth and *mukti*, and will bring down Hindu society on the same level with other societies which we do not like. Our society has been demoralised no doubt, but we must have our eyes open to Hindu ideals and try to go up as far as we can and not be influenced by the examples of other societies and ideals. Examples of Ahalyabai, Rani Bhavani, Behula, Sita, Savitri, Damayanti will guide the Hindu society and we must direct it according to their ideals. I beg most humbly, therefore, that you will refrain from giving your opinions on these knotty questions and allow the society to do what it thinks best.

This indignant protest leaves me unconverted and unrepentant. My advice will not wean from her purpose a single widow who has a will of her own and who knows *brahmacharya* and is bent upon observing it. But if the advice is followed, it will certainly bring great relief to those girls of tender age who knew not the meaning of marriage when they were put through the ceremony. The use of the term "widow" in their connexion is a violent abuse of a name with sacred associations. It is precisely for the very object that my correspondent has in view that I advise the youth of the country to marry these so-called widows or not at all. The sacredness of the institution can be preserved only when it is purged of the curse of child widowhood.

The statement that the widows attain *moksha* if they observe *brahmacharya* has no foundation whatsoever in experience. More things are necessary than mere *brahmacharya* for the attainment of the final bliss. And *brahmacharya* that is superimposed carries no merit with it, and often gives rise to secret vice that saps the morals of the society in which that vice exists. Let the correspondent know that I am writing from personal observation.

I should be glad indeed if my advice results in elementary justice being done to the maiden-widows, and if for that reason the other maidens instead of being prematurely sold to man's lust are given an opportunity of waiting for maturity in age and wisdom.

I have no theory of marriage that is inconsistent with a belief in transmigration, rebirth or *mukti*. The reader should know that millions of Hindus whom we arrogantly describe as belonging to the lower order have no ban<sup>1</sup> on widow-remarriage. And I do not see how if remarriage of old widowers does not interfere with that belief, real marriage of girls wrongly described as widows can interfere with that grand belief. I may mention for the edification of the correspondent that transmigration and rebirth are not mere theories with me but facts as patent as the daily rise of the sun. *Mukti* is a fact to realize which I am striving with all my might. And it is the contemplation of *mukti* which has given me a vivid consciousness of the wrong that is being done to these maiden-widows. Let us not in our emasculation mention in the same breath as these modern injured maiden-widows the immortal names of Sita and others referred to by the correspondent.

Lastly, whilst there is, and very properly, glorification of real widowhood in Hinduism, there is, so far as I am aware, no warrant for the belief that in the *Vedic* times there was any absolute ban upon remarriage of widows.

But my crusade is not against real widowhood. It is against its atrocious caricature. The better way is not to regard as widows at all the girls I have in view and whom every Hindu who has a spark of chivalry in him is bound to relieve from their

intolerable yoke. I therefore humbly but emphatically repeat the advice to every young Hindu to refuse to marry any but these maidens miscalled widows.

*Young India*, 6-10-1927, p. 336

### 135. SATYAGRAHA AGAINST CHILD AND UNEQUAL MARRIAGES

(Originally appeared under the title "The Running Sore", translated from Hindi by P.)

A Maheshvari young man from Sholapur referring to the question of marriages of child-girls with old men writes:

Domestic life in our Maheshvari community has really fallen upon evil times. Hundreds of decrepit old men in our community every year secure child-girls by a lavish expenditure of money to satisfy their lust. As a result our community is fast becoming a sink of depravity and corruption. Child-marriages and ill-matched unions have become the order of the day. It is vain to expect such a community, in which domestic life has fallen into such corruption and decay, to produce sons worthy of the country. Unless something is done in time, its future is dark indeed.

An agitation to cope with this evil has been set on foot by about a dozen young men of this place who have formed themselves into a society for the prevention of child-marriages and ill-matched unions. We propose to offer Satyagraha on the occasion of every ceremony in connection with such undesirable marriages and feel sure that such action will not fail to prove effective. You know the various rites and ceremonies in connection with Maheshvari marriages. Will you please advise as to the best way peaceful satyagraha can be offered in this behalf?

What, in your opinion, should be considered to be the proper age limit for the bride and the bridegroom respectively for marriage? And in what circumstances would you recommend the offering of satyagraha for the prevention of unequal marriages?

Only the other day two old men of fifty-five and sixty years of age respectively married girls of twelve years of age. Several other equally shocking marriages are going shordy to take place in this very village. We have already started an agitation by distributing printed leaflets to prevent these marriages from taking place. But we feel that what is needed is strong direct

action, not merely empty propaganda. Would you kindly let us have your opinion on all these points in the columns of *Hindi Navajivan*?

There is no doubt that Satyagraha is the right thing in such cases. But how to offer it is another question. I have more than once dilated, in my writings, on the limits of Satyagraha. Satyagraha presupposes self-discipline, self-control, self-purification, and a recognized social status in the person offering it. A Satyagrahi must never forget the distinction between evil and the evil-doer. He must not harbour ill-will or bitterness against the latter. He may not even employ needlessly offensive language against the evil person, however unrelieved his evil might be. For it should be an article of faith with every Satyagrahi that there is none so fallen in this world but can be converted by love. A Satyagrahi will always try to overcome evil by good, anger by love, untruth by truth, *himsa* by Ahimsa. There is no other way of purging the world of evil. Therefore a person who claims to be a Satyagrahi always tries by close and prayerful self-introspection and self-analysis to find out whether he is himself completely free from the taint of anger, ill-will and such other human infirmities, whether he is not himself capable of those very evils against which he is out to lead a crusade. In self-purification and penance lies half the victory of a Satyagrahi. A Satyagrahi has faith that the silent and undemonstrative action of truth and love produces far more permanent and abiding results than speeches or such other showy performances.

But although Satyagraha can operate silently, it requires a certain amount of action on the part of a Satyagrahi. A Satyagrahi, for instance, must first mobilize public opinion against the evil which he is out to eradicate, by means of a wide and intensive agitation. When public opinion is sufficiently roused against a social abuse even the tallest will not dare to practise or openly to lend support to it. An awakened and intelligent public opinion is the most potent weapon of a Satyagrahi. When a person supports a social evil in total disregard of a unanimous public opinion, it indicates a clear justification for his social ostracism. But the object of social ostracism should never be to do injury to the person against whom it is directed. Social ostracism means complete non-cooperation on the part of society with the offending individual;

nothing more, nothing less, the idea being that a person who deliberately sets himself to flout society has no right to be served by society. For all practical purpose this should be enough. Of course, special action may be indicated in special cases and the practice may have to be varied to suit the peculiar features of each individual case.

But what about the sensual old man who even in his decrepitude cannot help his sensuality? Sensuality is blind; it cannot discriminate, it seeks satisfaction anyhow and at any cost. How should society deal with such a man? The reply is, by refusing to provide him with hapless victims. The rule about not giving in marriage any girl below twenty and against her will should be rigorously enforced. The question as to what the old man should do if no girl should be willing to marry him of her own accord naturally arises. Society has no answer to such a question; it is not bound to furnish any. It is concerned only with saving hapless girls from falling victims to blind lust. It is no part of its duty to provide means for the satisfaction of the latter. In practice, however, it will be seen that when purity pervades the social atmosphere it will serve largely to quell the lust of the lustful.

*Young India*, 8-8-1929, p. 262

## 136. ITS AWFUL CONSEQUENCES

(From "Notes")

A correspondent sends me a long article on child- marriage and enforced widowhood in Bengal. He says:

You are surely aware that the condition of Hindu society in other provinces is no better, if not worse, than prevailing in Bengal. Early marriage and girl-widowhood exists in a specially virulent form amongst the depressed classes of Hindu society. In Bengal it is very frequent amongst *Dom, Chamar, Namasudra, Kaibarta* (fishermen) classes. These people on the other hand form the bulk of Hindu population in Bengal. I wish I had time and opportunity to study and prepare similar figures for other provinces.

The article bristles with figures which are in the main included in the summary which I reproduced a fortnight ago from Sir Ganga Ram's statistics. The following conclusions drawn by the writer are interesting and instructive:

- (i) It is sapping the vitality of thousands, of our promising boys and girls on whom the future of our society entirely rests.
- (ii) It is bringing into existence every year thousands of weaklings—both boys and girls—who are born of immature parenthood.
- (iii) It is a very fruitful source of appalling child mortality and still-births that now prevail in our society.
- (iv) It is bringing into existence thousands of girl-wid-ows every year who in their turn are a source of corruption and dangerous infection to the society.
- (v) It is a very important cause of the gradual and steady decline of Hindu society in point of (1) number, (2) physical strength and courage and (3) morality.

*Young India*, 20-8-1926, p. 301 at p. 302

## 137. CHILD-MARRIAGES AND VIRGIN-WIDOWS

(From "Weekly Letter" by M.D.)

Replying to the address of the Civic and Social Progress Association,\* he emphasized the necessity of the youths of the country taking as much interest in social reform as in politics. For their capacity for self-government would be measured by the extent to which they had purged themselves and their society of the many evils it was suffering from. . . . Coming to the question of the remarriage of virgin-widows and child-marriages, he (Gandhiji) said:

I have met hundreds of girls, I have during my wanderings scarcely seen two or three who being above the age of 13 said that they were unmarried. It is no religion to have as one's wife a girl who is fit only to sit in one's lap, but it is the height of irreligion. I look to every youth in India to resolve not to marry a girl under 16. The widow has a sacred place in Hinduism but the ancient Hindu widow was never in the wretched condition that we find the Hindu widow of today. I cannot conceive of a girl of 15 becoming a widow. I do not regard a girl married who is given away in marriage by her parents without her consent and for pecuniary or other advantage. If any such girl is widowed I think it is the duty of her parents to marry her again. So far as other widows are concerned, if they think that they can not lead a life of pure widowhood, they have as much a right to remarry as have widowers in the same predicament. Let your society make these... questions its own, and try its utmost to solve them.

*Young India*, 18-8-1927, p. 266 at p. 267

\* In Bangalore

## 138. CHILD-WIDOWS AND CHILD-WIVES

(From a speech at the Pachiappa's College, Madras; this along with another speech in Madras appeared under the tide "Two speeches".)

You have mentioned there child-marriages and child-widows. A learned Tamilian has written to me to address students on child-widows. He has said that the hardships of the child-widows in this presidency are far greater than those of child-widows in other parts of India. I have not been able to test the truth of this statement. You should know that better than I do. But what I would like you, young men around me, to do is that you should have a touch of chivalry about you. If you have that, I have a great suggestion to offer. I hope the majority of you are unmarried, and a fair number of you are also *brahmacharis*. I have to say "a fair number" because I know students; a student who casts his lustful eyes upon his sister is not a *brahmachari*. I want you to make this sacred resolve that you are not going to marry a girl who is not a widow, you will seek out a widow-girl and if you can not get a widow-girl you are not going to marry at all. Make that determination, announce it to the world, announce it to your parents if you have them or to your sisters. I call them widow-girls by way of correction because I believe that a child ten or fifteen years old, who was no consenting party to the so-called marriage, who having married, having never lived with the so-called husband, is suddenly declared to be a widow, is not a widow. It is an abuse of the term, abuse of language and a sacrilege. The word "widow" in Hinduism has a sacred odour about it. I am a worshipper of a true widow like the late Mrs. Ramabai Ranade who knew what it was to be a widow. But a child 9 years old knows nothing of what a husband should be. If it is not true that there are such child-widows in the presidency, then my case falls to the ground. But if there are such child-widows, it becomes your sacred duty to make the determination to marry a girl-widow if you want to rid ourselves of this curse. I am superstitious enough to believe that all such sins that a nation commits react upon it physically. I believe that all these sins of ours have accumulated together to reduce us to a state of slavery. You

may get the finest constitution that is conceivable dropping upon you from the House of Commons. It will be worthless if there are not men and women fit enough to work that constitution. Do you suppose that we can possibly call ourselves men worthy of ruling ourselves or others or shaping the destiny of a nation containing 30 crores so long as there is one single widow who wishes to fulfil her fundamental wants but is violently prevented from doing so? It is not religion, but irreligion. I say that saturated as I am with the spirit of Hinduism. Do not make the mistake that it is the Western spirit in me that is speaking. I claim to be full to overflowing with the spirit of India un-defiled. I have assimilated many things from the West but not this. There is no warrant for this kind of widowhood in Hinduism.

All I have said about child-widows necessarily applies to child-wives. You must be able surely to control your lust to this extent that you are not going to marry a girl that is under 16 years of age. If I could do so I would lay down 20 as the minimum. Twenty years is early enough even in India. It is we who are responsible for the precocity of girls, not even the Indian climate, because I know girls of the age of 20 who are pure and undefiled and able to stand the storm that may rage round. Let us not hug that precocity to ourselves. Some Brahman students tell me that they cannot follow this principle, that they cannot get Brahman girls sixteen years old, very few Brahmans keep their daughters unmarried till that age, the Brahman girls are married mostly before 10, 12 and 13 years. Then I say to the Brahman youths, 'Cease to be a Brahman, if you cannot possibly control yourself. Choose a grown-up girl of 16 who became a widow when she was a child. If you cannot get a Brahman widow who has reached that age, then go and take any girl you like.' And I tell you that the God of the Hindus will pardon that boy who has preferred to marry out of his caste rather than ravish a girl of twelve. When your heart is not pure and you cannot master your passions, you cease to be an educated man. You have called your institution a premier institution. I want you to live up to the name of the premier institution which must produce boys who will occupy the front rank in character. And what is education without character and what is character without elementary personal purity? Brahmanism I adore. I have defended *varnashrama dharma*. But Brahmanism that can

tolerate untouchability, virgin-widowhood, spoliation of virgins, stinks in my nostrils. It is a parody of Brahmanism. There is no knowledge of Brahman therein. There is no true interpretation of the scriptures. It is undiluted animalism. Brahmanism is made of sterner stuff. I want these few remarks of mine to go deep down into your hearts. I am watching the boys whilst I am speaking and it hurts me to hear a single giggle whilst I am pouring out my heart. I have not come to appeal to your intellects but to your hearts. You are the hope of the country and what I have said is of primary importance to you.

*Young India*, 15-9-1927, p. 311 at p. 314

## 6. THE DOWRY SYSTEM

### 139. PRICE FOR A BRIDE!

(M.D. published by stringing together extracts from Gandhiji's many speeches in Chettinad an article under the tide "Message to Chettinad". The following excerpt is taken from therein.)

I understand that some of your marriage customs are very bad. There is very often a price put upon the head of a bride as much as Rs. 30,000. I understand that you do not hesitate to spend as much as Rs. 50,000 per marriage; but the custom I consider to be immoral. There can be no price put either way in the matter of such a sacred contract as marriage. It must be as easy for a poor man to get a virtuous bride as for a rich man. Merit and mutual love are the sole tests for marriage contracts. The expenses for marriage ceremonies, though I do not consider them to be immoral, I do regard as a criminal waste. It is not becoming a rich man to dangle his wealth before the multitude in the fashion in which he very often does. *The art of amassing riches* becomes a degrading and despicable art if it is not accompanied by the nobler art of how to spend wealth usefully. So, out of this marriage reform alone and putting a wise restraint upon your extravagance on these ceremonies, you can turn this Chettinad into a fairy land.

*Young India*, 6-10-1927, p. 334

## 140. A DOUBLE SIN

(From "Notes")

A correspondent, who sends his name for my information but adopts the pseudonym of "A Bachelor" writes with reference to my article *Is It a Marriage?* published some time ago, a long letter which I abridge as follows:

I have read with interest the article in your paper of the the 1st instant under the heading *Is It a Marriage?* Though the names of the parties are omitted it is an open secret to the Gaud Sarasvat Brahmans from Karwar. As a member of the community in which the marriage in question took place I wish to place before the public and the Gaud Sarasvat Brahmans throughout India in particular the following few lines for their careful consideration.

It is no doubt a disgrace for a man to buy a girl. But there is another custom among us which is equally bad, for a father among us is obliged to buy a husband for his daughter and the amount received by the husband is called dowry. It is not setted to suit the purse of the parents of girls but it would be according to the hereditary income of the would-be husband or it sometimes depends upon the education he has received. The more a man is educated, the higher the degree he has received, the more is he worth, in the matrimonial market.

A few months back the marriage took place in Bombay of a well-educated gendeman who is a high Government official and it is said that a dowry of nearly Rs. 20,000 was presented to him. It is really a pity that the people who receive higher education are going lower and lower by resorting to the very practices they are expected to put down.

I have before me another letter on the subject from a member of the same community. It appears that those who wish to buy wives go 10 Goa in search, for it is there that poor Sarasvat Brahmans are to be found who are not ashamed to enrich themselves by selling their daughters to persons old enough to be their fathers or grand-fathers. Thus the community commits a double sin. An educated young man is open to the highest bidder for his hand, and needy parents are open to negotiate the sale of their daughters, hardly out of their teens, to the oldest men (sometimes educated) who are prepared to pay the highest price. The only consolation that the

Sarasvat community may derive, if it wishes to, and if it would postpone a dealing with the reform under some excuse or other, is that there are "castes" too that are not free from the same evil. The difference, if any, would be that of degree. But if the Sarasvat community would lead the reform, it will disdain to seek the doubtful refuge of the *tu quoque* and will, now that the evil has been exposed, set about ridding itself of the double sin.

*Young India*, 6-10-1927, p. 337

## 141. A SHAME UPON YOUNG MEN

(From "Notes")

A correspondent sends me a newspaper cutting showing that recently in Hyderabad, Sindh, the demand for bridegrooms has been increasing at an alarming rate, an employee of the Imperial Telegraph Engineering service having exacted Rs. 20,000 as cash dowry during betrothal, and promise of heavy payments on the wedding day and on special occasions thereafter. Any young man who makes dowry a condition of marriage discredits his education and his country and dishonours womanhood. There are many youth movements in the country. I wish that these movements would deal with questions of this character. Such associations often become self-adulation societies, instead of becoming, as they should be, bodies representing solid reform from within. Good as the work of these bodies is at times in helping public movements, it should be remembered that the youth of the country have their reward in the public appreciation that they get. Such work, if it is not backed by internal reform, is likely to demoralize the youth by creating in them a sense of unwarranted self-satisfaction. A strong public opinion should be created in condemnation of the degrading practice of dowry and young men who soil their fingers with such ill-gotten gold should be excommunicated from society. Parents of girls should cease to be dazzled by English degrees and should not hesitate to travel outside their little castes and provinces to secure true, gallant young men for their daughters.

*Young India*, 21-6-1928, p. 207

## 142. A SINDH CURSE

The Amils of Sindh are probably the most advanced community in that province. But in spite of all their advance, there are some serious abuses of which they seem to have a monopoly. Of these the custom of *detileti* is not the least serious. I have more than once remarked upon it in these columns. My attention was drawn to this abuse during my very first visit to Sindh and I was invited to speak to the Amil friends about it. Though no doubt isolated work has been done in the direction of removing this abuse, no organized effort seems to have been made to end the evil. The Amils are a compact little community. The seriousness of the evil is not questioned by anybody. I have not known a single Amil to defend the vile custom. It has persisted because it is a custom patronised by the educated youth among the Amils. Their mode of life is above the means they can honestly command. Hence they have thrown all scruples to the wind and do not mind degrading themselves by prostituting the institution of marriage for their own base ends. And this one vicious habit has told upon the quality of their national work which otherwise by their intellect and education they are capable of doing to the great benefit of the country.

In order to put an end to this evil, a provisional committee has already been formed now of which Acharya A. T. Gidwani has accepted the presidentship.

This is as it should be. When he undertook to go to Sindh from Brindaban it was naturally expected that he would throw himself with zest into all desirable movements that conduce to national well-being. It is to be hoped that the provisional committee will soon become a permanent organization and under his able leadership the reform which is already belated will make steady progress.

The Secretary, Sjt. Mirchandani, asks me for suggestions. The only suggestion that I can think of just now is that this organization should create a public opinion against *deti-leti* that would become irresistible. Young educated Amils are able to squeeze the poor parents of marriageable girls only because there is no active public opinion

against the custom. There should be work done in the schools and colleges and amongst the parents of girls. The parents should so educate their daughters that they would refuse to marry a young man who wanted a price for marrying and would rather remain spinsters than be party to the degrading terms. The only honourable terms in marriage are mutual love and mutual consent.

*Young India*, 27-12-1928, p. 431

### 143. THE STAIN OF DETI-LETI

(From a report by M.D. in "Weekly Letter" of a speech by Gandhiji in reply to a joint address by students of the Law College, the Engineering College and the Arts College of Karachi.)

And lastly, what had they to say with regard to the scandalous custom of *deti-leti*? Instead of making their wives the queens of their homes and of their hearts, they had converted them into chattels to be bought and sold! Was this the lesson that they had imbibed from the reading of English literature? Woman had been described as the *ardhangana* or the better half of man. But they had reduced her to the position of a slave and the result was the state of paralysis in which they found their country. "Swaraj is not meant for cowards," he concluded, "but for those who would mount smilingly to the gallows and refuse even to allow their eyes to be bandaged. Promise that you will wipe off the stain of *deti-leti*, that you will die to restore your sisters and wives to their full dignity and freedom. Then I shall understand that you are ready for the freedom of your country." Addressing next the girl students who were present there he said, "As for you young girls, to you I will only say, that if I had a girl under my charge I would rather keep her a maiden all her life than give her away to one who expected a single pice for taking her for his wife." Finally he banteringly warned the students that if they contented themselves merely with singing his praise without meaning to follow his advice theirs would be conduct worthy of *bhats* or bards only, not gentlemen.

*Young India*, 14-2-1929, p. 50 at p. 54

## 144. MARRIAGE BY PURCHASE

Some months ago the *Statesman* opened its columns to a discussion of the dowry system prevalent among many castes almost all over India, and dealt with it editorially. I used to write on the cruel customs often enough in the columns of *Young India*. The cuttings from the *Statesman* revive the cruel memories of what I used to know then. My remarks were aimed at *deti-leti* as the custom is known in Sind. Enough educated Sindhis were found who exacted large sums of money from parents who were anxious to see their daughters well married. The *Statesman* has carried on a crusade against the custom in general. There is no doubt that the custom is heartless. But so far as I am aware it does not touch the millions. The custom is confined to the middle class who are but a drop in the ocean of Indian humanity. Whenever we talk of evil customs, we usually think of the middle class. The millions living in the villages have their customs and woes of which we have as yet but little knowledge.

This however does not mean that one may ignore the dowry evil because it is confined to a comparatively small number of the people of this country. The system has to go. Marriage must cease to be a matter of arrangement made by parents for money. The system is intimately connected with caste. So long as the choice is restricted to a few hundred young men or young women of a particular caste, the system will persist no matter what is said against it. The girls or boys or their parents will have to break the bonds of caste if the evil is to be eradicated. Then the age for marrying has also to be raised and the girls have to dare to remain spinsters, if need be, i.e. if they do not get a suitable match. All this means education of a character that will revolutionize the mentality of the youth of the nation. Unfortunately the system of education has no connection with our surroundings which therefore remain practically untouched by the education received by a microscopic minority of the boys and girls of the nation. Whilst therefore whatever can be done to abate the evil must be done, it is clear to me that this evil and many others which can be named, can only be tackled, if there

is education which responds to the rapidly changing conditions of the country. How is it that so many boys and girls who have even passed through colleges are found unable or unwilling to resist the manifestly evil custom which affects their future so intimately as marriage does? Why should educated girls be found to commit suicide because they are not suited? Of what value is their education if it does not enable them to dare to defy a custom which is wholly indefensible and repugnant to one's moral sense? The answer is clear. There is something radically wrong in the system of education that fails to arm girls and boys to fight against social or other evils. That education alone is of value which draws out the faculties of a student so as to enable him or her to solve correctly the problems of life in every department.

*Harijan, 23-5-1936, p. 117*

## 145. AVOIDABLE MISERY

From a correspondent's long letter of wail I take the following:

I am a school-master (aged 67) with long service (46 years) in the educational line born of a poor but highly respectable Kayastha family in Bengal which knew better days but is reduced to poverty. I am blessed (?)\* with 7 daughters and two sons; the eldest son aged 20 died in October leaving behind him his miserable and helpless parents to mourn his loss! He was a promising youth—the only hope of my life. Of my 7 daughters 5 have already been given in marriage. My sixth and seventh daughters (aged 18 and 16) are yet unmarried. My younger son is a minor aged 11 years. My pay is Rs. 60. It hardly allows me to make the two ends meet. I have no savings. I have less than nothing, being in debt. The match of my sixth daughter has been settled. The cost of the marriage will be not less than Rs. 900 in ornaments and dowry (Rs. 300). I have a life policy, in the Sun Life Assurance of Canada for Rs. 2000/-. The policy was issued in 1914. The Company has agreed to give me a loan of Rs. 400 only. It is only half the amount required. I am absolutely helpless in respect of the other half. Could you not help this poor father with the other half?

This letter is one out of many such. The majority of letters are written in Hindi. But we know that English education has made things no better for parents or daughters. In some cases they have become worse in that the market price of possible young men who would suit an English educated daughter of an English educated father suffers an appreciable increase.

In a case like the Bengali father's the best help that can be rendered is not a loan or a gift of the required sum, but it should consist in persuading and strengthening the parent to refuse to purchase a match for his daughter but choose or let the daughter choose one who would marry her for love, not for money. This means a voluntary extension of the field of choice. There must be a breach in the double wall of caste and province. If India is one and indivisible, surely there should be no artificial divisions creating innumerable little groups which would neither interdine nor intermarry. There is no religion in this cruel custom. It would not do to plead that

individuals cannot make the commencement and that they must wait till the whole society is ripe for the change. No reform has ever been brought about except through intrepid individuals breaking down inhuman custom or usages. And after all what hardships can the school-master suffer if he and his daughters refused to treat marriage as a marketable transaction instead of a status or a sacrament which it undoubtedly is. I would, therefore, advise my correspondent courageously to give up the idea of borrowing or begging and to save the four hundred rupees he can get on his life policy by choosing in consultation with his daughter a suitable husband no matter to what caste or province he belongs.

*Harijan, 25-7-1936, p. 192*

\* The interrogation is the correspondent's.

## 146. HOW TO PREVENT THIS SORDID EXACTION?

(Originally appeared under the title "What A girl Needs".)

A fair correspondent writes:

Your article 'Avoidable' Misery seems to me to be incomplete. Why should parents insist on marrying their daughters and for that reason undergo nameless difficulties? If parents were to educate their daughters as they educate their sons, so as to enable them to earn an independent living, they won't have to worry themselves over the selection of husbands for their daughters. My own experience is that when girls have had the opportunity of developing their minds fairly and are able to support themselves in a dignified manner, they have no difficulty, when they are desirous of marrying, in being suitably matched. I must not be understood to be advocating what is called higher education for our girls. I know it is not possible for thousands of girls. What I plead for is a training of girls in useful knowledge and some calling that would make them fully confident about their ability to face the world and not to feel dependent upon parents or their future husbands. Indeed I know some girls who, having been deserted by their husbands, are today living a dignified life with their husbands, because during the period of their desertion they had the good fortune to become self-dependent and to receive a general training. I wish you could emphasize this aspect of the question in considering the difficulties of parents having on their hands daughters of marriageable age.

I heartily endorse the sentiments expressed by my correspondent. Only I had to deal with the case of a parent who had made himself miserable not because he had an incompetent daughter, but because he and perhaps even his daughter wanted to restrict themselves, in the choice of a husband to their own little caste. The "accomplishment" of the girl was itself a hindrance in this case. If the girl was illiterate, she could have accommodated herself to any young man. But being an accomplished girl, naturally she would need an equally "accomplished" husband. It is our misfortune that the sordidness of exacting a price for marrying a girl is not regarded as a decided disqualification. An altogether artificial value is put upon English collegiate education. It covers a multitude of sins. If the definition of

"accomplishment" was more sensible than it has become among the classes whose educated young men exact a price for accepting marriage proposals on behalf of girls, the difficulty of selecting suitable matches for girls would be much lessened, if not entirely removed. Whilst therefore I commend the proposal of my fair correspondent to the attention of parents, I must insist on the necessity of breaking down the highly injurious caste barriers. Breaking down the barriers will widen the range of choice and thus in a great measure prevent exactions.

*Harijan*, 5-9-1936, p. 233

## 147. NO OTHER WAY

(From "Question Box")

Q.: The demand for dowries in the marriage market is growing. None is immune from this injustice. The richer the parent of the prospective bridegroom, the heavier is the demand of the dowry. The problem now is such that many marriageable girls cannot be married and the state of their parents can better be imagined than described. Popular Governments should help to check the evil through the law.

A.: It is a curious phenomenon the questioner notices. Education not only does not improve the situation but makes it worse. The affected class has to wake up before the curse destroys the class which in its terrible weakness shamelessly betakes to it. Let them ceaselessly and restlessly agitate. I know no other way.

New Delhi, 12-10-1946

*Harijan*, 20-10-1946, p. 368

## SECTION FOUR : ABOUT JUVENILES

### 148. ABOUT ORPHANAGES

(The article originally appeared in *Chitramaya Jagat*, a Marathi journal under the title "A few words to Orphanages". Its publication was noticed in *Kheda Vartaman* of 11-7-1917. The following is a translation from Gujarati version.)

In the course of my travels in India, I have examined a number of orphanages, some of them closely and others cursorily, and have expressed my views on some of them before the managers. Like anyone else, I also think well of my ideas and I feel that it will not be amiss to place them before the public.

An *anathashrama* may be correctly defined as a place which gives shelter to those who are *anatha* and makes them *sanatha*. In respect of such institutions, the term *anatha* is especially applied to children who have no living parents or guardians. Their claim is, or ought to be, to make good the want of a guardian. *Anathashram* is a translation of the English term "orphanage". Though this is the meaning of the term *anatha*, besides children, young men who can earn their livelihood are also accommodated in orphanages. In addition, the disabled, the lame, the crippled and the blind are also admitted and now even four-ndling-boxes have been introduced in orphanages. It is my opinion that this way one of the purposes is served fully. Though, superficially considered, it might suggest a more philanthropic attitude, on deeper reflection it will be seen that this state of affairs comes of a commercial mentality. I have no doubt that the future of the orphanages is the same as that of misers who would earn the highest interest on their moneys and so ultimately ruin themselves. I have used the word "future" only to be on the safe side. Personally, I see their degradation in the present. An arrangement like this is a sign of our fear, of our lack of faith. We assume that, for all our institutions, we get help 'from the rich only with the utmost efforts. "We cannot but protect the disabled and we are bound to take care of babies born in secret; so let us manage that from *whatever we have*

*received.*" This is an abject attitude. I am convinced that for a good cause money will be available even in this poor country of India. It is for those in charge to prove that the cause is good. Institutions have declined not for lack of funds but for lack of organizers with steadfastness, faith and integrity. Whether or no this view is right, one thing is certain, that, in trying to ride three horses at once the orphanages succeed in managing none.

In these conditions, how can the "orphans" cease to be "orphans"? They are constantly reminded of the fact of their being such. We would never want to leave our children in charge of these institutions. Here is the real test of an orphanage. We would not welcome the companionship of the disabled, the blind, or the crippled for our children. If these institutions were (really) the guardians of those without any guardians, we would find the manager's children among the inmates. They would have no hesitation in placing their children in the midst of the orphans, if for no other reason, at least in order to test themselves. I submit, on the strength of my extensive experience, that this is not too excessive an expectation. That the orphans are placed with the disabled is not all; the other arrangements also are mostly such that the children are constantly reminded of their destitute condition. If orphanages were reserved for orphans alone, they could be self-supporting in a very short time. We have much to learn from the Salvation Army in this respect. The orphanages which they run have a soul in them. Ours are by comparison soulless. They have given refuge to thousands of children, have made men of them, have found employment for them. The children in our orphanages have not been given this sense of security. Some have been found petty jobs. These may be left out of account. The general practice in our orphanages is to send away the children when they come of age. Not so with the Salvation Army.

In its institutions, the orphans, when they come of age start working in its factories, in the same way that a son in the family who has grown up is regarded as an additional shield and support for the family. It is necessary that such a family feeling be injected in our institutions too.

We can educate them in the institutions and find work for them in the factories of the institutions even as we provide them with lodging, boarding and clothing. We can launch great national experiments in the institutions, can impart them education on national lines, teach them crafts, teach them agriculture, and save the professions which are dying out. If affairs are managed in this manner, the orphans of today can become teachers, artisans, and leaders in their own orphanages. We can also raise an Indian Defence Force suited to our conditions from among the inmates of such orphanages.

If I am right in these calculations, a common standard can be set up for all the institutions by bringing together the heads of all the institutions, or at least of those in the Bombay Province, and consulting their views. If there is a central executive body for all, it can supervise them and make such changes as are all called for by experience. If we are not ready for such an integrated scheme, a policy like the one indicated above can surely be introduced in those institutions which have more of life in them.

In some institutions, I have noted a tendency to coax children into staying on there. To me this seems to be an ill-considered thing to do. The boys who do not want to continue in the orphanages are not orphans but free persons (who can look after themselves). The worth of an orphanage should not be judged by the number of inmates, but rather by the number of citizens it turns out.

There are enough institutions to meet the needs of the disabled. That, wherever necessary, such institutions should be set up separately, requires no elaborate proof.

The problem of admitting foundlings is a serious one. I am not yet convinced that providing for such admissions is ethically sound. I have a kind of feeling that such facilities lead to increase in indulgence. It can in no way be proved that keeping alive every creature that is born, no matter how, is a part of humanitarianism. It is indeed futile to make such an effort. One detects a hidden pride behind it. I, for one, realize every moment from experience that the term "humanitarianism" is not easy to understand. I have in some measure made that subject my own and hence I have

ventured to be so emphatic. Humanitarianism does not mean saving a definite number of lives. It is the very property of the soul. Because of this fact, living creatures in the presence of a compassionate soul have an immediate and direct experience of its compassion. There is no room for arithmetic in humanitarianism. Unclean flour is infected with numberless lives. To preserve such flour is no humanitarianism. It lies rather in covering up the flour with earth or destroying it, though either way the vermin in the flour perish. Numberless vermin perish even in the process of keeping our bodies clean. Pure humanitarianism will seek ways to prevent the infesting of the flour and keeping the body from becoming unclean. So also, pure humanitarianism will look for the cause of surreptitious admissions and take measures to promote moral purity. It will not encourage and shield laxity by accepting the burden of such admissions.

I need hardly say that my criticism is only meant to be helpful and is not promoted by a desire to cast aspersions. It is also not true that all the comments apply to every institution. The sole purpose of this article is to see that all the institutions attain the highest possible level.

In almost all our institutions, we notice more of the attitude of the *vanik* than anything else. It is imperative to keep this in the background and give prominence to the (venturesome) spirit of the Kshatriya, to the (far-sighted) vision of the Brahmin, above all, to the Shudra's spirit (of service).

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. XIII, p. 469*

## 149. PLIGHT OF SCHOOL CHILDREN

One who knows what she is writing about says:

Until our boys learn to conserve their vital forces India will never have the men she should have. For nearly 17 years I have had the charge of boys' school in India. It is appalling to see the number of boys Hindu, Mahomedan and Christian who begin school life full of energy and enthusiasm and hope and end it physical wrecks. In literally hundreds of cases, I have traced this directly to self-abuse, sodomy or early marriage. I have today the names of 42 boys guilty of sodomy and not a boy is over 13 years of age. Masters and house fathers will deny that these conditions exist but if the right tactics are used the trouble will be discovered and nearly always the boys will confess. A large percent of the boys confess to having been taught by men—often their own relatives.

This is no fanciful picture. It is truth suppressed by many school-masters who know. I have known it before. It was first brought to my notice by a Delhi school master now nearly eight years ago. But I have kept silent merely discussing with individuals the remedies. The mischief is not confined to India. But it comes upon India with deadlier effect because of the curse of child- marriage. A public discussion of this very difficult and delicate subject has become necessary because one sees in respectable newspapers the sexual passion discussed with a freedom that would not have been possible a few years back.

The fashion of regarding the sexual act as natural, necessary, moral and conducive to mental and physical health has accentuated the evil. The advocacy by the cultured men of the free use of contraceptives has created an atmosphere favouring the growth of the sexual microbe. The tender and receptive minds of youngsters draw the hasty deductions favouring and justifying their unlawful and destructive desires and the parents and the teachers exhibit a sad, almost criminal, indifference and tolerance in respect of the deadly vice. Short of complete purification of the social environment, nothing, in my opinion, will stop the evil. The unconscious and subtle effect of an atmosphere charged with sexuality cannot but react upon the minds of

the school-going youth of the country. The surroundings of the city life, the literature, the drama, the cinema, the household appointments, various social ceremonies, do but to point one thing—the promotion of the sexual passion. It is impossible for little children already conscious of the beast within to resist the pressure exerted by these influences. Palliatives will not answer. The reformation must begin with the elders if they would discharge their trust by the younger generation.

*Young India*, 9-9-1926, p. 314

## 150. CHOICE BEFORE US

A correspondent sends me a cutting from the press giving most gruesome facts about the growing infantile crimes and illicit gratification among girls in the New World.

A boy of 4 years is reported to have shot his mother, because she forbade him to play with matches. When the police confronted him he was in no way taken aback. He threatened "to shoot them too", and when questioned by the Coroner, he grew so impatient with him, that he picked up a knife from among the exhibits lying in front of him and rushed to strike him. It is said, that hardly a day passes in America without some crime being committed by a boy or a girl, and in most American colleges there are said to be suicide-clubs or crime societies, and the more horrible part of the account shows that many girls, even of exclusive colleges, have become so lawless as to run away in pursuit of illicit adventures.

It is difficult in an age in which newspapers, in order to provide sensational food for their readers, invent stories when they have no facts to weave narratives from, to believe without reservation reports such as I have condensed. But whilst one may make ample allowance for exaggeration, there is no doubt that infantile crime and lawlessness among boys and girls are sufficiently extensive in the New World to make us beware of a civilization which must be held responsible for these crimes and lawlessness. That life in the West goes on—and it may be said progressively after a fashion—in spite of these infantile crimes, may be granted. And it may also be granted that the wise people of the West are not only not unaware of the evil, but that they are manfully struggling to overtake it. Nevertheless we have to decide whether we shall indiscriminately copy this civilization. We may well pause in the face of the awful revelations that come to us from the West from time to time, and ask ourselves, whether after all it is not better to hold by our own civilization and seek, in the light of the comparative knowledge that is available to us, to reform it by removing its known excrescences. For there is no doubt, that if the West has its

terrific problem arising out of its own civilization, we have no less grave problems of our own to deal with.

It is perhaps unnecessary, if not useless, in this connection to weigh the merits of the two civilizations. It is likely that the West has evolved a civilization suited to its climate and surroundings, and similarly, we have a civilization suited to our conditions, and both are good in their own respective spheres. This may be safely said, that the crimes and the lawlessness described by me are almost impossible with us, and I hold that this is due to our pacific training and the restraining influence in the midst of which we are brought up. Cowardliness which often springs from pacific training, and obsequiousness which comes from the restraint that is handed down from generation to generation, have somehow to be avoided, if the ancient civilization is not to perish before the mad modern rush. The distinguishing characteristic of a modern civilization is an indefinite multiplicity of human wants. The characteristic of ancient civilization is an imperative restriction upon and a strict regulating of these wants. The modern or Western insatiableness arises really from want of a living faith in a future state and therefore also .in Divinity. The restraint of ancient or Eastern civilization arises from a belief, often in spite of ourselves, in a future state and the existence of a Divine Power. The record condensed above is a warning, if we will take it, against a blind imitation of the West, which one sees so often in the city life of India and especially among the educated classes. Some of the immediate and brilliant results of modern inventions are too maddening to resist. But I have no manner of doubt that the victory of man lies in that resistance. We are in danger of bartering away the permanent good for a momentary pleasure.

*Young India*, 2-6-1927, p. 176

## 151. THE EVIL OF JUVENILE SEDUCTION

(Originally appeared under the title "A growing Vice?")

The Principal of the Sanatan Dharma College, Lahore, writes:

Allow me to request you to peruse the accompanying newspaper cutting, notices, etc. which speak for themselves. The youths' Welfare Association is doing very useful work here in the Punjab. It has attracted notice in academic and administrative quarters, while it has secured the active interest of enlightened guardians of boys. Pt. Sitaram Das of Bihar is the leading spirit of this movement which counts very many distinguished people here among its patrons.

The evil of juvenile seduction is admittedly more rampant in the Punjab and N.W.F. Province than elsewhere in India.

May I pray that you will draw the attention of the country to this canker through a note or letter in the *Harijan* or in any other newspaper?

The Secretary of the Youth League wrote to me long ago on this very delicate subject. On receiving his letter I entered into correspondence with Dr. Gopichand who confirmed the statements made in the League Secretary's letter. But I could not see my way clear to discussing the problem in these columns or elsewhere. I had known of the evil but was not sure that a newspaper discussion could deal with it to any purpose. Nor am I sure now. But I may not resist the appeal of the Principal of the College.

The vice is not new. It is wide-spread. As it is necessarily kept secret, it is not possible to detect it easily. It goes hand in hand with easy life. In the case referred to by the Principal, the teachers are alleged to be the corruptors of their own wards. "When the salt loses its savour wherewith shall it be salted?"

This is a matter which no commission, no government can deal with successfully. It is the function of the moral reformer. The parents have to be awakened to a sense of their responsibility. The students should be brought in close touch with clean life. The

idea that ethics and clean living are the foundation of true education, should be seriously propagated. Trustees of educational institutions have to exercise the greatest care in the selection of teachers, and having selected them they have to see to it that they remain up to the mark. These are some of the ways in which the awful vice can be brought under control even if it cannot be eradicated.

*Harijan, 27-4-1935, p. 84*

## 152. CRIMES AGAINST CHILDREN

(Originally appeared under the title "Duty of Reformers".)

I gladly publish the following letter from the Principal, Sanatan Dharma College, Lahore:

In all earnestness I beg to draw your attention to the horror of the atrocities connected with cases of unnatural offence committed on children.

As you are well aware very few of these are reported to the police or taken to law courts. Of late there seems to have been an orgy of such cases in the Punjab. The enclosed newspaper cuttings, which report only the most flagrant of the very rare cases that come to law courts, will fully reveal to you the magnitude of this menace to our young boys and girls. Some months back daring attempts were made in Lahore by *gundas* to abduct little schoolboys from the very gates of some schools in broad daylight. Even now special vigilance arrangements are necessary for them while going to and returning from school. The circumstances of the assaults narrated in the reports of the cases tried are of rare and diabolical cruelty and daring.

The feeling of the public in general is either one of apathy or of helplessness and lack of self-confidence in the matter of organized effort to crush these crimes.

The enclosed copy of the circular issued by the Government of Punjab will show you how the Government feel helpless in the face of the apathy of the public as well as of their departmental officers.

You rightly remarked in your editorial notes in *Young India* of the 9th September 1926, and of the 27th June 1929, that the time was ripe for a public discussion of the subject of sexual offences of this class and that only a levelling up of public opinion all over the country could cope with the evil. The only effective way to such levelling up of public opinion is publicity through newspapers.

I submit most respectfully that this is the least that the horrible situation demands; and I appeal to you to give a lead to our press by raising your powerful voice for mobilizing an intensive press campaign against this horror.

There can be no doubt that there must be a relentless war waged against this vice. I have gone through the gruesome reports enclosed with this letter. These are of a different type from those dealt with by me in the articles to which the Principal refers. They had reference to cases exclusively of seduction by teachers. The reports now sent deal with cases of unnatural assaults committed by *gundas* on boys of tender age and then murdered. Though the cases of unnatural assaults followed by murder appear more heinous, I believe that they are more capable of being dealt with than the cases in which boys become willing victims of their teachers. Both require incessant vigilance by the reformer and the rousing of public conscience against the commission of this disgusting crime. It is the duty of leaders in the Punjab, in which this crime seems to flourish most, to get together irrespective of race or creed, and devise methods of protecting the youth of the land of five rivers from criminals whether as seducers or ravishers and murderers. It is no use passing resolutions condemning the criminals. All crimes are different kinds of diseases and they should be treated as such by the reformers. That does not mean that the police will suspend their function of regarding such cases as public crimes, but their measures are never intended to deal with cause of these social disturbances. To do so is the special prerogative of the reformer. And unless the moral tone of society is raised, in spite of whatever may be written in the newspapers such crimes will flourish, if only for the simple reason that the moral sense of these perverts has become blunt and they rarely read newspapers, especially those portions which contain fervent exhortation against such vices. The only effective way I can conceive of, therefore, is for some enthusiastic reformers like the Principal of the Sanatan Dharma College, if he is one, to gather together other reformers and take concerted measures to deal with the evil.

*Harijan*, 19-10-1935, p. 286

## SECTION FIVE: SERVICE OF THE DISEASED AND THE DISABLED

### 153. A CAMPAIGN AGAINST TUBERCULOSIS

(Originally appeared in *Indian Opinion*, dated 5-8-1911.)

We invite the special attention of our Natal Indian readers to Dr. Murison's letter to Mr. Gandhi on the campaign that he, with the assistance of Dr. Adams, the specialist, is conducting in the Durban Borough against Tuberculosis. This fell disease is no respecter of persons and affects all the communities residing in Durban. If its progress is not arrested in time, it is difficult to estimate the damage it may cause to precious human lives. It is then only proper that Mr. Jameson and his Committee should seek and command the co-operation of all the communities in their endeavour to root out the disease. At the desire of Mr. Jameson a small Indian Committee has been already formed to render the necessary assistance to his Committee to assist ourselves. But the establishment of the Committee is not enough. We have no doubt that Dr. Murison ought to be besieged by Indian volunteers who would place themselves at his disposal to do inspection and visiting work. They may become angels of mercy in the truest sense of the term. We feel sure that the work that Dr. Murison expects (and rightly) from us can only be performed by volunteers and not paid workers. Who can reason with our consumptive except our leaders? Dr. Adams preaches the gospel of open air, first and last, in the treatment of this disease. It will require all the ability and persuasive powers of those whom the people trust before the latter will adopt the treatment which is so incredibly simple and yet, unless it is understood, so difficult of adoption. Those who are afraid of catching cold if they breathed the fresh but cold air of the fields rather than the hot but contaminated and carbon-loaded atmosphere of a stuffy room are not to be easily persuaded that their salvation—freedom from consumption—lies in breathing pure and invigorating fresh air even as we drink pure and health-giving water rather than poisoned water vomited by others. We trust that every influential Indian will have his name registered as a volunteer worker in the crusade of the Durban Corporation against tuberculosis.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. XI, p. 137

## 154. HAPPY HOME FOR THE BLIND

(From an article which originally appeared under the title "Four Functions".)

During my day's stay in Bombay on my way to Bhopal I had four interesting functions to attend to

The third function took place at Vanita Vishram for helping the blind. I must again make the confession as in the case of Karsandas Chitalia, that it was not the demonstrable strength of the cause as the faith and devotion of Sjt. H. D. Chhatrapati and Sjt. B. Khambhata that induced me to preside at the function. I had the privilege of knowing the blind brother of Sjt. H. D. Chhatrapati, i.e. Dr. Nilkanthrai Chhartapati. But being wholly immersed in the cause of the starving millions who are worse than the physically blind, I have not been able to take any active interest in the latter. It required the magnetic touch of these two friends to draw me. There is at Tardev the Happy Home for the Blind. It was for this institution that the meeting was called. How happy that Home is, the curious and philanthropically minded reader must find out for himself or herself. The conductors invite scrutiny, but they also invite all

- (a) to furnish the Home with funds,
- (b) to send th blind they can get hold of, and
- (c) to ind municipalities and the like to do likewise.

It is stated that there are 15,00,000 of totally blind people in India and that nearly 70 per cent of these are curable if treated in time. They state also that the number of partially blind is 2 ½ times as much as that of ^e totally blind. Sjt. Chhatrapati also mentioned the interesting but painful fact, that the blind beggars in Bombay received from 4 to 5 rupees daily and that the money mostly went into the pockets of the conductors whom the blind beggars employed. If therefore instead of our charity being blind, as it undoubtedly is today in many cases, it became enlightened, and if

then we refused to pay anything to the beggars but took the trouble of sending them to the home or homes designed for them and helped the homes, we should save the nation's money and in the bargain make the blind fit for earning their livelihood as they can be made without much difficulty.

*Young India*, 12-9-1929, p. 300

## 155. EYES TO THE BLIND

(From "Notes"—translated from *Harijansevak*)

Though I had heard a lot about the reputation of Dr. Mathuradas of Moga, I had never had occasion to witness any of his famous operations for cataract, until I saw them in Wardha last month. He came specially at the invitation of Jamnalalji, and with his assistants restored eyes to about three hundred people who had been blinded by cataract.

These mass operations have been described as a *yajna* (sacrifice). And *yajna* it ceratinly is, as any act of selfless service is a sacrifice. This *yajna* began some years ago in the Bhagvad Bhakti Ashram at Rewari, with which Jamnalalji was closely connected. He therefore invited the doctor this time 'to Wardha. I bowed to Dr. Mathuradas in admiration for his unerring and quick surgical hand. He performed operations at the rate of one in a minute, there was scarcely a mishap. Thousands thus get back their eyes free, as he charges no fee to the poor.

The doctor told me that nowhere except in India was cataract so common as was also rhinoplasty. These operations, therefore, place him in the forefront of the surgeons for cataract throughout the world. No doubt many doctors have now taken up the work and copy his example. It is just as it should be, for the medical profession should be one of selfless service. And there was no humanitarian mission for which Jamnalalji was not ready. It came to him as naturally as any of his business enterprises. That was why he had a scheme in hand for making these operations a periodical feature in G.P.

I hope that the scheme will not be interrupted by his death and Dr. Mathuradas is always ready for these *yajnas*.

On the train to Calcutta, 17-2-1942

*Harijan*,, 22-2-1942, p. 53

## 156. KASTURBA LEPROSY WORK

This work has been going on under Prof. T. N. Jagdisan's supervision since 19th May 1945. He has produced a short summary of the work done from day to day. Dr. T. S. S. Rajan is the chairman of the committee specially formed for this work. Dr. V. P. Ramaswami has specially trained himself for the work under Dr. R. G. Cochrane. He is doing out-patient work as well as conducting surveys of villages.

The first survey in Kandachipuram schools of 655 children revealed that apart from leprosy there was a high incidence of scabies and guinea work. Over 100 children have to be followed up and 30-40 treated for leprosy. In Madavilagam village 18 definite cases of leprosy have been discovered out of 593 inhabitants. Four of these are infective and fourteen neutral. Infection is spread by indiscriminate contact of infective cases with children.

In Adukkam village 15 cases have been found out of a population of 323. Five of these are infective. Two other places have 29 and 15 definite cases respectively of which 9 are lepromatons.

Dr. Ramaswami has also surveyed five more villages and has so far detected 300 cases out of which 157 only, being women or children under seven years, can benefit from the Trust.

Prof. T. N. Jagdisan's summary points out that poor men patients though in need of attention cannot get the benefit of the funds. This defect cannot be removed by any departure from the terms of the Trust, but the professor can easily raise a small fund locally and bring them within the scope of his work.

New Delhi, 4-4-1946

*Harijan*, 14-4-1946, p. 80

## 157. ON NO ACCOUNT TO BE SHUNNED

(Originally appeared under the title "Leprosy and Contamination".)

Dr. R. G. Cochrane, Principal of the Missionary Medical College for Women in Vellore writes:

My good friend Mr. Jagadisan has brought to my attention a paragraph in the *Hindu* of Madras of August the 26th. It reads "Bihar is going to have a separate jail for the leper prisoners, it is learnt to save other prisoners from contamination. Arrangements are being made in the first instance, it is understood, to segregate about 100 such prisoners at Govindpur in the District of Manbhum. I was so pained by the news that I could not resist the urge to write to you, for, you have been a consistent champion of those who suffer from leprosy and indeed, of all persons in society who are undeservedly stigmatized. I feel that I should write to you and say that it will be a great pity if the Bihar Government were to build a separate jail for prisoners with leprosy. It is a gratuitous measure whose only effect will be the strengthening of the public's prejudice against leprosy. On examination, it is likely to be found that 80% at least of the prisoners with leprosy are non-infective, and therefore, there is absolutely no reason, why these should be separated from the other prisoners. With regard to the prisoners who suffer from infective leprosy, the main precautions are that the prisoner should not come into contact with healthy persons during night and should avoid, direct, close contact during the day. As leprosy is a mildly contagious disease, even its infective types, a prisoner with infective leprosy could be more easily dealt with than prisoners with other infective diseases. And yet, if the report is true, the Bihar Government is going to act on the fear of "contamination". The very use of this word indicates a mediaeval attitude to leprosy. It is a great pity that statements are being continually published to suggest that leprosy patients are contaminated in some way or other.

We in Madras, enthusiastically supported by Mr. Jagadisan, are doing all we can to protest against the discrimination of the patient suffering from leprosy on the grounds of social stigma. It is no more of a disgrace to get leprosy than to get measles, and not until the general public realize that it is not a rapidly spreading plague, as it is commonly believed to be, shall we make any advance in the control of leprosy. I am very grateful to hear from Mr. Jagadisan that you have now put leprosy work as an integral part of the Nation's Constructive

Programme. Your remark that the leprosy patient is as much a part of society as the tallest of us, moves me deeply. May I hope that India's leaders will follow your footsteps and do the right thing by the leprosy patient?

It is to be hoped that the information about Bihar is not true and that, if it is, this letter of his will dissipate the fear of leprosy. "Superstitions die hard." In this land of faith and superstitions, both flourish abundantly. Hence, they often intermingle and the contamination of superstitions—a multitude—seems to have overlaid faith so much so that, it is hard to distinguish between the two. But my faith which burns too bright for the army of superstitions to touch it, tells me that leprosy is no contamination. We must learn the laws governing infectious and contagious diseases and obey them.

Dr. Cochrane is, I believe, a medical philanthropist. He knows a great deal about leprosy and lepers. I fancy that the National Governments will not be wrong in accepting his judgment that, of all the diseases of the kind, leprosy is the least among them. In its virulent form, it deprives a patient of his limbs and defies ordinary medical treatment. What nature does is yet unknown. But the ordinary man does not need to bother about this difficult matter. Enough if he realizes that a leper is as much his brother as any other, and he is on no account to be shunned.

New Delhi, 11-9-1946

*Harijan*, 22-9-1946, p. 319

## 158. THE ALLAHABAD CONGRESS HOSPITAL

### AN APPEAL

In June last year Pandit Motilal Nehru visited Bombay and saw the good work that the Congress hospital was doing there. He was impressed by this and, on his return to Allahabad, he expressed a desire that a similar hospital be started in Allahabad also. Soon after he was arrested and sentenced to imprisonment, but even in his absence efforts were made to carry out his wishes. Largely owing to the generosity of friends in Bombay, some funds and material were collected for the proposed hospital. On Pandit Motilalji's discharge from prison, the hospital was formally started in a wing of Swaraj Bhawan. He nominated a committee consisting of the signatories to this appeal for collecting and controlling the funds, and a managing committee for the hospital consisting of the three signatories and Dr. R. N. Banerji and Dr. Jairaj Behari of Allahabad. The hospital has been functioning now for over six months and has done good work both in the indoor and outdoor departments.

The limited funds collected have now been exhausted and the committee had to consider whether it should continue the hospital or not. On the advice of Mahatma Gandhi and other friends it has been decided to continue it. It was felt that it would be unfortunate if the good work which the hospital was carrying on should be discontinued, and further that it was likely that special demands may be made on the hospital in the future. The committee and the friends consulted also felt that they should carry out Pandit Motilalji's wishes in the matter.

This appeal for financial assistance is therefore being issued in the hope that there will be a generous response to it.

The question of having a permanent hospital in Swaraj Bhawan has not been decided yet. But the Committee would like to have sufficient funds for the carrying on of the hospital for at least three years. The estimated expenditure on the hospital, if it is run on its present limited scale is rupees one thousand a month.

Besides serving a useful purpose the hospital is carrying out the deceased's wishes. But it is not intended to take the place of any national memorial which may be raised to him. The larger question of a memorial has not been raised yet as the leaders felt that the energy of

the nation should not, at present, be diverted from the national struggle and in any case it could only be taken up by an All India Committee of a far more representative character.

Donations should be sent to Pandit Mohanlal Nehru, Treasurer, Congress Hospital, Swaraj Bhawan.

KAMLA NEHRU,

MOHANLAL NEHRU

May 11, 1931

RAMAKANT

MALAVIYA

[I hope that the foregoing appeal will receive a quick response from the public. It has been purposely not signed by any except those who are connected with the management of the hospital, because it is not to be in any way considered as a national memorial. But the appeal is not the less important on that account. Thirty-six thousand rupees to carry out a wish of Pandit Motilal Nehru is a paltry sum. I hope, therefore, that there will be no delay and no hesitation in responding to the appeal made by Shrimati Kamla Nehru and her co-signatories. The reader should know that from the commencement of the hospital she has been its soul. The public may wonder why the appeal treats the hospital as a temporary thing. The idea is to watch how the institution works and by actual experience to know what will be the real need. Moreover, whilst everything is in the melting pot, it was thought that the wisest course would be for the time being to be satisfied with meeting the daily need.—M. K. G.]

*Young India*, 14-5-1931, p. 109

## SECTION SIX : AMENITIES TO RAIL AND STEAMER PASSENGERS

### I. RAIL TRAVELLING

#### 159. PASSENGERS' DAY

(From "Notes")

It is a good idea to observe a Passengers' Day and review the progress of improvement in the condition of millions of passengers who use either the railways or the waterways connecting one part of India with another. In my palmy days when I enjoyed the privilege of travelling 3rd-class I used to have piuch to say about the condition of 3rd-class passengers whether by rail or water. But on principle of 'out of sight out of mind' not experiencing in my own person the difficulties of 3rd class railway travelling I have ceased to write upon it. But the forthcoming Passengers' Day reminds one of one's duty toward the dumb millions who are packed like sardines in ill-constructed dirty compartments and whose wants nobody ever cares to look after. The difficulties due to the indifference of railway authorities are however one part of the distress. It would be well to lay stress upon that part; but the indifference and ignorance of the passengers themselves are almost equally responsible for their difficulties. The speakers therefore at the meetings that would be held in different parts of the country would do well to emphasize the duty of passengers towards themselves. Our insanitary habits, want of consideration for our neighbours, insistence upon getting into overcrowded compartments and a host of other bad habits must be removed before 3rd class railway travelling can be made bearable. It requires great vigilance and there is risk of an association that deals with the internal aspect of the question even courting unpopularity in the initial stages. I wish every success to the effort of Mr. Jivraj Nensi and his fellow organizers.

*Young India*, 19-11-1925, p. 397

## 160. NOT SO TERRIBLE AFTER ALL

(From a letter to Shri G. K. Gokhale)

RAJKOT,

*March 4, 1902*

DEAR PROFESSOR GOKHALE,

Having passed five nights in the train, I reached here on Wednesday last, i.e. only a day later than I would have, had I not stopped at the intermediate station.

It was with very great difficulty that I found a seat in one of the intermediate carriages and that after I offered to stand the whole night if necessary. As it was, it was merely a trick on the part of the friends of some of the passengers. The former had occupied all the spare room with a view to prevent any more passengers from getting in. They got out as soon (as) the guard blew the whistle for the train to go. There was absolutely no room in the 3rd-class carriages. You cannot adopt gentlemen's time and travel 3rd. From Benares, however, I travelled 3rd only. In your words, it was only the first plunge that was difficult, the after-effect was all pleasure. The other passengers and I talked freely and at times became even chummy. Benares is probably the worst station for the poor passengers. Corruption is rampant. Unless you are prepared to bribe the police, it is very difficult to get your ticket. They approached me as they approached others several times and offered to buy our tickets if we would pay them a gratuity (or bribe?). Many availed themselves of the offer. Those of us who would not, had to wait nearly one hour after the window was opened, before we could get our tickets and we would be fortunate at that if we did so without being presented with a kick or two from the guardians of law. At Moghalsarai, on the other hand, the ticket master was a very nice man. He said he knew no distinction between a prince and a peasant.

In the carriages we were packed any how. There was no restriction as to numbers though there were notices in the compartments. Night travelling under such circumstances does become rather inconvenient even for the poor 3rd-class passengers.

There was plague inspection at three different places, but I cannot say it was carried on with any harshness. My experience yet is very little, but the picture that the imagination had drawn of the terrible lot of these passengers has become toned down. Five days can hardly afford sufficient data for drawing a fair conclusion. I feel all the richer and stronger in spirit for the experience which I would resume at the very first opportunity.

\* \* \*

*I remain,*

*Yours truly,*

M. K. GANDHI

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. III, p. 228*

## 161. RAILWAY TRAVELLING IN 1917

[The following is a cutting from die *Times of India* of 1st October 1917, preserved by Shri Chhaganlal Gandhi. There are perhaps some improvements in the conditions since that date. But to a large extent the picture is true even to this day as will be seen from the experience related by Shri G. Sitaramsastry in an article<sup>1</sup> which I hope to publish in the next issue. K.G.M.]

To the Editor of *The Times of India*

Sir,

I have now been in India for over two years and a half after my return from South Africa. Over one quarter of that time I have passed on the Indian trains travelling third-class by choice. I have travelled up north as far as Lahore, down south up to Tranquebar, and from Karachi to Calcutta. Having resorted to third-class travelling among other reasons for the purpose of studying the conditions under which this class of passengers travel, I have naturally made as critical observations as I could. I have fairly covered the majority of railway systems during this period. Now and then I have entered into correspondence with the management of the different railways about the defects that have come under my notice. But I think that the time has come when I should invite the Press and the Public to join in a crusade against a grievance which has too long remained unredressed though much of it is capable of redress without great difficulty.

On the 12th ultimo I booked at Bombay for Madras by the Mail train and paid Rs. 13-9-0. It was labelled to carry 22 passengers. These could only have seating accommodation. There were no bunks in this carriage whereon passengers could lie with any degree of safety or comfort. There were two nights to be passed in this train before reaching Madras. If not more than 22 passengers found their way into my carriage before we reached Poona, it was because the bolder ones kept the others at bay. With the exception of two or three insistent passengers, all had to find their

sleep being seated all the time. After reaching Raichur the pressure became unbearable. The rush of passengers could not be stayed. The fighters among us found the task almost beyond them. The guards or other railway servants came in only to push in more passengers. A defiant Memon merchant protested against this packing of passengers like sardines. In vain did he say that this was his fifth night on the train. The guard insulted him and referred him to the management at the terminus. There were during this time as many as 35 passengers in the carriage during the greater part of it. Some lay on the floor in the midst of dirt and some had to keep standing. A free fight was at one time avoided only by the intervention of some of the older passengers who did not want to add to the discomfort by an exhibition of temper.

On the way, passengers got for tea—tannin water with filthy sugar and a whitish looking liquid, miscalled milk, which gave the water a muddy appearance. I can vouch for the appearance but I cite the testimony of the passengers as to the taste.

Not during the whole of the journey was the compartment once swept or cleaned. The result was that every time you walked on the floor or rather cut your way through the passengers seated on the floor you walked through dirt.

The closet was also not cleaned during the journey and there was no water in the water tank.

Refreshments sold to the passengers were dirty looking handed by dirtier hands, coming out of filthy receptacles, and weighed in equally unattractive scales. These were previously sampled by millions of flies. I asked some of the passengers who went in for these dainties to give their opinion. Many of them used choice expressions as to the quality, but were satisfied to state they were helpless in the matter, they had to take them as they came.

On reaching the station I found that the *ghari* would not take me unless I paid the fare he wanted. I protested and told him I would pay him the authorized fare. I had to turn passive resister before I could be taken. I simply told him he would have to pull me out or call the police.

The return journey was performed in better manner. The carriage was packed already and but for a friend's intervention, I would not have been able to secure even a seat. My admission was certainly beyond the authorized number.

This compartment was constructed to carry passengers but it had constantly 12 in it. At one place an important railway servant swore at a protestant, threatened to strike him and locked the door over the passenger whom he had with difficulty squeezed in. To this compartment there was a closet falsely so called. It was designed as a European closet but could hardly be used as such. There was a pipe in it but no water and I say without fear of challenge that it was pestilentially dirty.

The compartment itself was evil looking. Dirt was lying thick upon the wood-work and I do not know that it had ever seen soap or water.

This compartment had an exceptional assortment of passengers. There were three stalwart Punjabi Mahomedans, two refined Tamilians and two Mahomedan merchants who joined us later. The merchants related the bribes they had to give to procure comfort. One of the Punjabis had already travelled three nights and was weary and fatigued. But he could not stretch himself. He said he had sat the whole day at the Central Station watching passengers giving bribes to procure their tickets. Another said he had himself to pay Rs. 5 before he could get his ticket and his seat. These three men were bound for Ludhiana and had still more nights of travel in store for them.

What I have described is not exceptional, but normal. I have got down at Raichur, Dhond, Sonapur, Chakradharpur, Purulia, Asansol and other junction stations and been at the *Mosqfir Khanas* attached to these stations. They are discreditable looking places where there is no order, no cleanliness but utter confusion and horrible din and noise. Passengers have no benches or not enough to sit on. They squat on dirty floors and eat dirty food. They are permitted to throw the leavings of their food and spit where they like, sit how they like and smoke everywhere. The closets attached to these places defy description. I have not the power adequately to describe them without committing a breach of the laws of decent speech. Disinfecting powder, ashes

or disinfecting fluid are unknown. The army of flies buzzing about them warns you against their use. But a third-class traveller is dumb and helpless. He does not want to complain even though to go to these places may be to court death. I know passengers who fast while they are travelling just in order to lessen the misery of their life in the trains. At Sonapur flies having failed, wasps have come forth to warn the public and the authorities but yet to no purpose. At the Imperial Capital a certain third-class booking office is a Black Hole fit only to be destroyed.

Is it any wonder that plague has become endemic in India? Any other result is impossible where passengers always leave some dirt where they go and take more on leaving.

On Indian trains alone passengers smoke with impunity in all carriages irrespective of the presence of the fair sex and irrespective of the protests of non-smokers. And notwithstanding a bye-law which prevents a passenger from smoking without the permission of his fellow in a compartment which is not allotted to smokers.

The existence of the awful war cannot be allowed to stand in the way of removal of this gigantic evil. War can be no warrant for tolerating dirt and overcrowding. One could understand an entire stoppage of passenger traffic in a crisis like this, but never a continuation or accentuation of insanitation and conditions that must undermine health and morality.

Compare the lot of the first-class passengers with that of the third-class. In the Madras case, the first-class fare is over five times as much as the third-class fare. Does the third-class passenger get one-fifth, even one-tenth, of the comfort of his first-class fellow? It is but simple justice to claim that relative proportions be observed between the cost and the comfort.

It is a known fact that the third-class traffic pays for the ever increasing luxuries of first and second-class travelling. Surely a third-class passenger is entitled at least to the bare necessities of life.

In neglecting the third-class passengers, opportunity of giving a splendid education to millions in orderliness, sanitation, decent composite life, and cultivation of simple and clean tastes is being lost. Instead of receiving an object-lesson in these matters, third-class passengers have their sense of decency and cleanliness blunted during their travelling experience.

Among the many suggestions that can be made for dealing with the evil here described, I would respectfully include this. Let the people in high places, the Commander-in-Chief, the Rajas, the Maharajas, the Imperial Councillors and others who generally travel in superior classes, without previous warning, go through the experience now and then of third-class travelling. We would then soon see a remarkable change in the conditions of third-class travelling and uncomplaining millions will get some return for the fares they pay under the expectation of being carried from place to place with the ordinary creature comforts.<sup>2</sup>

M. K. GANDHI

Ranchi, 25-9-1917

*Harijan*, 23-10-1949, p. 281

\* Omitted from this Collection

<sup>2</sup> The above letter was also addressed by Gandhiji to *The Leader*, Allahabad and is published in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. XIII at pp. 547-551

## 162. HARDSHIPS OF THIRD CLASS RAILWAY PASSENGERS

SATYAGRAHASHRAM, SABARMATI,

*October 31, 1917*

The Secretary to

The Department of Commerce and Industries,

Delhi

Sir,

I enclose herewith copy of a letter\* recently addressed by me to the Press on the hardships of 3rd class railway passengers.

The hardships are of two kinds: those which are due to the neglect of the passengers themselves and those that can only be remedied by the Railway companies. They may again be divided into those that can be dealt with without any great extra cost and those that can be dealt with only on a large outlay of money.

I recognize that the hardships falling under the last category cannot be effectively dealt with whilst the war is going on. They are due to insufficiency of accommodation. On this I venture to suggest that some check can certainly be exercised in the issue of tickets, and guards or other officials should be instructed to regulate the traffic. As it is, the strongest find their own seats without any supervision and the weaker ones often find themselves left out. Officials should not only be instructed to regulate the traffic, but they should also be required to examine the state of the compartments from time to time and see that no passengers appropriate space to the discomfort of other passengers.

In so far as the passengers are themselves responsible for the evils I have described, notices should be pasted on the walls of the carriages and put up at the stations giving detailed instructions regarding the use of closets, etc. Bye-laws prohibiting

dirty or offensive practices may be cautiously enforced. A book of instructions in the different vernaculars may be issued together with long-journey tickets and otherwise given gratis on demand. Go-operation of volunteers should be invited from the general public in the prosecution of this educative work.

As to the other grievances:

Station inspectors or the other officials should be directed to have the carriages and closets swept and cleaned at every junction or principal station.

Station closets ought to be kept scrupulously clean, earth and disinfectants should be used every time closets are used. This presupposes constant employment of *bhangis* at every station. In my humble opinion, the importance of the matter demands such employment. It may be a wise thing to set apart special privies which any passenger may use on payment of a nominal fee. At present there is no privacy provided in the station latrines. I think that at a very small cost this can be provided.

There should be bathing facilities at all principal stations.

I understand that only licensed vendors are permitted to sell refreshments at the stations. A written tariff should be provided and cleanliness of refreshments and vendors should be ensured before the granting of licences. Third-class refreshment rooms should not be allowed to be in the dirty state in which they are at present, but should be kept scrupulously clean.

Untold difficulties are put in the way of the passengers getting their tickets on application. Often they are issued only a short time before the departure of trains. The result is bribery, a fight among passengers for the purchase of tickets and disappointment to many.

Waiting rooms at the principal stations need complete overhauling. There ought to be regulations for the observance of passengers. Benches should be provided in large numbers. They should be cleaned several times during the day. Rooms should be provided for the use of the fair sex.

In my humble opinion, all the evils except the provisions of extra carriages can be dealt with at a very small additional cost to the railway administrations. What is needed is sympathy and due recognition of the rights of third-class passengers who provide the largest part of the income from passenger traffic.

Though the grievances here adverted to are old, they are pressing enough to demand immediate attention. I hope that your department will take up the matter at an early date. My services are at its disposal to be utilized in any manner it may deem fit.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. XIV, p. 45*

*\*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. XIII, pp. 547-551*

## 163. AGONY OF THIRD-CLASS TRAVELLERS

(From an address at All-India Social Service Conference held at Calcutta on 31-12-1917)

Nothing perhaps affords such splendid facility to every worker, wholetime or otherwise, for effective service as the relief of agony through which the 3rd class railway passengers are passing. I feel keenly about this grievance not because I am in it, but I have gone to it as I have felt keenly about it. This matter affects millions of our poor and middle-class countrymen. This helpless toleration of every inconvenience and insult is visibly deteriorating the nation, even as the cruel treatment to which we have subjected the so-called depressed classes has made them indifferent to the laws of personal cleanliness and the very idea of self-respect. What else but downright degradation can await those who have to make a scramble always like mad animals for seats in a miserable compartment, who have to swear and curse before they can speak through the window in order to get standing room, who have to wallow in dirt during their journey, who are served their food like dogs and eat it like them, who have ever to bend before those who are physically stronger than they and who, being packed like sardines in compartments, have to get such sleep as they can in a sitting posture for nights together? Railway servants, swear at them, cheat them. On the Howrah-Lahore service, our friends from Kabul fill to the brim the cup of the misery of the third-class travellers. They become lords of the compartments they enter. It is not possible for anyone to resist them. They swear at you on the slightest pretext, exhaust the whole of the obscene vocabulary of Hindi language. They do not hesitate to belabour you if you retort or in any way oppose them. They usurp the best seats and insist on stretching themselves full length even in crowded compartments. No compartment is deemed too crowded for them to enter. The travellers patiently bear all their awful impertinence out of sheer helplessness. They would, if they could, knock down the man who dared to swear at them as do these Kabulis. But they are physically no match for the Kabulis and every Kabuli considers himself more than a match for any number of travellers from the plains. This is not right. The effect of

this terrorizing on the national character cannot but be debasing. We the educated few ought to deliver the travelling public from this scourge or for ever renounce our claim to speak on its behalf or to guide it. I believe the Kabulis to be amenable to reason. They are a God-fearing people. If you know their language, you can successfully appeal to their good sense. But they are spoilt children of nature. Cowards among us have used their undoubted physical strength for our nefarious purposes. And they have now come to think that they can treat poor people as they i choose and consider themselves above the law of the land. Here is work enough for social service. Volunteers for this class of work can board trains and educate the people to a sense of their duty, call in guards and other j officials in order to remove over-crowding, see that passen- gers leave and board trains without a scramble. It is clear i that until the Kabulis can be patiently taught to behave themselves, they ought to have a compartment all to themselves and they ought not to be permitted to enter any other compartment. With the exception of providing additional plant, every one of the other evils attendant on railway travelling ought to be immediately redressed. It is no answer that we have suffered the wrong so long. Prescriptive rights cannot accrue to wrongs.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. XIV, p. 121, at p. 124

## 164. RAILWAY PASSENGERS

(This was originally published as a pamphlet in Gujarati and distributed gratis in Gujarat during 1916-17. The following is an English translation thereof. A summary of this pamphlet appeared in *Kathiawar Times*, dated 26-7-1916.)

No one doubts that railway passengers are put to many hardships. Against many of these, we have the remedy in our own hands. Unity is in the air all over India. If we did no more than resort to this, quite a few of the hardships could be overcome. This article makes some suggestions on how they could be. Those into whose hands this may fall are requested to read it carefully and afterwards to read it out to others who cannot read. The reader will easily guess that the cost of paper and printing must have been met by someone with a public spirit and, in view of that at any rate, he will realize that the article should not be treated lightly merely because he has got it free.

*To the authorities, I shall say:*

If you are a station master, you can remove many of the hardships of passengers.

Using courtesy in your dealings with poor passengers you can set an example to your subordinates.

If you are a ticket collector, with a little reflection you will realize that the poor should receive the same time and attention that you give to first and second-class passengers.

The railways depend on the poor for their existence and you owe your salaries largely to the money received from them.

Some booking clerks abuse the poor, address them slightly and on top of that delay issuing tickets to them as long as they can. This is no way of showing one's importance. Issuing a ticket without delay to anyone asking for it saves the latter's time and you lose nothing by doing so.

If you are a policeman, you should refrain from accepting bribes, resolve not to shove the poor people about but behave towards them with kindness. You should understand that you are servants of the people and not their masters. It is your duty to help them out of their difficulties. That you should yourself become the cause of difficulties is sheer injustice.

*To educated passengers, I shall say:*

Most of you like showing that you are educated and that you have some patriotism in you. If you use your patriotism in doing good to the illiterate and poor passengers with whom you come into contact, you will be doing national service without having to search for an occasion.

For instance, if a passenger is being ill-treated, you can help him in a number of ways. Even if you do not generally travel third-class, your doing so occasionally just to get experience is likely to benefit the third-class passengers very much.

If you go, in their midst, without disclosing your status, for purchasing tickets etc., it will be easy for you to find a remedy for the difficulties you will experience in the process and the facilities offered to you will be available before long to the people at large.

Sometimes educated people themselves become the cause of injustice to third-class passengers. They are impatient to get their tickets first, may enjoy special facilities in trains and occupy more space than they need; the poor are put to difficulties in consequence. The educated class must certainly refrain from making itself a cause of injustice in this manner, if it can do nothing else.

It is your duty to write to the authorities about any deficiencies that you may observe on stations or trains.

*To passengers in general, I shall say:*

No matter what category of passengers you belong to, educated or uneducated, rich or poor, if you bear in mind the following suggestions, 75 per cent, of the hardships of passengers will disappear in a moment:

1. You will lose nothing, and others will gain through your restraint, if instead of pushing yourself forward when getting to the platform or boarding the train, you don't mind being the last and act accordingly.
2. Having taken your seat in the train, you should know that, up to the number indicated, others have as much right to seat (in the compartment) as you. Hence if you stop others from entering, you will violate the moral law through falsehood and will also break a railway regulation.
3. If you have with you only as much luggage as third-class passengers are entitled to carry, others will be able to sit in comfort. If you can afford to carry more luggage, you had better put the excess in the luggage van and pay the additional charge.
4. Your luggage should be of a kind that can be easily stowed away under a bench or placed on the shelf.
5. If you are well-to-do and have no philanthropic intentions, you should seek your comfort by purchasing an upper-class ticket. By purchasing a third-class ticket out of sheer miserliness, you will make yourself a burden on the poor. But even if you do not want to travel upper class, you should certainly not use your funds so as to make your luggage and yourself a nuisance to your fellow-passengers.
6. You should bear in mind that all long-distance passengers are entitled to some facility for sleeping; you can have, therefore, no more than your share of sleep.
7. If you are a smoker, you should consider that, being in a train, you can smoke only with others' permission and so as not to inconvenience them.
8. If, when you want to spit, you do so where the passengers rest their feet, the place will become extremely dirty and there is a risk of one contracting some

disease; those other passengers, moreover, who are particular about rules of cleanliness will find your dirty habit intolerably painful.

9. If you use the railway lavatories with due care, everyone will be the happier for that. In using them carelessly, you take no thought of the passengers who may follow you.
10. Instead of making distinctions when you travel, such as that you are a Brahmin or a Vaishya or a Shudra and someone else belongs to another class or that you are a Hindu and another a Muslim, or that you are from Bombay Presidency and another from Madras Presidency, and creating ill-will in consequence, if you think of all as children of India who have for the nonce assembled under one roof, and cherish a brotherly feeling for all, you will be happy this very moment and bring glory to India.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. XIII, p. 284*

## 165. THIRD-CLASS TRAVELLING

Now that I have resumed third-class travelling after many years, my eyes are opened to the fact that the condition is about the same that ruled five years ago. Third-class carriages and especially latrines are just as dirty and unkempt as they ever were. Nor have the third-class passengers learnt better manners. They are as indifferent as before about their own comforts and those of others. They would squat in the passage and in the corridor and remain there not minding passengers from the other parts of the compartment treading on their clothes, and even themselves in their passage to and fro. They will not take the trouble of getting up for the time being to give them passage. They are utterly oblivious of the simple rules of sanitation. Let us not mistake this kind of indifference for virtue or regard it as a sign of India's proverbial patience and forbearance. Indifference to physical comforts is good when it comes from enlightenment; but it is criminal when it is the result of slothfulness or ignorance or both. Indifference to sanitation is ever a crime. Such indifference as one notices during railway travelling is surely due to slothfulness, ignorance of the elementary laws of sanitation and want of consideration for others' feelings. Here then is work for the Railway Passengers' Association. It is no doubt absolutely necessary to complain against the indifference on the part of authorities to the well-being of third-class railway passengers. But I am afraid that no amount of complaints and protests will wake them to a sense of duty unless the third-class passengers themselves demand redress and show energetic impatience of neglect on the part of the authorities. Nearly three-fourths of the discomfort of third-class travelling can be avoided without much extra expense. Proper cleaning of the compartments and latrines and ensuring obedience to the bye-laws framed for the comfort of passengers will remove the most glaring difficulties of third-class travelling which should be as free from risk as first-class and second-class travelling is or is supposed to be. If third-class passengers are duly instructed about the need of insistence upon elementary comfort and to complain about it every time that avoidable inconvenience is felt, the disgraceful condition under which third-class travelling has to be undertaken can be

remedied. This instruction is, I know, much more difficult to impart than the simple task of swearing at the authorities and sending a basketful of complaints. But it is just this more difficult task which it is the duty of the Railway Passengers' Association to take up. It should have courteous, well-versed, patient and cultured agents travelling third class, reading notices to the third-class passengers, telling them of the insanitation and the discomfort they should feel and strive to remove insisting, wherever possible, upon immediate redress. These missionaries if one may use that term for the class of persons I have in mind, should become a binding link between the railway officials and the passengers, they may not treat the former as the natural enemy of the latter but regard them as trustees for their welfare. Much improvement can be effected by tactfulness on the part of these missionaries.

Then, there is the larger question of improvement in accommodation by the construction of more and better carriages. This no doubt involves considerable expense. But as it is the third-class railway traffic which is the most paying part of railway administration, it is due to that vast travelling public that at least a minimum of comfort is insured for them.

To mention one glaring instance, the latrines on the JJ other systems that I know are somewhat tolerable; but the latrines in the Jodhpur State Railway are, in my opinion, absolutely intolerable, insanitary and unfit for human use. They are little black holes without ventilation; without light, without latches to close the doors from inside. A bulky man like say Maulana Shaukat Ali would not perhaps be able to enter the latrines or having entered would certainly not be able to use it. Lean man like me cannot use them without the clothes touching the walls. The whole construction was evidently conceived without reference to the primary human want. It is up to the railway management to alter this disgraceful state of things without a moment's delay. The State railways should really be a model to the British system; whereas the actual state of things is the other way. The construction of the State railways that I know is any day inferior to the construction of the carriages in British India.

*Young India*, 14-2-1929, p. 52

## 166. OVERCROWDING IN TRAINS

Sjt. T. N. Sharma of Anandaniketan, Andhradesha, writes:

I want your advice in the following affair. Sjt. S. Shriharirav a young man has been collecting funds for our Ashram for the last two months in the railway trains. Seeing the overcrowding in the trains, he was reporting to the guards for sometime. But when he found that his words were not heeded, he began to pull the chain. The railway people were very much annoyed, but they could not do anything as there were decisions in several High Courts that pulling the chain for overcrowding was legitimate. Sjt. Shriharirav one day pulled the chain and stopped the mail train when the Agent of the M.S.M. Rly was travelling. The Agent also got annoyed at first, but seeing Sjt. Shriharirav's bold stand promised redress. Seven additional ticket collectors were appointed for each train to avoid overcrowding. Extra carriages also were attached. People were feeling quite happy and were congratulating Sjt. Shriharirav. This lasted only for a fortnight. Suddenly on the 1st instant, Sjt. Shriharirav was arrested under a warrant issued by the Joint Magistrate of Rajahmundry under Section 110(e) which, we hear, is applied to habitual offenders. Since the arrest, the railway people have abolished the staff and the overcrowding continues as before. The case is posted for the 14th. Now many people are prepared to follow Sjt. Shriharirav and continue to do so till the grievance is redressed. This they are prepared to do irrespective of their political creed without having any connection with the Congress or any of our institutions. The procedure they want to adopt is this to give a notice to the District Traffic Superintendent that the chain will be pulled from the 1st of the next month in an organized way by various persons; one each day, if the grievance is not redressed.

In my opinion the idea of stopping the train by pulling the chain to avoid overcrowding is quite sound. If the railway authorities enforce the rule of numbers for 1st and 2nd-class compartments, why will they not for the 3rd class? The overcrowding is at times suffocating as was described the other day by Shrimati Mira behn in these pages. It is largely greed of profits that makes the authorities indifferent to the comfort of the uncomplaining submissive 3rd-class passengers who provide the profits, not 1st and

2nd-class passengers. It will be interesting to know why Sjt. Shriharirav is being prosecuted if the facts are as stated above.

*Young India*, 13-2-1930, p. 55 at p. 56

## 167. AMENITIES TO THIRD-GLASS TRAVELLERS

(During the pilgrimage to Madras and Palni, a document containing 16 demands of the workers of the S. I. Railway was handed over to Gandhiji at a large meeting of labourers at Golden Rock. Demand No. 10 was as follows: "Rebuilding of third-class carriages so as to provide better facilities for passengers such as bathrooms, fans, and sleeping accommodation for long distance travel etc." The comment of Gandhiji on this demand is reproduced below from the article titled "Some Labour Questions".)

Item No. 10, I would consider quite extravagant. By far the largest number of passengers belong to the 3rd class and I have no doubt they deserve progressively better treatment, not the 1st and 2nd class. Railway cars of the not distant future will have no classes. Classless society is the ideal, not merely to be aimed at but to be worked for and, in such society, there is no room for classes or communities. Until that time is arrived at, 1st and 2<sup>nd</sup> class comforts should be standardized and lowered where necessary and all attention bestowed upon 3rd-class passengers. But I cannot visualize a time when 3rd-class carriages, no matter how distant the journey may be, can carry bathing accommodation for tens of thousands of travellers. What is required is proper bathing arrangements for 3rd-class passengers at railway stations. 3rd-class passengers are the most neglected in India. Railway cars and railway stations should be utilized for proper education of the public in sanitation and cleanliness. This is not the case today. And the quicker Hindu and Mohamedan tea or water distinctions disappear the better. Why should the State recognize these unnatural and irreligious distinctions? Those who consider themselves defiled by service rendered by persons not belonging to their own persuasion may well be left to their own resources.

The Association for Railway Passengers' Relief should certainly ventilate grievances before the authorities. Their main work should be to conduct sustained education among the passengers as to their own duty towards one another and about observing laws of cleanliness and hygiene.

Sevagram, 8-2-1946

*Harijan*, 17-2-1946, p. 9

## 168. TICKETLESS TRAVELS AND OTHER EVILS

(From "Gandhiji's Post-prayer Speeches")

Gandhiji next referred to the ticketless travel which had become a common disease these days. People evidently thought that under independence travelling by trains or buses was free for all. As a result of the ticketless travel Government had already incurred a loss of nearly 8 crores of rupees. Who was to bear the loss?. If things like these continued India would be ruined. If the railway earnings ran into crores, it was equally true that the expenses of running trains were no less heavy. If, therefore, such things continued much longer, stark ruin faced India. He had heard that things in Pakistan were no better.

Gandhiji then impressed on the audience the necessity of observing the laws of sanitation in railway compartments. Spitting within the compartments was an instance in point. He also deprecated disregard of railway rules like pulling the alarm signals without sufficient cause.

If he were at the head of the railway administration, Gandhiji said, he would advise the railway management to tell the public that unless they purchased tickets trains would be stopped and they would resume journey only if the passengers willingly paid the fares due.

*Harijan*, 9-11-1947, p. 399

## 169. SMOKING IN RAILWAY COMPARTMENTS

(Originally appeared under the title "Smoking Nuisance".)

A correspondent writes:

Section 110 of the Indian Railway Act says:

Any person smoking without consent of his fellow passengers in any railway carriage not provided for the purpose shall be punished with fine not exceeding rupees: twenty, and if he persist in so smoking, may be removed by any railway servant from the premises of the railway.

Why do not the authorities enforce it? Why do not the passengers enforce it?

In this case at any rate the authorities are not to blame. Unless the passengers affected complain, the railway authorities can take no action. The passengers can do much to abate the nuisance which is very real. The smoker all the world over is perhaps the most inconsiderate of all the slaves of habit. He takes it for granted that everybody else smokes or ought to. He will part with many things before he will part with his pipe. He will spit anywhere and smoke in your very face and expect you to enjoy the smoky curl that mounts up in front of you. And it would be the height of insolence if you were to protest against the enjoyment thus thrust on you. Our proverbial docility enables the Indian smoker to outdo his foreign companions in indifference. And so the smoker in India appears to have acquired a prescriptive right to make of himself a nuisance. Who can deny that he is in a majority? For of the travelling public almost every other man one meets with is smoking tobacco in one form or other. The only remedy is for volunteers to come into being, who will courteously ask the offending smokers to desist from smoking, and then if need be, to report to the authorities. Of course the best course is as elsewhere to set apart smoking compartments or perhaps to reserve compartments for non-smokers.

*Young India*, 27-2-1930, p. 70

## 170. HINDU AND MUSALMAN TEA ETC.

Hindu and Musalman tea is sold at railway stations. Separate arrangements for meals for the two communities are sometimes made and none seem to be there for Harijans. All this is a sign of our pitiable condition and constitutes a blot on British administration. One can understand their not interfering in religious matters but for them to allow separate arrangements for tea, water, etc. for the two communities is to set the seal of approval on separatism. Railways and railway travelling offer a golden opportunity which could be used for social reform and for educating the public in sanitation and hygiene, good manners and communal unity. Instead, however, an utter neglect of and indifference to these desiderata are shown. Railway travel serves to strengthen rather than mitigate evil customs and bad habits. First and second-class passengers are pampered, luxurious habits encouraged. Third class passengers on whom the railway revenues largely depend are denied even elementary amenities and exposed to all kinds of hardship. In either case weakness is exploited. And when, in addition to this, separation and untouchability are recognized by the railway authorities, it is the very limit. If any passenger wishes to impose restrictions on himself he is at liberty to do so at his own expense and suffer, may be, even hunger and thirst. But let him not demand special facilities for himself from railway authorities.

That vegetarians and non-vegetarians should be catered for is another matter. That is already being done.

Poona, 7-3-1946

(From *Harijansevak*)

*Harijan*, 17-3-1946, p. 48

## 171. HINDU PANI AND MUSLIM PANI

A stranger travelling in Indian trains may well have a painful shock when he hears at railway stations for the first time in his life ridiculous sounds about *pani*, tea and the like being either Hindu or Muslim. It would be repulsive now that the Government at the Centre is wholly national and a well-known Indian in the person of Asaf Ali Saheb is in charge of Transport and Railways. It is to be hoped that we shall soon have the last of the shame that is peculiarly Indian. Let no one imagine that Railways being under a Muslim, Hindus may not get justice. In the Central and Provincial Governments, there is or should be no Hindu, Muslim or any other communal distinctions. All are Indians. Religion is a personal matter. Moreover, the members of the Cabinet have set up a wholesome convention that they should always meet at the end of the day's work and take stock of what each member has done. It is team-work in which the members are jointly and severally responsible for one another's work. It is not open to any member to say that a particular thing is not his work because it is no part of his portfolio. We have a right therefore to assume that this unholy practice of having separate everything for every community at railway stations will go. Scrupulous cleanliness is a desideratum for all. If taps are used for all liquids there need be no compunctions felt by the most orthodox about helping themselves. A fastidious person may keep his own *lota* and cup and receive his milk, tea, coffee or water through a tap. In this there is no interference with religion. No one is compelled to buy anything at railway stations. As a matter of fact many orthodox persons fast for water and food during travel. Thanks we still breathe the same air, walk on the same mother earth.

All communal cries at least at railway stations should be unlawful.

As I have often said in these columns trains and steamers are the best media for the practical education of the millions of travellers in spotless cleanliness, hygiene, sanitation and camaraderie between the different communities of India. Let us hope that the Cabinet will have the courage to ac<sup>^</sup>.up to their convictions and may

confidently expect the hearty co-operation of the railway staff and the public in making this much-needed reform a thorough success.

New Delhi, 12-10-1946

*Harijan*, 20-10-1946, p. 361

## 2. STEAMER TRAVELLING

### 172. INDIAN DECK-PASSENGERS

(Originally appeared in *Indian Opinion* dated 2-6-1906 under the title "Indian Passengers".)

Of late our Gujarati correspondence columns have been full of complaints from Indian deck-passengers who so largely patronize the steamers of the German East Africa Company. Our correspondents have complained of overcrowding, insufficient sanitary arrangements, and general want of consideration for deck-passengers. Some of them state that the passengers are very much inconvenienced whenever the steamers touch any port. They are then without any cover, and are called upon to shift their luggage. We draw the attention of the local agents of the Company to these complaints. In many respects, we are aware that a certain amount of inconvenience is inseparable from the mode of travelling that the poor Indian passengers are compelled to select. It is impossible to expect much from accommodation on deck. At the same time, it is a notorious fact that the deck-passenger traffic is the most lucrative and least troublesome. It, therefore, behoves the Company's managers to ensure as much comfort as is possible in the circumstances for the deck-passengers, if only for mercenary reasons.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. V, p.344*

## 173. DECK-PASSENGERS

I have already recounted my experience of how the Immigration Officer at Delagoa Bay behaves. One reason why we must suffer this is the behaviour of deck-passengers. By their general deportment they have created an impression that one can with impunity harass Indians in any way one likes. From my few days' experience of deck (travel) I realized that such criticism is not altogether unjust.

There seems to be no limit to the filthiness of deck passengers. Even though facilities for bathing are provided on the ship, many of them rarely take a bath. They feel they cannot bathe in brine from the sea. This is only superstition, but they have clung to it. Some of them bathe only once in a week due to sheer laziness. Many Indians on deck do not change at all and look very slovenly. Many spit right where they happen to be sitting. They have no thought for others' convenience. One of them spat over Mr. Kallenbach's head where he sat. The deck is so covered with leavings and spittle that one shrinks from walking barefoot over it, and if one does, there is every danger of slipping. They also quarrel with one another for places. They foul the latrines by using them so carelessly that even those who observe the minimum of cleanliness cannot- but feel revulsion. If this is how we live, no wonder the ship's officers treat us with contempt. And that is precisely what happens.

Furthermore, even those Indians who ought not to be travelling deck-class, do so. I believe that, when these Indians who are wealthy and well known as businessmen travel deck-class, through sheer miserliness, their rivals, the white traders, cease to be friendly and to think well of them. Imagine the Manager of the Standard Bank, who draws an annual salary of 1,000 or more travelling first-class on a ship. He discovers an Indian client (travelling) on deck in a wretched condition. The Indian keeps a balance of five to seven thousand pounds in his bank and enjoys credit facilities of the order of 25,000. Every Christmas, moreover, he gives the Manager gifts worth twice the deck fare. Though the passenger is clearly far better off, as far as money goes, than the Bank Manager, he travels deck-class. What thoughts must cross the Manager's

mind when he sees his client in these circumstances 1 He cannot but despise us and our money.

It is not my desire that we should imitate the whites in these matters. Even so, I would certainly say that when we compete with them in the trade and the like and demand the same rights that they have, we should, provided we have the means, give them no opportunity to point an accusing finger at us in matters which do not trouble our conscience. It is the duty of well-to-do people to travel first or second class for the sake of their own prestige and that of India as well and to keep the place absolutely clean. In many situations, we forget our honour.

Those who are poor may travel deck-class, but they should do their utmost not to leave any scope for complaint. We shall become happy if we end these self-created difficulties; it will then become the officers' duty to provide us further facilities, a duty they can escape only by fulfilling it.

If we had acted in this manner right from the outset, the state of deck-passengers would never have been what it is. It is no great to (have to) observe cleanliness, to wear clean clothes and to keep them tidy. It only calls for a little care. But what I have said should not be construed to mean that we must not protest against harassment by the ship's crew nor that whatever they do is right; this is not the construction that must be put on it. On the other hand, on the ship by which I travelled as a deck passenger, I tried to get the right thing done in every circumstance; this is the duty of every passenger who is in a position to do so by virtue of his knowledge of English, etc. A passenger from the *Purnea* brought a few facts (to our notice). If these are correct, it is absolutely necessary that some action be taken to correct this (state of affairs). All that I mean is that we, for our part, should not be at fault. If we are ourselves blameless, our complaints will receive a better hearing. Bathing arrangements, whether they are inadequate or totally lacking; lavatories, whether they are too few in number or foul and exposed; meagre protection against the cold or the heat; inconvenience as regards cooking; the absence of special places for women; and the shepherding about of passengers (by the crew) from one spot to

another as though they were cattle none of these can be an excuse or an answer for our inadequacies or our slovenly living, whatever we are. Passengers must do something about these deficiencies. Shipping agents ought to intervene in this matter and get the right thing done. My only aim in narrating my experience is that we should do our duty as men and as Indians, and uphold India's honour in all circumstances.

*The Collected Work of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. XI, p. 426*

## 174. LETTER TO AGENTS OF B.I.S.N. COMPANY

(RANGOON)

March 19, 1915

The Agents,

British India Steam Navigation Company,

Gentlemen,

With Mrs. Gandhi and five others, I was deck-passenger from Calcutta to Rangoon per s.s. *Lunka* which arrived here yesterday. I have been in the habit of travelling as a deck-passenger now for some time. I was surprised to find that the arrangements for deck-passengers on s.s. *Lunka* were the worst I have yet seen. The deck was uncomfortably crowded. There was hardly enough sitting accommodation for the number of passengers taken. My party could not all fully stretch ourselves during night although several passengers were anxious to make us comfortable. I saw many lying anyhow and anywhere thoroughly cramped. The latrines were in a dangerously filthy state. The floor space between the seats and the doors was used as urinals. There seemed to be no outlet for the urine. There was therefore always a pool of urine in front of you. The walls of the latrines I found to be extremely dirty and sticky. The doors were without bolts. The only bathing room I saw was used by the passengers for urinary purposes. There was no check against passengers spitting anywhere. The deck used by them was never washed.

I am sure that a great company like yours do not wish to treat their deck-passengers in the manner described above. May I ask you please to forward this letter to the proper quarters for attention?

I am likely to return to Calcutta next week and may hope that my party and I, in common with the other passengers, will be able to have the ordinary sanitary comforts which a human being should have?

## 175. DECK-PASSENGERS

(From "Notes")

I invite the reader's attention to Mr. Chaturvedi's interesting and instructive experiences in East Africa. His bitter experiences as a deck-passenger revive painful memories. The picture he has given is not overdrawn. Three parties can change the disgraceful state of things:

- (1) The British India Steam Navigation Company,
- (2) The Government,
- (3) The Passengers.

The British India S.N. Company will not worry because its concern is to secure the largest profits. We may expect nothing from the Government, till we have the power to move it. The passengers are the real parties affected. Unfortunately the majority of them are inured even to avoidable hardships. The others secure relief by bribes. It is only when a sensitive passenger travels as a deck-passenger that he causes stir. He does not make reform in the treatment of deck-passengers his life-work and so nothing is achieved. Only when self-respecting persons like Mr. Banarasis insist on proper sanitation and accommodation not merely for themselves but for all, may substantial change be expected.

*Young India*, 10-4-1924, p. 117

## 176. THE INHUMAN SYSTEM

The Imperial Indian Citizenship Association, Bombay circulated during the Christmas week the following note to the press:

It will be remembered that in that month of September last, Reuter reported the death of 37 repatriated Indians on board the s.s. *Sutlej* returning to India from British Guiana. The Hon. Secretary at once telegraphed to the Government of India to supply him with full information regarding the circumstances under which that unfortunate tragedy occurred; and also suggested that the Government of India should institute a public enquiry on the arrival of the boat in Calcutta. It transpires now that an official enquiry was held by the Government of Bengal at the request of the Government of India. The investigations were conducted by Major W.O. Walker, I.M.S., Protector of Emigrants Calcutta and Mr. E. H. Blandy, I.C.S. Collector of the 24 parganas. The report of this official enquiry says that there were 745 passengers on the s.s. *Sully* out of which 37 died. Of these deaths, thirty were due to respiratory diseases and seven to other causes such as heart diseases, nephritis, enteritis, senility and malaria. The report further observes that the deaths were practically confined to old people, who were not strong and who, but for their great anxiety to return to their homeland, would probably have been advised not to undertake so long a voyage. It also shows that the incident was no exception to previous years; as since 1923, deaths among the repatriated Indians on these boats have regularly occurred.

Any comment on this most unsatisfactory report appears to be unnecessary. The tragedy of the deaths of these unfortunate labourers on these boats to and fro British Guiana is by no means of recent origin. As early as 1839, Lord Brougham referring to the mortalities among Indian labourers on the boats bound for British Guiana said, "Mortality and massacre on the voyage far exceeded the African middle passage itself."

The Hon. Secretary of the Association is in correspondence with the Government of India with a view to urge upon them the immediate necessity of the adoption of means for terminating this most scandalous and antiquated state of affairs.

As it was received at a time when I was hardly able to rest my head on a pillow, the note was placed by my assistant in the *Young India* file. It is only during my journey to Sindh that I am able to reach this important note.

The system of Government which holds us in bondage is so wicked that it successfully denies justice by making a pretence of rendering justice. An inordinate mortality occurs on an immigrant ship. Lest it might attract public opinion, a guilty conscience appoints a public inquiry so-called but in reality a white-washing inquiry which finds that such deaths have always occurred on such ships, as if a wrong becomes right by prescription. The committee consists of a person called the "Protector" of Immigrants and a collector both of whom by the very nature of their occupation are inured to such occurrences. I know these boats and I know how the "exiles" are "packed like sardines" (not an expression of my coining but that of those concerned with emigration) in ill-ventilated and worse lighted holes. Add to this the habit of our people to shun air and light when there is the least cold. These habits do not affect them much when perforce they have to be outdoor for the better part of the day. They do affect them mortally as on the s.s. *Sutlej* when they have to be in a dungeon-like closed deck practically during the whole of the voyage.

In my opinion the Imperial Indian Citizenship Association should not allow the matter to rest at the so-called enquiry but having drawn public attention to the terrible mortality should demand an impartial public enquiry which should include an examination by experts of the build of the boats designed for emigration purposes. It will be found then that more than one department was concerned in the tragedy which as is admitted is of periodical occurrence. It will be found too that the greed of the owners of these ships is no less responsible for this mortality than the callous indifference of masters and officers of these ships who regard the emigrants not as fellowmen to be gently treated but as beasts needing no attention. As a matter of fact even beasts are better kept for the simple reason that their owners will exact damages if they are not properly tended.

*Young India*, 7-2-1929, p. 44

## 177. THE SUTLEJ TRAGEDY

Dr. Menon writes as follows from Calcutta regarding my article on the *Sutlej* tragedy:

I have made two trips on the s.s. *Sutlej* as ship's doctor on voyage *out to Fiji from Calcutta* returning with no dudes as the Fiji Government appoints its own "Surgeon-Superintendent" to look after the returning emigrants, which it is bound to do according to the Indian Government Rules of Emigration. I am, therefore, in a way competent to say something on the whole business of the conveyance of emigrants outwards and inwards, and I can subscribe to every word you have said with one or two reservations.

According to the above-mentioned rules, the Government of the colony concerned is responsible for chartering a suitable boat for the conveyance either way of statutory emigrants, that is, indentured labourers; of course, since the abolition of the indenture system, this obligation applies only in the matter of repatriation back to India of those in the colony concerned who claim the right of passage back to India. The ship to be so chartered is surveyed by a "Surveyor" who, among other things, gives a certificate on the carrying capacity and sea-worthiness of the ship, as well as by the Emigration Agent in the Indian port and by the Immigration Agent and a Medical Officer in the colonial port. The would be Surgeon-Superintendent also goes round some time before embarkation more particularly to satisfy himself that all necessary equipment is on board.

On the voyage, the master (and his subordinates) have specific duties to perform. These consist mainly in navigating the ship, custody and issue of provisions etc., and rendering such other reasonable services to enhance the convenience and comfort of the passengers as the Surgeon-Superintendent may from time to time require of the master. The master or his subordinates have nothing direedy to do with the management of or discipline among the emigrants for which the Surg- eon-Superintendent is direcdy and exclusively responsible. Therefore, *there is no occasion for "callous indifference of masters and officers* Consequendy, I want to draw your attention to the implied injustice to some people of which they have not been and cannot be guilty and which is conveyed by your observation. I must here mention that the Surgeon-Superintendent has his own numerous staff of compounders, sirdars, attendants and others selected and appointed by the Immigration Agent in the Colony

responsible and amenable to him and only to him (Surgeon Superintendent) in course of the voyage.

I shall not find fault even with the owners for their greed, for they own ships for profit and profit always connotes greed. And their boat is selected for chartering by the Government of the Colony concerned or its agents acting within the Indian Government Rules on Emigration (and return). So, I really think that the Government of India is primarily and solely to blame for the inhuman system. I do not think that these rules have been materially revised since they were first enacted during the pre-steamship days of sailing ships. Why, these rules do not apparently say anything about life-boat provision; for the *Sutlej* with accommodation for less than 400 persons in the life-boats has been known to carry well-nigh a thousand souls. And the passage out to Fiji after Singapore and that to Guiana after the Cape of Good Hope are not routes usually followed by ships; which means that, in case of accident, ships for rescue can arrive only seven days after the despatch of S.O.S. signals. And if land is conspicuous by its absence along the route from the Gape of Good Hope to the West Indies and British Guiana, the route to Fiji is infested with sharks. And die best life belt becomes unserviceable in less than two days.

"The deaths are due to the feet that the boats which are being chartered now-a-days are absolutely unfit for the voyage between India and the West Indies and Guiana. A reference to any ordinary map of the world will tell one as much. Calcutta is something over 20 degrees north of the Equator; the Cape of Good Hope is more than 35 degrees south of the Equator and Guiana and the West Indies are again a few degrees north of the Equator. That means that a ship, during such a voyage, crosses the Equator and then approaches and crosses the Equator again. Very wide changes in temperature and climate, all in the course of a short period. Besides, one is told that the region of the Atlantic is well known for rough seas and strong winds.

The particular unsuitability of the ships for the Guiana strip is borne out by the fact that mortality is very low among the same number of passengers between India and Fiji. Fiji is only 18 degrees or so south of the Equator, less distant from the Equator than Calcutta. But that does not mean it is all quite or nearly satisfactory on the voyage between India and Fiji. Passengers are packed like sardines, between decks where they have to sleep it is very stuffy even with all of the few port-holes open and space on the main deck is just sufficient for them to sit or stand. If more than a few of them want to stretch their limbs, they will be in

some body's way. The bathings and washing arrangements for a long non-stop voyage of about 25 days (between Calcutta and Fiji) are improvised and endrely unsatisfactory. In fact, we are still in the sailing-ship days except that the propelling force is steam and voyage lasts a slightly shorter period.

Finally it will be instructive to compare these ships, the *Chenab* and the *Sutlej*, with those carrying emigrants from the United Kingdom to Austrilia or even with boats carrying Chinese labourers between China and the Straits Settlements.

This forceful letter in my opinion makes things look uglier than I thought they were. But I cannot acquit the master and officers as easily as Dr. Menon does. Every master of a ship is surely responsible for the welfare of the passengers under his charge. I have known humane masters make the lives of passengers happy in difficult circumstances and I have known callous masters make the lives of their charge needlessly unhappy. Indifferent officers often make the lot of passengers unbearable. But it was not my purpose to distribute the blame. It was enough for me to show that the matter could not be regarded as closed because the Government had held what could not be called an impartial enquiry.

*Young India*, 7-3-1929, p. 78

## 178. DECK-PASSENGERS

Resumption of travelling third-class by rail and deck on sea is reviving old experiences in circumstances somewhat different from the old. When no one or few people knew me, I could easily be lost in the crowd and share its trials and its joys to the full. Now I am a distinguished untouchable. They must make room for me and give me facilities which they will not give to any other fellow passenger. Consequently when I travelled as a deck-passenger on board the s.s. *Arona* on my way to Burma, I was isolated from the rest of my fellows. On the outward voyage the steamship authorities too had conspired with passengers in the scheme of isolation. They had set apart a portion of the second saloon deck for me and insisted on my use of the second saloon latrines. I was therefore able to see little of the inconveniences of the deck-passengers. On the return voyage I happened to have the same boat but the steamship authorities had allowed things to take their natural course and I found myself in the midst of the deck-passengers. Though, therefore, I suffered from the disabilities of Mahatmaship, I was able fairly to share their trials. And I found that as in railway carriages so in steamships, there was not much difference between the condition of travelling in 1915 and 1929 so far as the lowest class travelling is concerned. There was the same squalor, the same indifference, the same overcrowding, the same stenches and the same din and noise as before. I observed on the *Arona* that the space reserved for the passengers was encroached upon by motor cars, fowl and cattle, I felt keenly, the criminal disregard of the welfare and the feelings of human cargo. Indeed it seemed to me that the other cargo both animate and inanimate claimed greater attention inasmuch as negligence in respect thereof by the steamship authorities might involve them in financial loss. The latrines were filthy beyond description. The sorest trial for me was in reaching the latrines to wade through a corridor reeking with urine and on reaching there to find that I could not lock even the half door of the latrine.

As however I was unable owing to my foregoing disability to make an inspection myself I asked one of my companions to make a diligent inspection of the whole of

the deck accommodation and draw up a brief report of such inspection. I reproduce the report below:

There is deck accommodation on board the s.s. *Aronda* for about 1,500 passengers though in the busy season this limitation is overlooked. There are for the use of these 1,500 passengers two tiny bath-rooms and twelve latrines in sets of 4 for men and 2 bath-rooms and 8 latrines for women. This gives an average of one latrine to 75 passengers and one bath-room to 375 passengers.

There is only a sea-water tap in the bath-rooms, but no fresh water tap nor any facility whatever for keeping the clothes in a dry place while one is bathing. Either the bathrooms have no latches or the latter are out of repair. One of the bath-rooms is also used partly as a urinal and probably is- not intended to be shut at all. Its door is permanently fastened with a string to a nail on the wall to prevent it from banging when the ship rolls. The space used as urinal is open to view and is not curtained from the rest of the bath-room by any partition.

The latches of the latrines are in the same condition of disrepair as those of the bath-rooms. The construction of the latrines leaves much to be desired. There is a sort of a running corridor in front of each set of latrines through which the passage to the bath-room also lies. Dirty water and urine from the latrines flow into this corridor, and owing to faulty drainage, instead of discharging itself through the drain, the foul water continues to roll to and fro on the floor with the rolling of the ship.

The twin or the lowe rmost deck is nothing better than a a black hole. It is dark and dingy and stuffy and hot to the point of suffocation. Electric lights have to be kept burning for the most part. There is no direct access to the sea air. The only ventilation is through a couple of air chimneys and a square hole in the ceiling opening on the main deck. There are no refuse bins or receptacles for the rubbish. So the passengers spit, squirt their betel-nut chew and throw orange peels and such rubbish just on the floor. At best this deck is fit only to be used as a cattle-hold instead of accommodating the human cargo that it does.

The fore part of the main deck is sometimes partly used— as was the case last time when we voyaged from Calcutta to Rangoon—as a catde-hold; the space used for the catde being separated from the passengers just by a trellised partition. Similarly at the stern end of the shade deck there is a cage where sheep, goats, ducks and poultry are kept. It is foul and stinky beyond description so much so that it is next to impossible to stand anywhere near it.

There seems to be no hospital arrangement for third- class passengers on board this boat. Nor is there any special accommodation provided for patients from among third-class passengers in case of casual illness or an epidemic outbreak.

The s.s. *Aronda* is owned by one of the biggest steamship companies in the world. It has therefore ample means at its disposal to make deck accommodation decent and progressively comfortable, if only it has the will. I was able to observe the progressive changes in the first saloon and second saloon accommodation, though obviously I could not carefully examine this accommodation. The changes obtruded themselves on my attention. There is no reason why deck-passengers who are really more paying customers than saloon passengers should not have reasonable accommodation and reasonable comforts. I was told by passengers that during that part of the year the voyage was tolerable for deck-passengers but that during the rainy season when the upper deck was almost useless those passengers suffered almost indescribable hardships, most of them fell ill and some even lost their lives as a result of hardships suffered during the voyage. This is wrong for any steamship company; it is doubly wrong for a rich and world-renowned corporation like the combine of P.&O. and B.I.S.N. Companies. The owners and managers should know that day after day the number of intelligent and educated passengers travelling by the deck is increasing. It behoves the Company to anticipate their wants and reasonable desires.

*Young India*, 11-4-1929, p. 116

## 179. B.I.S.N. Co.'S DENIAL

Whilst I am touring in the villages of Andhradesha, I see the following Free Press message in the *Hindu*:

The B.I.S.N. Co. in a statement to the *Englishman*, denies the allegations made by Mahatma Gandhi, who, referring to the sanitary arrangements of the boats plying to Rangoon, termed them as "criminal disregard of the welfare and feelings of the human cargo". The Company says that Mahatma Gandhi thought that a deck-passenger enjoyed second-class privileges. The space termed by Mahatma Gandhi as black hole was the extra space placed at the disposal of the deck-passengers with the hatches open for allowing ventilation. As regards the sanitary arrangements, the Company says there are sufficient men to keep the latrines etc. clean, and no complaint has been sent to the Commander about any inconvenience. There are arrangements for hospital but Mahatma Gandhi and his friends occupied it(?) on their return journey from Rangoon without permission.

I wish I had the full text of the statement before me. But if the Free Press telegram is a fair summary of the B.I.S.N. Company's agent's statement, I am sorry for it. Instead of setting about correcting the disgraceful state of affairs, the agent has chosen to refute my very mild condemnation of the treatment of deck-passengers based on personal observations. I hope I am not so stupid as to expect second-class privileges for deck-passengers but I do resent the unnatural gulf that separates the deck-passenger from the saloon passenger. The deck-passenger may not claim the luxurious conveniences provided for saloon passengers but he is entitled, whether he asks for it or not, to complete sanitary arrangements, and ample and clean accommodation. It should be possible for a person used to cleanly conditions to travel as deck-passenger without running the risk of being ill or without having partially to starve as I had to starve for want of proper latrine arrangements.

A "black hole" may not be claimed as 'extra space placed at the disposal of passengers'. I suggest that deck passengers should be prevented from occupying space not intended for human habitation. I admit that the ordinary deck passenger will take

up any space to which he may have access in order to avoid the feeling of being cramped and in order to have some freedom of movement.

That the Company has sufficient men to keep the latrines etc., clean does not prove that they do keep them clean. My charge is that the latrines were not kept clean, that the half doors were in a state of disrepair, making it impossible to lock them from within, and that they were not enough for the number of passengers taken on board.

I had hoped that the Company's agent would not resort to the trick common in such cases of saying that 'no complaint has been sent to the Commander about any inconvenience'. When the class of passengers who travel deck learn the art of complaining of inconvenience, there would be no occupation for men like me. It is unfortunate that we as a nation will not air our discontent or do it clumsily and that we will put up with inconveniences which a human being should never tolerate. What is worse, I admit that the ordinary deck passenger has no sense of sanitation. But that to me makes it all the more necessary for a carrying company to be extra careful to ensure sanitation on its boats or trains. The last statement in this extraordinary denial, if it correctly represents the original, is a pure libel. I am not in the habit of occupying places to which I am not entitled; such practice is contrary to the habit of a life time. I could not even have unconsciously occupied a space Reserved as hospital accommodation, for it was allotted to me and my friends by the company's officers. There was thus no question of occupying anything without permission. Let me now describe what space I was permitted to occupy. It was the open space on the bow between two life boats and surrounded on all sides by passengers. Nor were I and my company the only passengers on this space. Moreover I observed that the space was used by the officers for lifebuoy practice by the crew. There was no notice anywhere to show that this open space was reserved as hospital accommodation. Let me add too that there was a continuous shower of coal dust blowing over our heads the whole of the three days of the voyage. It was difficult to keep anything clean. If this was hospital accommodation, it reflects little credit either on the company or the medical officer who would be satisfied with an accommodation dangerous even for a healthy person and almost fatal for patients in some illnesses. Needless to say that there

could be no privacy in an open space like this which the passengers and officers must frequently cross and recross. I have seen hospital accommodation for deck-passengers on other boats. This has been a properly fitted cabin with reserved latrine accommodation for patients. Neither I nor my companions noticed anything of this character on s.s. *Aronda*. Lastly if I had usurped this space, surely it was the duty of the captain and the officers to draw my attention to the trespass. I expect the Company to withdraw the libel and apologize for it or substantiate the charge-so recklessly made. Surely it will pay the Company to right the wrong instead of bolstering it by vain denials.

*Young India*, 25-4-1929, p. 132

## 180. A MALICIOUS LIBEL

I have now before me the full text of the *Englishman* interview given by an official by the B.I.S.N. Company. I reproduce it below in full:

Interviewed by a representative of the *Englishman* yesterday, an official of the steamship company said:

Mr. Gandhi had no special privileges when he travelled as deck-passenger on the s.s. *Aronda* but he and his friends occupied a portion of the deck which was actually second-class space. The isolation of Mr. Gandhi from his fellow deck-passengers was by his or his friends' arrangement. The party was allowed to occupy the space they had taken. The steamer authorities did not set apart a special portion of the second saloon deck for his party nor did they insist on his using it and if he used the second-class latrine, it was against orders. Mr. Gandhi was nominally a deck-passenger; there was nothing to prevent him seeing the alleged inconveniences of other deck-passengers.

The din and noise complained of could only have been made by the deck-passengers themselves.

The space reserved for passengers, alleged to have been encroached upon by motor cars, fowl and catde was actually space set aside for the particular purpose of carrying this sort of cargo. It was not intended to be used by passengers. The motor cars referred to were carried not in passengers' sleeping accommodation but on a deck only required when a full complement of passengers is being carried, far more than on that particular voyage.

As to the statement that the latrines were filthy, four topasses are solely employed in keeping the latrines and decks clean. Deck-passengers themselves object to having decks and latrines cleaned but an endeavour is made to keep them clean as far as possible.

Every latrine door has an automatic lock and also latches for closing. There are notices in various places round the decks informing all passengers that if they have any complaint to make they should make it to the Commander when he is doing his rounds. No complaints were made on this voyage. Commanders of steamers personally go round and inspect all passenger decks at least twice a day, sometimes thrice.

It is seldom that the full number of passengers allowed by the Indian Passenger Act is carried and the occasion on which Mr. Gandhi travelled there were only about 400 passengers outward and inward.

#### **HOSPITAL OCCUPIED**

With reference to the tween or lower deck referred to by Mr. Gandhi as a "Black Hole" this is the tween deck which the company always places at the disposal of deck-passengers. It is extra space over and above that required by law even when a full complement of passengers is carried. The lower hatches of this deck are always kept wide open which allows for good ventilation.

The forepart of the main deck which he refers to as being a cattle hold was not intended for passengers but passengers themselves apparently made use of it. The cage referred to at the stern end of the shade deck where sheep, goats, duck and poultry are kept (actually there are never any goats) contains the steamer livestock.

There are arrangements for a hospital on board but Mr. Gandhi and his friends occupied it on the return journey from Rangoon without the permission of the officers of the ship.

In rainy weather which Mr. Gandhi speaks about there is no necessity for deck-passengers to get wet unless they, through their own wish, prefer sleeping on the exercise deck, as all passenger carrying accommodation is under cover.

The original is much more malicious than the Free Press summary. I have had the misfortune to expose many falsehoods but I cannot recall more falsehoods packed in a column of newspaper than I find in this interview. The discerning reader will not fail to detect the falsehoods for himself unless he thinks me to be an inventor of lies and utterly devoid of self-respect. I wish indeed it was true that I had no special privileges when I travelled as deck-passenger from Calcutta to Rangoon. My own companion had gone to buy the tickets and the company issued a special ticket for me. For deck-passenger tickets names are not entered, mine however was a special coupon and bore my name. When I boarded the vessel, the Company's men took me to a place which they said was reserved for me. I thankfully occupied that seat but had no intention whatsoever of using second saloon facilities. I went to the deck latrine. This was noticed by the officers. A messenger thereupon came to me and said that

the first officer did not like my using the deck latrines and that he would like me to use the second-class latrine. I told the messenger that I had chosen to travel deck and that I could accommodate myself to the latrine meant for deck-passengers. This led to a discussion between the message bearing official and myself, and in order not to appear fussy or punctilious I availed myself of the courtesy extended to me. It is not likely that a Company whose officials can be so insulting and reckless in making statements as this interviewed official has been would allow me or my friends to occupy any unauthorized place we liked or to use without interference and at our own sweet will privileges to which we were not entitled.

If the space occupied by deck-passengers was really not intended for them and was intended for fowl, cattle and motor-cars, it means that the former had better accommodation than the human cargo. For this space occupied by sub-human cargo was the best and the most airy. I would certainly have loved to have taken the space occupied by- the motor-cars which blocked the air in addition to occupying the floor space. And the suggestion that the Company's officers permitted without hindrance deck-passengers to occupy space not allotted for the purpose is unworthy of belief. I have known Company's officials kick passengers who dared to occupy space not allotted to them.

The rest of the interview was dealt with by me last week.

I am sorry that my article, the subject matter of the interview, has missed its mark, and instead of resulting in a quiet inquiry by the Company and amelioration of the lot of deck-passengers, has resulted in an insolent exhibition of power derived from wealth and Government patronage. I invite the Company to probe the matter deeply and withdraw the libellous statements, so recklessly made by the, interviewed official and what is more, right the wrong that is being done to the deck-passengers.

*Young India*, 2-5-1929, p. 140

## SECTION SEVEN: NEWSPAPER ADVERTISEMENTS

### 181. ADVERTISEMENTS IN NEWSPAPERS

(September 14, 1919)<sup>1</sup>

We have reproduced this letter because the criticism Shri Khandwala makes is also made by other friends. Shri Khandwala's fear is unnecessary. Labouring under the false belief that advertisement can be secured by money alone, the correspondent believes that Swadeshi articles will not get support from *Navajivan* which accepts no advertisements. Money is not at all required to spread information as to the place of getting a thing when it is needed by the country. When the scope of *Navajivan* is properly known and its workers organized, it will be our endeavour to bring to light the obscure industries of our country in these columns even at some expense to the proprietor, if necessary. When advertisements are inserted by payments, it is well-nigh impossible to control their matter or language. Of the various advertisements that have come under our notice, ninety-nine per cent are totally useless. The advertisements that are most paying relate to medicine and it is our belief that the deceitfulness and obscenity that are often found in such advertisements are harmful to the country. We know many friends who have contracted disease by using advertised medicines. Who has not been deceived by advertisements regarding other things? It is our mistaken belief that we get newspapers cheap because they take advertisements. It is forgotten that the things that are advertised are bought by the readers and it is the readers who have ultimately to pay for the advertisement charges. The price of medicine does not lie in the drug so much as in the bottle, the cork and most of all in the advertisement. Hence, sometimes, we pay one rupee for a medicine worth a pice only. If there were no system of advertisements, we are sure to save at least half the price.

*Young India*, 24-9-1919

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. XVI, p. 133

1 The first two sentences have been taken from *Navajivan*, dated 14-9-1919, in which they originally appeared in Gujarati.

2 Omitted from this Collection.

## 182. INDECENT ADVERTISEMENTS

(From "Notes")

Lying on my back and trying at times, in obedience to medical instructions, to take my mind off serious reading, I chance upon advertisement sheets of newspapers. They are sometimes painfully instructive. I see often in respectable papers advertisements of a lewd nature. The headings are deceptive. In one case, the heading was "books relating to *Yoga*". On looking at the contents of the -advertisement, I discovered hardly one book out of ten having any reference to *Yoga*; all the rest had reference to sex, suggesting that young men and women may indulge in sexual pleasures without coming to grief, promising to divulge secret remedies. I came upon worse things which I do not propose to copy in these pages. Hardly a newspaper is free from liquor advertisements, and advertisements regarding medicines designed to debase and corrupt youthful minds. The editors and the proprietors who are themselves known to be pure and opposed to drink, to smoking and such other evils, are at times found not to be averse to deriving an income from advertisements which are obviously intended to spread the evils which they shun. The argument sometimes advanced is that it is not possible to conduct a newspaper on any other condition. But is it necessary to conduct newspapers at any cost? Is the good that they do so great as to outweigh the evil that mischievous advertisements cause? We have a journalists' association. Is it not possible through it to cultivate a uniform code of morals among them and to create a public opinion that would make it impossible for a respectable journal to violate the prescribed code?

*Young India*, 23-6-1927, p. 204 at 205

## 183. TAKING UNLAWFUL LIBERTIES

A Sindhi friend writes:

I am enclosing herewith a cutting from the *Sind Observer* of Karachi wherein you will find your name among others used in support of medicines sought to be popularised and sold through the medium of such advertisement.

I can hardly believe you could have spoken or written appreciatively of the medicines, mixtures, pills or potions of the pharmacy in question.

I hope you would write in *Young India* about this matter.

I have seen the advertisement too. It is taking an unlawful liberty with my name and I doubt not the names of other leaders. It is remarkable the freedom these pharmacies take in order to find custom for their wretched traffic. In my opinion this use of names of persons without their permission is an illegality punishable in law. Since as a non-co-operator I may not seek the protection of the law, I must be satisfied with warning the public against being misled by the use of my name in connection with any drug whatsoever. My disbelief in drugs in general is as strong as ever notwithstanding the very limited use by me in recent times of one or two comparatively harmless and well-known opening drugs and quinine. I have no desire to see pharmacies multiplied in this country. I would rather see people freed from the slavery of drugs.

*Young India*, 12-1-1928, p. 13

## 184. ADVERTISING LEWDNESS

(From "Notes")

Sjt. Jairamdas, the Hon. Secretary of the Foreign Cloth Boycott Committee, has sent me mild specimens as he calls them of indecent pictures which unscrupulous sellers of foreign cloth put in the pieces of Calico etc., they sell. He tells me that there were pictures far more indecent than the specimens he has sent to me. Whether the interpolation of these pictures is the work of these agents or of the principals it is difficult to say, but the pictures are there and they bear also names appropriate to the lewdness they advertise. One is marked "Vilas Jivan" for instance. The unscrupulous ways adopted for enticing simple folk to buy foreign cloth ought to disgust decent men and make them boycott foreign cloth even for these unscrupulous ways apart from any other reason.

*Young India*, 31-10-1929, p. 356 at p. 357

## 185. LIQUOR ADVERTISEMENTS

(From "Notes")

At the Temperance Conference in Lahore one of the resolutions adopted was as follows:

This Conference is of opinion, that there 'is no justification whatever for permitting advertisements and 'placards of liquors in public places and newspapers, and is strongly of opinion that these solicitations should be immediately prohibited, even if it is considered for any reason that sale of liquor cannot be stopped at once. This Conference appeals to all newspapers having the interest of the people at heart to abstain from publishing such advertisements, whatever the pecuniary sacrifice incurred may be.

It is a matter for sorrow, that in a country like India, where drink is almost universally admitted to be a vice, there are respectable newspapers enough to be found to take advertisements for the sake of spirituous liquors whilst their editorial columns favour total prohibition. I hope, that the resolution of the Conference will move the newspapers concerned to stop taking the offending advertisements. There may be the question of contracts made with advertisers. Since the proprietors of the newspapers concerned have wronged the nation in taking the advertisements, it is not too much to expect them to part with a portion of the ill-gotten profits in paying for such damages as may be necessary for ending contracts before their times.

*Young India*, 9-1-1930, p. 9

## 186. OBJECTIONABLE ADVERTISEMENTS

(Originally appeared under the title "A Flea for Purity")

A correspondent, himself an editor, sends me cuttings from one single newspaper owned or managed by a public worker of approved merit. They were with one exception about medicine. In my opinion they were highly objectionable. They contained indecent suggestions calculated to excite and promote animal passion in man. These advertisements were taken from recent issues of the newspaper concerned. They were all claimed to possess the virtue of rejuvenating their users. The description was revolting. Some of them were manifest lies.

My correspondent tells me that the newspaper from which he had taken the cuttings was by no means the sole offender. He could send me similar cuttings from others known to be popular and respectable.

The proprietors of such newspapers probably do not know that their sheets contain indecent advertisements. Perhaps they have not even read them. Let me hope that the editors and managers of newspapers will study their advertisements and remove those that are without doubt objectionable. I trust, too, that journalists' associations in the provinces will take up the matter and persuade proprietors to exercise restraint in the matter of admitting advertisements. It is not too much to expect them to remove all such as are likely to corrupt public morals or offend the sense of decency.

*Harijan, 27-7-1935, p. 185*

## 187. UNTRUTHFUL ADVERTISEMENTS

The other day I drew attention to indecent advertising. A Calcutta correspondent now sends me cuttings from well-known newspapers of advertisements which I would call untruthful. Just now a very vigorous propaganda seems to be going on in Bengal and probably in the other provinces also in favour of drinking Indian tea. The following is the translation sent by the correspondent of an advertisement in Bengali:

### TEA-DRINKING AND YOUTHFUL LOOK

Jalpaiguri, May 15 That tea helps retain youthful look and energy long is, it appears, demonstrated from the experience of Shrijut Nepal Chandra Bhattacharya. He is now forty-eight, but he looks no older than thirty-four. He maintains that this youthful look of his is due to his taking tea. He had his first cup of tea when he was fourteen. Since then he has been a regular tea-drinker, and since the year before last he has been taking more or less thirty cups of tea daily. In this respect he has a peculiarity all his own. He does not take tea immediately it is prepared, nor does he sip in the whole of it, but rejects a little at the bottom. He takes from six to ten cups of it at a time.

This is a specimen of many such and reads as if it were a report from the Paper's own correspondent. It advances a claim for tea-drinking which has no support in human experience anywhere. On the contrary even those who advocate tea-drinking advise extreme moderation. We should be no worse off, if there was no tea drunk in India. But unfortunately tea and such other so-called harmless drinks have come to stay in our midst. My plea is for due regard for truth in advertising. It is a habit with people, especially in India to treat the printed word in a book or a newspaper as gospel truth. There is need, therefore, for extreme caution in drawing up advertisements. Untruths such as my correspondent has drawn attention to are most dangerous. To drink thirty cups of tea per day not only does not refresh the body or the mind but weakens digestion and enervates the drinker. One or two cups of weak tea per day is about as much as the human body can accommodate, perhaps, without harm. In India the tea leaves are actually boiled so as to draw all the tannin they may contain. Any doctor

would testify that tannin is bad for the stomach. The Chinese know how to drink tea. They put their leaves in a strainer and pour boiling water over the leaves which are never put in the tea pot. The water has to attain only the colour of the straw. It is pale yellow, never bordering on the red as tea made generally in India. Strong tea is poison.

*Harijan*, 24-8-1935, p. 217

## 188. OBSCENE ADVERTISEMENTS

A sister sending me a cutting from a well-known magazine containing the advertisement of a most objectionable book writes:

The enclosed came under my eye when glancing over the pages of.... I do not know if you get this magazine. I do not suppose you ever have time to glance at it even if it is sent to you. Once before I spoke to you about "obscene advertisements". I do so wish you would write about them sometime. That books of the type advertised are flooding the market today is only too true, but should responsible journals like . . . encourage their sale? My woman's modesty is so utterly repelled by these things that I cannot write to anyone but you. To think that what God has given to woman with intent for an express purpose should be advertised for abuse is too degrading for words... I wish you would write about the responsibility of leading Indian newspapers and journals in this respect. This is not the first by any means that I could have sent to you for criticism.

From the advertisement I do not propose to reproduce any portion except to tell the reader that it describes as obscenely as it can the suggestive contents of the book advertised. Its title is "Sexual Beauty of the Female Form" and the advertising firm tells the reader that it will give away free to the buyer two more books called "New Knowledge for the Bride" and "The Sexual Embrace or How to Please Your Partner".

I fear that in relying on me in any way to affect the course of the advertisers of such books or to move the Editors or Publishers from their purpose of making their productions yield profits, she relies on a broken reed. No amount of appealing by me to the publishers of the objectionable books or advertisements of them will be of any use. But what I would like to tell the writer of the letter and other learned sisters like her is to come out in the open and to do the work that is peculiarly and specially theirs. Very often a bad name is given to a person and he or she in course of time begins to believe in the badness. To call a woman a member of "the weaker sex" is libel. In what way is woman the weaker sex I do not know. If the implication is that she lacks the brute instinct of man or does not possess it in the same measure as man,

the charge may be admitted. But then woman becomes, as she is, the nobler sex. If she is weak in striking, she is strong in suffering. I have described woman as the embodiment of sacrifice and Ahimsa. She has to learn not to rely on man to protect her virtue or her honour. I do not know a single instance of a man having ever protected the virtue of a woman. He cannot even if he would. Rama certainly did not protect the virtue of Sita, nor the five Pandavas of Draupadi. Both these noble women protected their own virtue by the sheer force of their purity. No person loses honour or self-respect but by his consent. A woman no more loses her honour or virtue because a brute renders her senseless and ravishes her than a man loses his because a wicked woman administers to him a stupefying drug and makes him do what she likes.

It is remarkable that there are no books written in praise of male beauty. But why should there always be literature to excite the animal passions of man? May it be that woman likes to live up to the titles that man has chosen to bestow upon her? Does she like to have the beauty of her form exploited by man? Does she like to look beautiful of form before man and why? These are questions I would like educated sisters to ask themselves. If these advertisements and literature offend them, they must wage a relentless war against them and they will stop them in a moment. Would that woman will realize the power she has latent in her for good, if she has also for mischief. It is in her power to make the world more livable both for her and her partner, whether as father, son or husband, if she would cease to think of herself as weak and fit only to serve as a doll for man, to play with. If society is not to be destroyed by insane wars of nations against nations and still more insane wars on its moral foundations, the woman will have to play her part not manfully, as some are trying to do, but womanfully. She won't better humanity by vying with man in his ability to destroy life mostly without purpose. Let it be her privilege to wean the erring man from his error which will envelop in his ruin that of woman also. This wretched advertisement is merely a straw showing which way the wind is blowing. It is a shameless exploitation of woman. It would not leave alone even "the beauty of the female form of savage races of the World".

*Harijan*, 14-11-1936, p. 316

## SECTION EIGHT: SOCIAL DISTINCTIONS—HIGH AND LOW

### 189. THE CANKER OF SUPERIORITY

The following remarkable paper handed to me at Mymensingh by the District Vaishya Sabha Association cannot fail to be of general interest:

1. Our Samiti aims at unity and regeneration of our community.
2. Your mission as we understand is three-fold:
  - (a) Introduction and spread of khaddar and charkha,
  - (b) Hindu-Muslim Unity,
  - (c) Removal of untouchability.

The first two are common to all. We have come to you mainly in connection with the third item and beg leave to give you an idea as to how untouchability stands in the way of unification of the Hindus in Bengal.

3. Bengal Hindu Society may be principally grouped into two classes.

(i) Jal Acharaniya (ii) Anacharaniya.

Group (i) consists of: Brahmins, Baidyas, Kayasthas, Navashakas (meaning 9 or 10 castes)

Group (ii): Baishashahas, Subarnabaniks (goldsmiths) Sutradhars (carpenters), Jogis (weavers), Sundis (Wine sellers), Fishermen, Bhui Malis (sweepers), Dhopas (washermen), Muchis or Reshees (cobblers and drummers) Kapaliks, Namasudras and others.

Some of these are classified as depressed classes by the Census authorities.

Of the first group the first three classes claim to dominate the rest of the Hindu society and not only do they despise them [particularly those belonging to group (ii)] at heart, but oppress them in various ways, e.g., (i) freedom of worship in or access to public temples not allowed, (ii) mess and hostel difficulties of the students of the 2nd group, (iii) entrance into hotels and sweetmeat shops resented.

In Bengal those who are taking lead in the movement for removal of untouchability are not, in our opinion, adopting the right method and have not made any appreciable progress in this direction.

According to the census of 1921, of the total Hindu population of Bengal numbering 2,09,40,000 and odd the Brahmins (13,09,000 i.e. 17%), Kayasthas (12,97,000, i.e. 16%) and Baidyas (1,03,000 i.e. 1%) together count only 28,09,009 or thereabout.

Baishya Shaha community of East Bengal and Sylhet are of the premier mercantile communities- in Bengal—are mainly confined to parts of Mymensingh, Pabna, Bogra, Rajshahi, Farid- pur, Dacca, Noakhali, Chittagong, Tippera and Sylhet, the total population coming up to 3,60,000 i.e. 3% of the entire Hindu population of Bengal.

Literacy per mile among the Baishya Shahas is 342 while that of Baidyas 662, Brahmins 484, Kayasthas 413, Subamabanik 383, Gandhabanik 344.

Literacy is much less amongst all other Acharaniya classes not to speak of those held Anacharaniya.

Our community does not lag behind others in founding and maintaining educational and charitable institutions, e.g. several colleges, many High and M.E. Schools and charitable dispensaries and hospitals, tanks, pucca wells etc. besides private donations to institutions— educational, charitable and religious.

In point of manners, customs and hospitality this community yields to no other class. As regards female education this community is by no means less advanced.

In spite of all these we are treated as if we are outside the pale of Hindu society. And up-till now no sincere attempt has been made to recognize our proper status in the Hindu Community, although the members of these communities never keep aloof from taking part in all national movements. But for the social abilities and difficulties attendant thereon this community could be much more useful.

This community is quite distinct from the Sun dies. Taking advantage of the fact that the Sundies also use the surname "Shaha" the narrow-minded members of the Hindu Society envious of our prosperity have been maliciously and falsely stigmatizing this community by classing them with the Sundies (liquor traders). We have, however, succeeded to a great extent to remove the mischievous and. wrong notions created as above, establishing from

history that this community belonging to Baishya Bama migrated from time to time for trading purposes from North Western India and settled in parts of East Bengal and Sylhet, and that as this community could not shake off the Buddhistic influence as easily as the other classes when Brahminism revived, they were not given a proper place in the Hindu society and left in a despised condition.

For the purpose of ameliorating our condition and having our proper status recognized, we have formed associations which are doing considerable work.

Total removal of untouchability is in the opinion of this community essential to solidarity of the Hindus and consequently to Hindu-Muslim unity. We approach you, Mahatmaji, with the request that in your public utterances regarding untouchability, you will not lose sight of the peculiar features of the Hindu Society in Bengal, as we have tried to give you an idea of; and we solicit your advice, as of one who is a born devotee and fighter for the cause of the downtrodden, in our fight with the bureaucracy in the Hindu Society.

It is likely that there is some exaggeration in the foregoing statement. But the reason why I have reproduced the paper is to show how deep the canker of superiority has eaten into the very vitals of Hinduism. The writers, themselves a despised group in the estimation of their so-called superiors, have not hesitated to claim for themselves a status superior to and distinct from those more despised. The same notion of superiority and inferiority runs through the despised "untouchables"! I notice throughout my tour in Kutch that as in other parts of India the "untouchables" have among themselves also superior and inferior castes, and the higher caste Antyaj will not touch the lower caste, will positively refuse to send their children to those belonging to the lower caste. Intermarriage and inter-dining between them is unthinkable. This is caste reduced to the grossest absurdity. And it is by way of protest against this arrogation of superiority by one class over another that I delight in calling myself a *bhangi*; that is, a sweeper, beyond which so far as I am aware, inferiority does not travel. He is the social leper shunned by all and yet he belongs to the one group more indispensable than any other for the sanitary well-being of society, and therefore its very physical existence. My sympathies are all with gentlemen on whose behalf the foregoing statement was given to me. But I warn them

against claiming superiority over men more unfortunately placed than themselves. Let it be their privilege to take even these with them and refuse to take privileges which may be denied to others. It is necessary if we will rid Hinduism of the curse of unnatural equalities for some of us to rise with our whole soul in revolt against it. In my opinion, he who claims superiority by the very nature of the claim forfeits it. Real, natural superiority comes without the claiming. It is recognized ungrudgingly, and ever refused not pompously, not out of a false sense of modesty but because the superiority is not even felt, and because the superior man knows that there is no distinction whatsoever between the soul within himself and the soul within one who regards himself as his inferior. Recognition of the essential identity and oneness of all that lives excludes the very idea of superiority and inferiority. Life is duty, not a bundle of rights and privileges. That religion is doomed to destruction which bases itself upon a system of gradations high and low. Such is not the meaning for me of *varnashram*. I believe in it because I imagine that it defines the duties of men belonging to different vocations. And Brahmin is he who is the servant of all, even the Shudras and the "untouchables". He dedicates his all to such service and lives upon the charity and sufferance of his fellow beings. He is no Kshatriya who puts forth pretensions to rank, power and privileges. He alone is a Kshatriya who uses the whole of himself for the defence and honour of society. And a Vaishya who earns for himself only, and believes in merely amassing wealth is a thief. A Shudra because he labours for hire on behalf of society is in no way inferior to the three classes. According to my conception of Hinduism there is no such things as a fifth or "untouchable" class. The so-called untouchables are as much privileged labourers of society as Shudras. *Varnashram* seems to me to be an ideal system conceived for the highest good of society. What we see today is a travesty and a mockery of the original. And if *varnashram* is to abide, Hindus must sweep away the mockery and restore *varnashram* to its pristine dignity.

*Young India*, 5-11-1925, p. 379

## 190. THE CASTE SYSTEM

I have received several angry letters about my remarks during my Deccan tour on the caste system. I am not publishing these letters because there is nothing but vituperation in them, and when there is no vituperation, there is little argument about them. I am anxious to open the columns of *Young India* to opinions expressing dissent from its views, but the writers must be brief and interesting. Acrimony is no argument. I am obliged to make these remarks because two writers at least would have gained publicity for their letters, if they had not been prolix and unintelligible in their expression. The question, however, that my correspondents have raised, commands attention and deserves an answer. They argue that the retention of the caste system spells ruin for India and that it is caste which has reduced India to slavery. In my opinion it is not caste that has made us what we are. It was our greed and disregard of essential virtues which enslaved us. I believe that caste has saved Hinduism from disintegration.

But like every other institution it has suffered from excrescences. I consider the four divisions alone to be fundamental, natural and essential. The innumerable sub-castes are sometimes a convenience, often a hindrance. The sooner there is fusion the better. The silent destruction and reconstruction of sub-castes have ever gone on and are bound to continue. Social pressure and public opinion can be trusted to deal with the problem. But I am certainly against any attempt at destroying the fundamental divisions. The caste system is not based on inequality, there is no question of inferiority, and so far as there is any such question arising, as in Madras, Maharashtra, or elsewhere, the tendency should undoubtedly be checked. But there appears to be no valid reason for ending the system because of its abuse. It lends itself easily to reformation. The spirit of democracy, which is fast spreading throughout India and the rest of the world, will, without a shadow of doubt, purge the institution of the idea of predominance and subordination. The spirit of democracy is not a mechanical thing to be adjusted by abolition of forms. It requires change of the heart. If caste is

a bar to the spread of that spirit, the existence of five religions in India – Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and Judaism – is equally a bar. The spirit of democracy requires the inculcation of the spirit of brotherhood, and I can find no difficulty in considering a Christian or a Mahomedan to be my brother in absolutely the same sense as a blood-brother, and Hinduism that is responsible for the doctrine of the caste is also responsible for the inculcation of the essential brotherhood, not merely of man but even of all that lives.

\* \* \*

Inter-drinking, inter-dining, inter-marrying, I hold are not essential for the promotion of the spirit of democracy. I do not contemplate under a most democratic constitution a universality of manners and customs about eating, drinking and marrying. We shall ever have to seek unity in diversity, and I decline to consider it a sin for a man not to drink or eat with any and everybody. In Hinduism, children of brothers may not inter-marry. The prohibition does not interfere with cordiality of relations, probably it promotes healthiness of relationships. In Vaishnava households I have known mothers not dining in the common kitchen, or drinking from the same pot, without their becoming exclusive, arrogant or less loving. These are disciplinary restraints which are not in themselves bad. Carried to ridiculous extremes they may become harmful, and if the motive is one of arrogation of superiority, the restraint becomes an indulgence, therefore hurtful. But as time goes forward, and new necessities and occasions arise, the custom regarding inter-dining and inter-marrying will require cautious modifications or re-arrangement.

Thus whilst I am prepared to defend, as I have always done, the division of Hindus into four castes, as I have said so often in these columns, I consider untouchability to be a heinous crime against humanity. It is not a sign of self-restraint but an arrogant assumption of superiority. It has served no useful purpose and it has suppressed, as nothing else in Hinduism has, vast numbers of the human race who are not only every bit as good as ourselves, but are rendering in many walks of life an essential service to the country. It is a sin of which the sooner Hinduism purges itself the better it is

for itself, if it is to be recognized as an honourable and elevating religion. I know no argument in favour of its retention and I have no hesi- tatin in rejecting scriptural authority of a doubtful character in order to support a sinful institution. Indeed I would reject all authority if it is in conflict with sober reason or the dictates of the heart. Authority sustains and ennobles the weak when it is the handiwork of reason but it degrades them when it supplants reason sanctified by the still small voice within.

*Young India*, 8-12-1920, p. 3

## 191. CASTE AND VARNA

(From "Caste and Communal Question")

As for caste I have frequently said that I do not believe in caste in the modern sense. It is an excrescence and a handicap on progress. Nor do I believe in inequalities between human beings. We are all absolutely equal. But equality is of souls and not of bodies. Hence it is a mental state. We need to think of and to assert equality because we see great inequalities in the physical world. We have to realize equality in the midst of this apparent external inequality. Assumption of superiority by any person over any other is a sin against God and man. Thus caste, in so far it connotes distinctions in status, is an evil.

I do however believe in *varna* which is based on hereditary occupations. *Varnas* are four to mark four universal occupations—imparting knowledge, defending the defenceless, carrying on agriculture and commerce and performing service through physical labour. These occupations are common to all mankind, but Hinduism, having recognized them as the law of our being, has made use of it in regulating social relations and conduct. Gravitation affects us all whether one knows its existence or not. But scientists who knew the law have made it yield results that have startled the world. Even so has Hinduism startled the world by its discovery and application of the law of *varna*. When Hindus were seized with inertia, abuse of *varna* resulted in innumerable castes with unnecessary and harmful restrictions as to inter-marriage and inter-dining. The law of *varna* has nothing to do with these restrictions. People of different *varnas* may inter-marry and inter-dine. These restrictions may be necessary in the interest of chastity and hygiene. But a Brahman who marries a Shudra girl or *vice versa* commits no offence against the law of *varna*.

\* \* \*

According to my definition of *varna* there is no *varna* operation at present in Hinduism. The so-called Brahmans have ceased to impart knowledge. They take to

various other occupations. This is more or less true of the other *varnas*. In reality, being under foreign domination we are all slaves, and hence less than Shudras—untouchables of the West.

... A vegetarian may with impunity dine with meat- eaters, Hindu and others, so long as he has eatable food cleanly prepared and placed before him. He will always have fruit and milk wherever he goes.

*Young India*, 4-6-1931, p. 129

## 192. THE FRAILTIES OF BRAHMANS

Let us not deceive ourselves and gods and deserve the curse of God for deceiving them. We may not regard a single being as untouchable. We have become lepers of the Empire by regarding a class of Hindus as lepers. I speak with the authority of experience and I assure you that in Hinduism there is no sanction for treating a single human being as untouchable. In the estimation of a Brahman knowing and living his religion, a Shudra is as good as himself. The *Bhagavadgita* has nowhere taught that a *Chandal* is in any way inferior to a Brahman. Brahman ceases to be a Brahman, immediately he becomes insolent and considers himself a superior being. India owes a deep debt to the Brahmans, who voluntarily sacrificed themselves for the betterment of all. It was Brahmans who have called God Servant of servants, the Purifier of the fallen. It was Brahmans who taught that the prostitute and the *Chandal* could attain *moksha* if she or he only purified her or his heart.

But unfortunately for the human race the Brahman shares with mankind the frailties of all. In common with others he has neglected his duty of giving knowledge to mankind, of guiding them in the right and truest path. We glibly charge Englishmen with insolence and haughtiness. Let us, before we cast the stone at them, free ourselves from liability to reproach. Let us put our own house in order.

*Young India*, 11-5-1921, p. 150 at p. 151

### 193. CLAIM OF SUPERIORITY

(From a report of some portions of Gandhiji's speech at Tanjore which appeared under the title "Brahman—Non-Brahman".)

I had hoped on coming to Tanjore today to discuss the Brahman-Non-Brahman question here and I had the pleasure of having a brief discussion with some of the friends this afternoon. I am not free nor is it necessary for me to discuss and place before you the contents of our discussion. But I was exceedingly glad of this discussion. I now understand the movement perhaps a little better than I did before the discussion. I have placed my humble view before those friends, of which they are at liberty to make what use they like. But throughout the discussion I saw a note of one thing which seemed to oppress these friends. They seemed to think that I had identified myself with the notion of inherited superiority and inferiority. I assured them that nothing was farther from my thought and told them that I would gladly explain my meaning of *varnaskrama* more fully than I have done in order to remove the slightest misunderstanding as to this question of superiority. In my opinion there is no such thing as inherited or acquired superiority. I believe in the rock-bottom doctrine of *Advaita* and my interpretation of *Advaita* excludes totally any idea of superiority at any stage whatsoever. I believe implicitly that all men are born equal. All—whether born in India or in England or in America or in any circumstances whatsoever—have the same soul as any other. And it is because I believe in this inherent equality of all men that I fight the doctrine of superiority which many of our rulers arrogate to themselves. I have fought this doctrine of superiority in South Africa inch by inch, and it is because of that inherent belief, that I delight in calling myself a scavenger, a spinner, a weaver, a farmer and a labourer. And I have fought against the Brahmans themselves wherever they have claimed any superiority for themselves either by reason of their birth or by reason of their subsequently acquired knowledge. I consider that it is unmanly for any person to claim superiority over a fellow-being. And there is the amplest warrant for the belief that I am enunciating in the

*Bhagavadgita*, and I am therefore through and through with every non-Brahman when he fights this monster of superiority, whether it is claimed by a Brahman or by anybody else. He who claims superiority at once forfeits his claim to be called a man. That is my opinion.

... As a non-Brahman I would seek to purify Brahmanism in so far as a non-Brahman can, but not to destroy it. I would dislodge the Brahman from the arrogation of superiority or from places of profit. Immediately a Brahman becomes a profiteering agency he ceases to be a Brahman. But I would not touch his great learning wherever I see it. And whilst he may not claim superiority by reason of his learning I myself must not withhold that meed of homage that learning, wherever it resides, always commands. But I must not go deeper into the subject before a large audience of this kind.

After all I must fall upon one sovereign 'remedy which I think if applicable for all the ills of life. And that is, in whatever fight we engage, the fight should be clean and straight, and there should not be the slightest departure from truth and Ahimsa. And if we will keep our carriage safely on these two rails you will find that our fight even though we may commit a thousand blunders will always smell clean and will be easier fought. And even as a train that is derailed comes to a disastrous end, so shall we, if we be derailed off these two rails, come to a disaster. A man who is truthful and does not mean ill even to his adversary will be slow to believe charges even against his foes. He will however try to understand the view points of his opponents and will always keep an open mind and seek every opportunity of serving his opponents. I have endeavoured to apply this law in my relations with Englishmen and Europeans in general in South Africa as well as here and not without some success. How much more then should we apply this law in our homes, in our relations, in our domestic affairs, in connection with our own kith and kin?

*Young India*, 29-9-1927, p. 329

## 194. ADVICE TO BRAHMANS

Proceeding to the topic which he had intended to deal with, he referred to a letter he had received complaining that the hopelessly insignificant minority of the Brahmans was faring badly in that the admission of Brahman boys and girls to colleges and services was becoming increasingly difficult because of the anti-Brahman movement. He could sympathise with the complainant because hitherto being more receptive, more industrious and more eager to gain knowledge the Brahmans seemed to have a monopoly, not because of any brute force they exercised but because of their superior qualities. But though he sympathized with the Brahmans in their lot, he did not share their grief or disappointment. In the first instance, he could not appreciate their considering themselves as a minority. If we were one nation, there could be no question of minority and majority. He might as well complain of being a minority and then imagine himself to be hurt that he could not enjoy all the privileges he might wish for. He would, therefore, advise his Brahman friends to forget that they were a class or group apart from the ocean of India's humanity. Considering them even as Hindus rather than Indians, sons of the same soil, there was to be none high and low in the ocean of Hinduism. If they ceased to consider themselves as a minority, they would be proud to share the majesty of the ocean of Indian or Hindu humanity, and could feel with a drop in the ocean, if it was not isolated from the latter, the greatness of the ocean, which carried on its broad bosom thousands of mighty steamships. After all what were the colleges and services in terms of the millions of villagers living in the seven lakhs of villages? He suggested that the Brahman friends should feel happy that they were no longer exposed to the temptation of having to go to colleges or to services under the Government. Such persons could only be few and far between. Those who refused to take part in the unseemly struggle for entrance to colleges or to services were the real servants of India. Knowledge was not confined within the four walls of a school or a college. It was open for every industrious boy or girl to gather real knowledge outside schools and colleges. And in this connection he

would commend to them the *Nai Talim* and all it meant. He further reminded them of what he had said about the validity only of those rights which were directly derived from duty well performed. They would then immediately realize that there was no such inherent right for anyone to be admitted to Government colleges. But if there was such a right belonging to any boy or girl, it was his or hers who had hitherto been criminally neglected.

A Brahman's duty was to know God and to enable others to do likewise. And the right that was derived from the duty would be to be fed and clothed decently and honourably by the community which he served.

*Harijan*, 13-7-1947, p. 232 at p. 234

## 195. CAN IT BE TRUE?

(From "Notes")

The President, Arya Samaj, New Delhi, writes:

The Baghat State is situated in the Simla Hills and its ruler is an enlightened Hindu chief. The capital of the State is at Solon which is noted for its salubrious climate. The population of the State is about ten thousand and mainly consists of Rajputs, Kanets and Brahmans. The other tribes are Kolis, Chamars etc. who are regarded as menials. Although the Kolis chiefly live on agriculture yet the social disabilities to which they are subject are numerous. Briefly stated they are the drudges of the caste-Hindus. Moved by the inhuman treatment which these people suffer at the hands of their Hindu brethren, the Arya Samaj, Simla, brought them into their fold with a view to raise their status in life and invested them with the sacred thread, inasmuch as by occupation they are Vaishyas. Since the time of their formal purification they have given up the evil habits of meat-eating and drink and have shown strong resentments at their being addressed as *Achhuts*. This seems to have given umbrage to the caste-Hindus who challenged the right of their being invested with the sacred thread. A summary trial was consequendy held on the 6th January 1928 by the chief of the State himself and on the subsequent day on the plea of antiquity and customs, the poor Kolis who were ten in number were sentenced to undergo six months' imprisonment in addition to a fine of Rs. 200 each. No opportunity was given to these unfortunate persons to defend themselves, nor permission was given to the Pandit of the Arya Samaj who happened to be present on the occasion to explain the point of view of the Arya Samaj in this matter. It is now reported that they are being coerced in the jail to take off their sacred thread.

The information contained in the foregoing seems to me to be unbelievable. The Kolis can in no way be considered to be untouchables or to be of the suppressed or the depressed classes. If they are their own farmers, according to the definition of the different varnas, they are born Vaishyas and have every right to wear the sacred thread. But assuming that they have no right in religion, I was totally unprepared for the news that the wearing of the sacred thread would be considered a crime punishable in law in any State. Equally unthinkable it is that the unfortunate men who

thought that they had passed through some desirable or meritorious religious ceremony were denied even the right of defending themselves and producing their witnesses. And, if the statements about the punishment and farcical trial are true, I should not at all wonder if the sacred thread had been forcibly taken off their persons. I would invite the president of the Arya Samaj to send further details, if any, in corroboration of the charges brought by him against the Baghat State and I would invite the State authorities if they wish to send me their version of the incident which I shall gladly publish.

*Young India*, 22-3-1928, p. 91

## 196. BAGHAT STATE AND SACRED THREAD

With reference to my note in *Young India* of 22nd March last about the treatment of Kolis in Baghat State, President of the Arya Samaj, New Delhi, writes:

Apropos of your note which appeared in *Young India* of 22nd March in regard to the position of Kolis in die Baghat State, you have very kindly given to me an opportunity to send further details in corroboration of the charges brought by me against the Baghat State. I am equally glad to learn that simultaneous opportunity has been offered to the State authorities, if they wish, to send in their version of the incident. I am not aware whether the Baghat State officials receive copies of your esteemed weekly, but for their convenience I have sent to them under a registered cover the relevant excerpt from *Young India* dated the 22nd March 1928 to enable them, if they care, to contradict the charges levelled against them.

As far as I am concerned I enclose for your kind perusal a copy of the correspondence which has passed between me and the State authorities. The only reply which I have so far received from the State officials is their letter of die 13th January 1928. Notwithstanding my repeated reminders I have as yet received no further answer to my letter of the 16th January. I may however mention that attempts have also been made to secure an interview with the Chief of the State but to no purpose. I therefore leave it to you to judge for yourself whether any further proof is required in support of the charges which I have brought against the State. The change in the position which has occurred since I last wrote to you on the subject is that the Kolis in question were released on the specific condition that if again they wore the sacred thread they would be punished with a fine of Rs. 500 each. This has greedy frightened these men and like die burnt child who dreads the fire, no good counsel from outside has now any meaning for them.

I further attach for your perusal a cutting from the *Tribune* dated the 18th January 1928 which is from the pen of a correspondent and contains more truth than fiction. It will be observed therefrom that the only fault of the Kolis concerned was, that in consequence of the propaganda of the Arya Samaj for the uplift of the so-called depressed classes in the Simla Hills, they had taken the sacred thread as an emblem of Hinduism and had simultaneously with the "purification" given up several evil habits and taken to religious ways. All this desire to improve their social condition by means which unthinking orthodoxy prohibits for

"untouchables" brought on their heads the wrath of the Ruler of the Baghat State, even though these people gave a very good account of themselves in the Rana Saheb's Court in regard to their knowledge and observance of Hindu religious practices. I am not used to stronger language than the facts justify, but I respectfully submit that if the Rulers of some of the States are too narrow-minded to initiate measures for the removal of the great curse of untouchability from Hindu Society, they should at any rate, refrain from placing serious and utterly unjustifiable obstacles in the way of those who are carrying on the humane work of upliftment of the so-called depressed classes. I hope that a further note from your pen may make die Rana Saheb see the utter unwisdom and injustice of his action in this matter and may persuade him to take the earliest opportunity of undoing it.

The president is no other than Rai Saheb Lala Ganga Ram the well-known philanthropist and public worker of Delhi. Lala Ganga Ram's letter seems to leave little doubt about the correctness of the allegations made in the previous letter published in these pages. I had hoped that his informants had exaggerated the happenings in the Baghat State and that it had not treated as a crime the wearing of the sacred thread by the so-called untouchables. I have before me a copy of the letter written to Lala Ganga Ram by the Prime Minister of the State. It runs:

In reply to your letter dated the 10th January 1928, I regret that the State is unable to supply you the copy of Judgment, as Arya Samaj is not a party to the suit. I cannot help remarking that the reply is in extremely bad taste. It is a bad copy of some English official's laconic and stereotyped replies which they ordinarily send to correspondents who ask inconvenient questions. But these estimable gentlemen as a rule respect rank and status and do not crudely invent things to suit their replies. The Prime Minister of Baghat State has dared to ignore Lala Ganga Ram's status in society (I mean apart from his title) and for the sake of insulting him has imagined what Lala Ganga Ram has never said in his letter. For he never asked for a copy of the judgment in the case nor claimed to be a party in the case against the unfortunate Kolis.

This is essentially a matter for the Hindu Maha Sabha to take up. I do not know whether the Sabha countenances the wearing of the sacred thread by the so-called untouchables. Whether it does or not, it cannot possibly approve of coercion being

used against those who choose to wear it. Immediately the thread becomes a monopoly carrying with it a punishment for its breach, it will cease to be sacred. It was sacred because and when the wearers were men of learning and piety. It will soon become a mark of degradation, if the alleged example of Baghat State proves infectious.

*Young India*, 5-4-1928, p. 106

## 197. SUPPRESSED CLASSES AND BAGHAT STATE

After all the Rana Saheb of Baghat did receive on the 5th instant a deputation on behalf of the Arya Prati nidhi Sabha, Punjab, consisting of Rai Saheb Lala Ganga Ram, Pandit Chamupati, M.A., Dewan Ram Sharan Das of Ludhiana, Pandit Dharmavir, Vedalankar and Lala Shankar Nath, Advocate, Simla, to discuss the situation that had arisen out of the recent attitude of the State in the matter of wearing of the sacred thread by Kolis, | reclaimed by the Arya Samaj.

The deputation has been permitted to issue the following agreed statement of what happened at the interview:

The members of the deputation thanked Rana Saheb for the cordial hospitality extended to them, and explained the position of the shastras and the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha in this behalf. His Highness gave a patient hearing to their representation and assured them that his State gave perfect liberty to all well-established religious societies to propagate their religion among his subjects. The members expressed their gratitude for the courtesy with which their representation was heard and the encouraging reply vouchsafed to them and withdrew.

The agreed statement betrays too much caution and great timidity on the part of the State. The State would have gained in public estimation by a frank confession of the wrong done to the suppressed classes and the insult offered to a great religious organization. However let us be thankful for small mercies. The wrong and the insult will be forgotten if letter and the spirit of the promise made by the Rana Saheb are fulfilled.

*Young India*, 17-5-1928, p. 157

## 198. BENEATH MAN'S DIGNITY

(From "Our Shame and Their Shame")

The long deferred Orissa visit has come to fill the bitter cup of sorrow and humiliation. It was at Bolgarh, thirty-one miles from the nearest railway station, that whilst I was sitting and talking with Deenabandhu Andrews on the 11th instant, a man with a half-bent back wearing only a dirty loin-cloth came crouching in front of us. He picked up a straw and put it in his mouth and then lay flat on his face with arms outstretched and then raised himself, folded his hands, bowed, took out the straw, arranged it in his hair and was about to leave. I was writhing in agony whilst I witnessed the scene. Immediately the performance was finished, I shouted for an interpreter, asked the friend to come near and began to talk to him. He was an "untouchable" living in a village six miles away, and being in Bolgarh for the sale of his load of faggots and having heard of me had come to see me. Asked why he should have taken the straw in his mouth, he said that was to honour me. I hung my head in shame.

The price of honour seemed to me to be too great to bear. My Hindu spirit was deeply wounded. I asked him for a gift. He searched for a copper about his waist. "I do not want your copper, but I want you to give me something better", I said. "I will give it", he replied. I had ascertained from him that he drank and ate carrion because it was custom.

"The gift I want you to give me is a promise never again to take the straw in your mouth for any person on earth, it is beneath man's dignity to do so; never again to drink because it reduces man to the condition of a beast, and never again to eat carrion, for it is against Hinduism and no civilised person would ever eat carrion."

"But my people will excommunicate me, if I do not drink and eat carrion", the poor man said.

"Then suffer excommunication and if need be leave the village."

This down-trodden humble man made the promise. If he keeps it, his three-fold gift is more precious than the rupees that generous countrymen entrust to my care.

*Young India*, 22-12-1927, p. 428

## SECTION NINE: INTER-DINING

### 199. INTER-DINING

(From "Notes")

A correspondent asks, "Should children belonging to different castes and living in one boarding house be made to dine together in a common dining room?" The question is not well put. But the answer to the question as it is put would be that children cannot be *made* to inter-dine. If, however, it be urged that no boarding house keeper can make rules requiring all who care to join it, to inter-dine, it would be as unreasonable a demand as it would be to compel children who are admitted without such stipulation as to inter-dining to dine in company with children belonging to other castes. In the absence of any rule to the contrary, I should imagine that the presumption would be that the usual rules for separate dining arrangements would apply. This question of inter-dining is a vexed one and in my opinion no hard and fast rules can be laid down. Personally I am not sure that inter-dining is a necessary reform. At the same time I recognize the tendency towards breaking down the restriction altogether. I can find reasons for and against the restriction. I would not force the pace. I do not regard it as a sin for a person not to dine with another nor do I regard it as sinful if one advocates and practises inter-dining. I should, however, resist the attempt to break down the restriction in disregard of the feelings of others. On the contrary, I would respect their scruples in the matter.

*Young India*, 19-3-1925, p. 93

## 200. A DIFFICULT PROBLEM

An Andhra correspondent invites attention to his difficulties as follows:

In last week's *Young India* in one of your answers to a Bengal correspondent on untouchability you have stated thus: "Since 'we' do take water from the hands of Shudras we should not hesitate to accept it from the hands of untouchables", meaning by "we" the high caste Hindus. I do not know the customs prevalent in Northern India. But are you aware of the fact that in Andhra as well as in still Southern parts of India Brahmans do not not only not take water from the hands of non-Brahmans (of any of the other three castes) but the more orthodox of them observe strict untouchability with non- Brahmans.

You have often said that you do not advocate inter- dining as essential to the removal of the present false notions of superiority of caste. You have quoted once an instance of Pandit Malaviyaji to bring out the fact that living as you are in mutual admiration and respect you could not think Malaviyaji meaning any contempt to you if he refused water or anything else from your hands. I agree there it might have meant no contempt. But do you know that the Brahmans of our part do not take food if seen by a non-Brahman even if it be from a distance of hundred yards? Let alone the touching of it by him. May I also point out that a word or two escaping the mouth of a Shudra in a street is enough to rouse the orthodox Brahman at meal to anger—and he will go without meal the whole day ? In what way can these facts be interpreted if they can mean no contempt? Has not the Brahman put on air of superiority? Will you please enlighten me on these points? I am myself a Brahman youth and hence write with first-hand knowledge.

Untouchability is a hydra-headed monster. It is a deeply moral and religious question. Inter-dining, to me, is a social question. Behind the present untouchability there is undoubtedly, and necessarily contempt for a portion of one's species. It is a canker that is eating into the vitals of society. It is a denial of the rights of man. It does not stand on a par with inter- dining. And I would strongly urge social reformers not to mix the two. If they do, they would injure the sacred cause of "the untouchables and the unapproachables". The Brahman correspondent's difficulty is real. It shows the length to which the evil has been carried. The name Brahman should be, as it once

was, a synonym for utter humility, self-effacement, sacrifice, purity, courage, forgiveness and true knowledge. But today this sacred land is cursed with divisions between Brahmans and non-Brahmans. In many instances the Brahman has lost the superiority which he never claimed but which was his by right of service. He is now desperately striving to assert what he cannot claim and has therefore roused the jealousy of non- Brahmans in some parts of India. Fortunately for Hinduism and fortunately for the country there are Brahmans like the correspondent who are fighting with all their strength the tendency towards the ominous assertion and are serving the non-Brahmans with a selfless pertinacity which is worthy of their high traditions. Everywhere one finds Brahmans in the forefront fighting the evil of untouchability and supporting their brief with authorities from scriptures. I urge the Southern Brahman of the type mentioned by the Andhra correspondent to recognize the signs of the times and rid himself of false notions of superiority or of superstition that smells sin in the visible approach of a non-Brahman or regards his dinner as polluted if he hears the voice of a non-Brahman. The Brahmans taught the world to see *Brahman* in every thing. Surely then there can be no defilement from outside. It comes from within. Let the Brahman re-deliver the message that the untouchables and the unapproachables are the evil thoughts that one harbours. He taught the world to believe that "man is truly his own deliverer as he is also his own defiler or captor".

The non-Brahman must not be ruffled by the things mentioned by the Andhra correspondent. Brahmans like the Andhra correspondent will fight, as they are fighting, his battle. He must not, as I fear is the growing tendency, despise the whole race of Brahmans because of the sins of a few. Let him be dignified enough not to claim right conduct towards himself from those who will misconduct themselves. I need not feel insulted because the passerby does not acknowledge me or because he feels polluted by my touch or presence or voice. It is enough that I refuse at his bidding to move from my path or to desist from speaking for fear of his hearing my voice. I may pity his ignorant assumption of superiority or his superstition but I may not get irritated and develop the contempt I would fain resent when directed towards myself. The non-Brahman will lose his case by loss of self-restraint. Above all let him

not, by overstepping the mark, embarrass his Brahman champions. The Brahman is the finest flower of Hinduism and humanity. I will do nothing to wither it. I know that it is well able to take care of itself. It has weathered many a storm before now. Only let it not be said of non-Brahmans that they attempted to rob the; flower of its fragrance and lustre. I would not have the non-Brahmans to rise on the ruin of the Brahmans. I would rather say that they rose to the height that the! Brahmans have occupied before now. Brahmans are born, not so Brahmanism. It is a quality open to be cultivated by the lowliest or the lowest among us.

*Young India*, 19-3-1925, p. 96

## 201. INTER-DINING AGAIN

A correspondent writes:

You have answered at length an Englishman's "puzzle" on the question of inter-marriage. But what about inter-dining, which is a much less vital affair but more frequent in life? Suppose some men of goodwill organize, as one means of promoting goodwill amongst all classes, an inter-caste, inter-communal and inter-national dinner on purely vegetarian and non-alcoholic lines; would you from your own *sanatan* point of view object, if any Hindus—say, some members of your caste or of your own family—wished to join that dinner on invitation (and not of course on compulsion!) and asked your opinion on it? Similarly may, a Brahman with *your* view of the *sanatan* (or *maryada*) *dharma* accept a clean dish of rice and a pure cup of water which a *chandal* or a Musalman or a Christian has offered him (and not of course forced on him), finding the Brahman wayworn, hungry and thirsty (and almost on the point of fainting, let us say) in a lone wild place? In fine the question is: Does such a demonstration of good-will as the "cosmopolitan" dinner or the offer of a dish by a supposed untouchable to a touchable Hindu and acceptance thereof square with your idea of the *sanatan* or *varnashrama dharma* or *maryada dharma* or does it not?

If a Brahman is in distress he would take, if he wishes to hold on to his body, clean food by whomsoever offered. I would neither object to nor advocate participation in an international or cosmopolitan dinner, for the simple reason that such functions do not necessarily promote friendship or goodwill. It is possible today to organize a dinner party between Hindus and Musalmans but I dare to say that such a dinner will no more bring the two communities together than the absence of it keeps them apart. I have known deadly enemies dine and chat together heartily and yet remain enemies. Where will the correspondent draw the line? Why does he stop at vegetarian and non-alcoholic meals? A man who regards flesh-eating a virtue and wine bibbing a harmless and pleasurable refreshment, will see nothing but promotion of goodwill in dividing with the world his beef-steak and exchanging with it the sparkling cup? On the argument underlying the correspondent's query, there can be no dividing line. I therefore rule out inter-dining as the means of promoting goodwill. Whilst I do not

myself observe these restrictions and take food that I do not regard as forbidden at the hands of anyone so long as it is cleanly dressed, I respect the scruples of those who observe the restrictions. Nor do I pat myself on the back for my "liberal" practice as against the others' "narrowness". I may be narrow and selfish in spite of my apparently liberal practice and my friend may be liberal and unselfish notwithstanding his apparently narrow practice. Merit or demerit lies in the motive. Insistence upon inter-dining as part of the programme of promotion of fellowship in my opinion retards the growth of goodwill by raising false issues and even false hope. What I am trying to remove is the idea of pollution and superiority. These self-imposed restrictions have a sanitary as also a spiritual value. But non-observance no more dooms a man to perdition than its observance raises him to the seventh heaven. A man who observes the dining restrictions in a most punctilious manner may be a veritable blackguard fit to be shunned by society, and a cosmopolitan omnivorous man may be one ever walking in the fear of God whose society it would be a privilege to cultivate.

*Young India*, 30-4-1925, p. 153

## 202. WHEN REFUSAL TO DRINK WATER IS ARROGATION OF SUPERIORITY

(From "A String of Questions")

Q.: Your sense of untouchability is a difficult one. Even among higher class Hindus, they do not drink water and eat cooked food from the hands of their *asanskrit* children. Do you call this untouchability?

A.: I do not call that untouchability. I have explained scores of times that there is no such thing as a fifth *varna* in Hinduism. The untouchable, therefore, should have all the rights common to the four *varnas*.

Q.: Some suggest that instead of putting too much stress on drinking of water, it is better to try to remove sense of superiority and inferiority from the heart of higher caste Hindus and increase mutual love and help. Do you approve of this suggestion?

A.: I do approve of the suggestion where it is not made to cover hypocrisy. You shall judge a tree by its fruit. I never lay stress on drinking and eating. But I do and would when a man refuses to drink at the hands of an untouchable because he is so-called. For then the refusal is a sign of arrogation of superiority.

*Young India*, 2-7-1925, p. 231

## 203. INTER-DINING AND UNTOUCHABILITY

(From "Untouchability, Women and Swaraj")

The question of inter-dining must be kept distinct from that of untouchability. Exclusion in culinary matters permeates the whole of Hindu society. To confuse it with untouchability is to retard the progress of the latter movement which is aimed at removing the ban on the social service to which the so-called untouchable has as much right as any other human being and on the same terms as the others receive it.

*Young India*, 10-3-1927, p. 76

## 204. AT GRIPS WITH ORTHODOXY

(From "Wardha Letter" by P.)

The patron of the Ashram, Sheth Jamnalal Bajaj is the arch rebel. Sometime back he caused a flutter in the orthodox Marwadi community by throwing open the Lakshmi-narayan Temple at Wardha to the so-called untouchables. It was represented to him by friends that the step was premature, that it would strengthen the hands of the reactionaries, and give a set-back to the cause of reform by scaring away those who were slowly veering round to its side. But he preferred to listen to the inner voice rather than counsels of caution. Events have fully justified the wisdom of his step, for whilst the die-hard section of his community has excommunicated him, his action has been hailed throughout India as the death-knell of unreasoning orthodoxy, and an influential portion of his community has not only reconciled itself to the reform: but has decided to stand by him through thick and thin.

The excommunication has left him altogether unrepentant and he proved it recently by going a step further ^ by partaking of food cooked by the so-called untouchable boys when recently at Rewadi. It was to understand the motive of this action of his, that a deputation of Agarwal Marwadis waited upon Gandhiji the other day. Sheth

Ghanshyamdas Birla who is at present here in connection with Lalaji Memorial Fund and whose opposition to untouchability is known to be no less strong than Jamnalalji's chivalrously offered to act the part of *adocatus diaboli*. "These friends," he said, "are anxious to help Jamnalalji in his work of social reform such as widow-remarriage, prevention of child-marriage and so forth. They would not even mind Shethji throwing open temples to the untouchables but they feel very strongly about his partaking of food at the hands of "untouchables". Since these friends are prepared to go so far they hope that Shethji would at least meet them halfway by giving up dining at the hands of the 'untouchables'."

"But how can I do that?" expostulated Jamnalalji. "In this Ashram I am bound to dine with everybody who comes there and untouchables are freely admitted here."

"We don't mind that", they rejoined. "You may do as you like in the Ashram. The Ashram is a sacred spot and no restrictions need be observed there even as none are at Jagannath Puri."

Gandhiji intervened, "Is your objection religious and fundamental or is it on the score of social tradition?" he asked.

"We are no learned Pandits", replied one of them. "Our objection is based on the latter ground."

"In that case," said Gandhiji, "you should bear with Shethji. If you objected to Shethji's dining with such 'untouchables' as were addicted to drink or led unclean lives I could understand you, but for lack of moral courage to hold that food is polluted by the mere touch of one born in a so-called untouchable family, though otherwise he may be a pure and righteous man, is a negation of religion. I admit that social tradition should be respected when it is meant for the protection of society even though personally one may not feel any need for following it, but to respect a tradition even when it becomes tyrannous spells not life but death and it should be discarded."

"Jamnalalji has chosen a wider field of service. He cannot exclusively indentify himself with any particular community. The world is his family and he can serve his community only through the service of humanity. So let Jamnalalji go his way. One can overcome opposition only by love, untruth by truth, not by compromising truth. See the state of society we are living in, it is full of falsehood, hypocrisy, hatred. But today they have become corrupt. What would be left of the sacredness of the Ganges if its stream were polluted at the very source? Let us therefore try to purify our *Panchas*, by doing penance, by suffering for right's sake. That is what Jamnalalji is doing. You should give him your blessings even if you cannot follow him. For a day will come when not only you but even the orthodox section will recognize that by his action Jamnalalji rendered the truest service to Hinduism and the future generation will thank him for it."

The burning appeal coming straight as it did from Gandhiji's heart seemed to go home to his hearers.

*Young India*, 13-12-1928, p. 413 at p. 414

## 205. INTER-DINING NOT A MATTER FOR RELIGIOUS REGULATION

(From "Confusing the Issue")

The *Vedas* and the *Mahabharat* are filled with illustrations both of inter-dining and inter-marriage. But these are matters of choice, not a matter of religious regulation. No one can be compelled or required to dine with any other or contract marital relations. No doubt social habits will grow up and regulate these things more or less rigidly. But it would be wrong to dignify them by the name of religious observances. Therefore, inter-dining and inter-marriage can form no part of the campaign against untouchability. In so far as they are a matter for reform, they must be treated, in my opinion, as absolutely separate subject, unconnected ... with untouchability.

*Harijan*, 4-3-1933. p. 5

## 206. INCONSISTENCIES?

(From "Notes")

A correspondent who is a diligent student of my writings finds it difficult to reconcile my recent writings about inter-caste dining and inter-caste marriage and corresponding writings of some years ago.

He quotes from my article on "Hinduism" contributed to *Young India* of 6th October 1921. I give the quotation below with his omissions:

Though, therefore, *Varnashrama* is not affected by inter-caste dining and inter-marriage, Hinduism does most emphatically discourage inter-dining and inter-marriage between divisions. Hinduism reached the highest limit of self-restraint. It is undoubtedly a religion of renunciation of the flesh, so that the spirit may be set free... By restricting his choice of a bride to a particular group, he exercises rare self-restraint... Prohibition against inter-marriage and inter-dining is essential for a rapid evolution of the soul.

And then he quotes from my statement dated the 4th November last year, which was circulated to the press. I give the quotation again with his omissions:

Restriction on inter-caste dining and inter-caste marriage is no part of Hindu religion. It is a social custom which crept into Hinduism when perhaps it was in its decline.... Today these two prohibitions are weakening Hindu society, and emphasis on them has turned the attention of mass mind from the fundamentals which are vital to life's growth .... Dining and marriage restrictions stunt Hindu society.

As I read them with a detached mind, I find no contradiction between the two statements, especially if they are read in their full context. In the statement of 1921<sup>^</sup> I wrote on Hinduism and gave the briefest outline of it. On the 4th of November, I had to apply myself to the innumerable caste and caste restrictions. The mode of life in the Ashram in 1921 was absolutely the same as it is now. Therefore my practice has undergone no change. I still believe that restriction imposed by oneself upon inter-dining and inter-marriage is an act of renunciation of the flesh. There is one word

that perhaps I would change if I was writing the article of 1921 today. Instead | of "prohibition" I should repeat the expression used in the same article just a few lines before and say "self-| imposed restriction against inter-dining and inter-marriage is essential for a rapid evolution of the soul".

In spite of my statement of 4th November last, I would say that inter-dining and inter-caste marriage are in no way essential for the promotion of the spirit of brotherhood or for the removal of untouchability. At the same time, a super-imposed restriction would undoubtedly stunt the growth of any society, and to link these restrictions to *Varna Dharma* or caste is undoubtedly prejudicial to the freedom of the spirit and would make *Varna* a drag upon religion. But having said this, I would like to say to this diligent reader of my writings and to others who are interested in them that I am not at all concerned with appearing to be consistent. In my search after Truth I have discarded many ideas and learnt many new things. Old as I am in age, I have no feeling that I have ceased to grow inwardly or that my growth will stop at the dissolution of the flesh. What I am concerned with is my readiness to obey the call of Truth, my God, from moment to moment, and, therefore, when anybody finds any inconsistency between any two writings of mine, if he has still faith in my sanity, he would do well to choose the later of the two on the same subject.

*Harijan, 29-4-1933, p. 2*

## 207. AN INDIVIDUAL QUESTION

(From an address of Gandhiji at a Public meeting held on 8-11-1933)

The question is repeatedly asked whether the reform includes inter-dining. Though I have answered this question repeatedly, I must continue to repeat the answer as long as the question continues to be asked. Everybody knows what my own personal views are. Since my youth upward I have consistently dined with all so long as the rules of cleanliness have been observed. But that has nothing to do with the present movement. Inter-dining and the rest is a question for each individual to determine for himself. The movement organized by the servants of the untouchables society stands for simple removal of untouchability in every shape and form, in so far as it is special to the so-called untouchables. They should have the same public rights and facilities as are enjoyed by every other Hindu, that is to say, they should have access to all public institutions, such as wells, schools, roads, temples etc.

*Harijan*, 17-11-1933, p. 4 at p. 5

## 208. UNTOUCHABILITY NO GROUND FOR RESTRAINT ON INTER-DINING

(From "Implications of Untouchability")

Q.: Are inter-dining and inter-marriage necessary for the removal of untouchability?

My answer is no and yes. "No" because it is no part of the programme of the Harijan Sevak Sangh. Generally, too, marrying and dining are matters of individual concern. No one has a right to ask another to choose a girl for wife or to dine with anybody against his will. But my answer is at the same time "yes", because if a person refuses to take food touched by another person on the ground of untouchability or inferiority, he is observing untouchability. In other words, untouchability cannot constitute any ground for restraint on inter-dining or marriage.

*Harijan, 23-3-1934, p. 44*

## 209. A REFORMER'S DIFFICULTY

A correspondent writes:

In the course of your drive against untouchability you make some remarks which seem to be inconsistent with your previous writings in the columns of *Young India*. For instance, you wrote some years ago that the rule about restraint of inter dining was intended for the evolution of the soul but was no part of *oarna dharma*. Now, if you grant the necessity or the advisability of restraint upon inter-dining for the evolution of the soul, how can you say, as you have nowadays been saying, that for anyone, to object to dine with an "untouchable" on the ground of untouchability is a sin? I agree with you that restraint upon inter-dining is no part of *varna dharma*; but I do not understand why inter-dining retards the evolution of the soul.

Here, there is a double confusion. In the first instance, restraint upon inter-dining on the ground of untouchability is wholly different from the restraint based on the ground of the evolution of the soul. The first restraint excludes a whole class whose very existence is challenged, the second excludes nobody on the ground of his birth in a particular class, but it may exclude those individuals who are addicted to particular habits. Thus, restraint on the ground of untouchability will persist without reference to the person's habits, while that on the ground of evolution of the soul will abate immediately the person excluded sheds his objectionable habits. There is, therefore, no inconsistency between the *Young India* writing referred to and my present position. Secondly, even if my opinion as expressed in *Young India* is indefensible, the correspondent's doubt is solved by my showing, as I have shown, that my condemnation of objections to inter-dining on the ground of untouchability has nothing to do with the restraint referred to in *Young India*, of which I have approved.

\* \* \*

The correspondent concludes, "We cannot resolve our doubts ourselves. We yield to your better judgment. But when we follow your teaching, we run the risk of being

boycotted even by those who are near and dear to us. What is to be done under such circumstances?"

This is a difficult question to answer and can only be determined by each one according to his or her individual ability to suffer. Those who feel that untouchability is an evil cannot practise it in any shape or form. In a matter of such grave importance, I should expect every reformer to have the courage of his or her convictions and the ability to brave all the social prosecution that they may have to suffer. Such has been the lot of reformers all the world over.

*Harijan*, 13-4-1934, p. 68

## 210. INTER-DINING AND INDIVIDUAL CHOICE

(From "The Cawnpore speech" at a public meeting held on 22-7-1934)

Let me repeat the implications of this movement.\* It is limited to the removal of the feeling of superiority and inferiority and has nothing to do with inter-dining and inter-marriage. I personally inter-dine with *Bhangis* and Musalmans. I am not ashamed of this. On the other hand, I think my conduct in this respect is fully in consonance with the shastras. But it has nothing to do with this movement. Inter-dining and inter-marriage are matters of individual choice. There is no need, nor can I spare time, for such propaganda. I only place the essentials of religion before the people for their acceptance. The movement claims for the Harijans the same social, civic and religious rights as belong to any other Hindu.

*Harijan*, 3-8-1934, p. 194

\* For removal of Untouchability.

## 211. MY FOOD AND DRINK PRACTICE

(From "Some Misconceptions" by M.D.)

As regards my own practice in matters of food and drink, everyone knows that I eat food from the hands of any human being, provided it is clean and pure. It is a purely personal question and not a social question at all. I am not out for reform in the matter, as I know that it can take care of itself, and I, therefore, do not seek to air my views in public.

*Harijan*, 24-8-1934, p. 220 at p. 221

## 212. CORRUPTION THROUGH TOUCH

(From "Conundrums")

Q.; It is said that a man becomes what he eats and that he is corrupted if he takes food or even water prepared or even touched by a corrupt person. And you say that prohibition against inter-dining is not an integral part of *varna* or caste rule. Is that so?

A.: It is insolence for any person to regard a fellow-being as corrupt and, therefore, untouchable. A man is corrupted by harbouring corrupt thoughts, making corrupt speech and doing corrupt acts, never by taking water or food at the hygienically clean hands of fellow-beings. I do believe that a man has to choose the ingredients of the food he eats.

*Harijan*, 28-9-1934, p. 257

## 213. ESCAPING THE OBVIOUS

When I was addressing a mixed conference of Harijans and non-Harijans the other day, I happened to deplore the fact that at railway stations one heard the cry "Musalman milk, Musalman water; Hindu milk, Hindu water", "Hindu *chapati* and Musalman *chapati*". I could bear, though I did not believe in anything like it; but Musalman and Hindu milk, with the making of which *man* had nothing to do, I could neither understand nor tolerate. I added that those who believed in the total removal of untouchability had to be free from superstitions like "Musalman and Hindu milk and water."

I have already remarked in these columns that those who refuse to take water and the like touched by Harijans may not claim that they are free from the taint of untouchability. It would be preposterous to justify the practice of differentiating between Musalman and Hindu water and milk, when we do away with the difference between Harijan water and milk and non-Harijan water and milk. The great movement for the removal of untouchability would lose all its charm, if it became a mere salve for conscience without truth behind it. The virus of untouchability is all pervasive, and those who believe in it cannot be said to be free till they have ceased to regard any single individual as untouchable or in any way inferior in status by reason of his birth, community or faith.

A letter has just come to emphasise the necessity of proper understanding of the implications of the movement. It describes how there was a public dinner arranged over the celebration of the Silver Jubilee of a High School in Berar. Harijan students were invited to attend it. The letter informs me that the Harijan students were provided with separate seats, the guests drawn from all the other castes and communities sitting in one row. Here was a wanton insult needlessly offered to the cultured Harijan students, who could not be recognized as such from their appearance. Such insults at this time of the day at a High School function shows that, though much headway has been made in the campaign against untouchability, the

superstition persists even in least expected quarters and in the least expected manner. It should be borne in mind that here there was no question of inter-dining, there was no question of mixed cooking, it was a question merely of sitting in the same row. If sitting on the same bench in the same compartment in a railway train and eating one's food in that condition is not inter-dining, surely this was not. But in the dictionary of untouchability, inter-dining has a specific meaning which excludes sitting at meal-time in the same row with people.

## 214. A PRACTICAL SUGGESTION

The following was received just after I had finished the Travancore pilgrimage:

Pray allow me as one of the subjects of His Highness the Maharajah of Travancore to welcome you to our blessed State of universal equality and brotherhood. Our Maharajah has done all that he could to save Hinduism, to raise the depressed classes, and to establish in the land perfect equality between man and man. The people seem to be lost in praising, of course deservedly praising, their beloved Maharajah. In a corner of my heart, however, there lurks a fear that when the people shall have expressed their worthy gratitude and admiration there will be left little of energy to implement the Proclamation by introducing the spirit of it in their daily home life. To be worthy subjects of this eminently worthy Maharajah, the people should follow up the Proclamation by introducing inter-dining in their homes amongst all classes of people, by employing poor Harijans as servants and cooks in their homes, etc. It would be nothing short of a calamity, if this Proclamation should end in establishing liberty of worship alone, while the numerous disgraceful class distinctions are allowed to continue. Would you advise the so-called leaders to make the Proclamation a real blessing in every sense of the word? It is a pity that the so-called higher classes have not yet begun to move in the matter.

The letter is from a retired principal of a college and deserves attention. I have already drawn attention to the many implications of the Proclamation. But I have not touched in that connection the question of inter-dining. My views in the matter are well known. Restrictions on inter-dining... were, in my opinion, hygienic rules in origin. Given a proper conformation with the rules of cleanliness there should be no scruple about dining with anybody. And training Harijan boys and girls as members of a family ensures cleanliness and raises their status and removes in the safest manner the insane caste restrictions on inter-dining. I fully agree with the writer of the letter quoted that equality all along the line is implied in the Proclamation. The young Maharajah has given the lead. Will the people of Travancore follow it with all its implications?

*Harijan, 13-2-1937, p. 7*

## 215. IF YOU HAVE COURAGE

(From "Question Box")

Q.: My mother died last month. I have for a long time been following the practice of eating food cooked by Harijans. The orthodox did not like it, but they tolerated my practice. Three years ago I accepted an invitation for a funeral dinner given by a Muslim friend on the occasion of his mother's demise. Now my mother is dead. My community have now boycotted all functions in connection with my mother's demise. What am I to do?

A.: If you have courage, you will let the castemen do, their worst, but you will befriend your Muslim friend at all costs and dine with him as often as is necessary. Such boycotts should not be feared at all.

*Harijan*, 8-6-1940, p. 159

## 216. A WIDOW'S DIFFICULTY

(From "Question Box")

Q.: I am a Bengali Brahman widow. Since my widow-hood—these 24 years—I have observed strict rules about my food. I have my separate widow's kitchen and utensils even in my own family. I believe in your ideal of truth and non-violence. I am a habitual wearer of khadi since 1930 and a regular spinner. Our Mahila Samaj has established a Harijan school in a Harijan village in Dacca. I go there and mix with the Harijans. I mix freely with my Muslim sisters towards whom I have nothing but good will. But I cannot inter-dine with Harijans or any other non-Brahman caste. Now can't orthodox widows like me enlist as satyagrahis, passive and active?

A.: According to the Congress constitution you have a perfect right to be enlisted. You can even enforce your right. But since you ask me, I would dissuade you from being enlisted. I know the punctilious way in which Bengali widows observe the rules custom has prescribed for them. But widows who dedicate themselves to the country's cause, and that in non-violent way, should have no scruples in dining with anybody. I do not believe that dining with people, no matter who they are, hinders spiritual progress. It is the motive which is the deciding factor. If a widow approaches every task in a spirit of service, it is well with her. A widow may observe all the dining and other rules with meticulous care and yet not be a true widow if she is not of a pure heart. You know as well as I do that outward observance of rules governing a society often covers hypocrites. I would, therefore, advise you to disregard the restriction on inter-dining and the like as a hindrance to spiritual and national progress and concentrate on cultivation of the heart. In the satyagraha *dal* I should like to have not self-satisfied persons but those who have used their reason and chosen a way of life that has commended itself to both head and heart. Sevagram, 10-6-1940

*Harijan*, 15-6-1940, p. 161 at p. 162

## 217. UNTOUCHABILITY AS REGARDS EATING

(Originally appeared in "Question Box" under the title "Implications of Untouchability".)

Q.: In Satyagraha camps there often crops up the question of the implications of untouchability. In Bihar this certainly is the case. If abolition of untouchability consists simply in touching the Harijans, untouchability does not exist in Bihar. But if it includes letting the Harijans use your water pot and exchange water with non-Harijans, if it includes inter-dining and allowing them to enter your dining room and kitchen, even Congressmen are not free from this untouchability. What do you say to this?

A.: Abolition of untouchability in me will be really achieved only when I behave towards Harijans as I should towards my own kith and kin. There is no untouchability today in Congress kitchens. And so if Congressmen in Bihar observe untouchability as regards eating, I should be disagreeably surprised. Believe me that Swaraj will be delayed in proportion to our failure and half-heartedness in carrying out the different items of the constructive programme. It is impossible to attain swaraj non-violently unless there is self-purification. I do not often use this word nowadays, but it is there in an important Congress resolution. It has been a vital part of Congress politics since 1920. Letters of the late Pandit Motilalji and other leaders, written during that period, are worth perusal. Their lives had undergone a conversion. Have we descended from that high pedestal?

*Harijan, 28-7-1940, p. 217 at p. 218*

## 218. EATING WITH HARIJANS

(From "Notes")

Q.: How can a vegetarian caste Hindu sit down to food in the home of a meat-eating Harijan?

A.: A vegetarian caste Hindu can eat vegetarian food in the home of a meat-eating Harijan. Inter-dining does not imply that one should eat everything that is put before one. All that is necessary is that the food, the plates on which it is served, and the hands that have cooked it should be clean. The same applies to water. Nor does inter-dining mean that people should eat out of the same plate or drink out of the same glass. There should be no breach of hygiene.

*Harijan*, 14-4-1946. p. 92

## 219. THE CHANGE IN MY VIEWS

(From "Harijan Sevak Sangh Under Fire" by Pyarelal)

Q.: Can the members of the Sangh refuse to inter-dine with the untouchables? Have your views on this question undergone any change?

A.: At one time I did say that inter-dining was not an essential part of the campaign for the removal of untouchability. Personally, I was for it. Today I encourage it. In fact, today I even go further, as a perusal of my recent preface to a recent Navajivan publication of my writings on *Varna Vyavastha* would show.

*Harijan*, 28-7-1946, p. 233 at p. 234