

BY MANUBAHEN GANDHI

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THE END OF AN EPOCH — MANUBAHEN GANDHI



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OF
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THE END OF AN EPOCH

BY
MANUBAHEN GANDHI

Translated from
the original in Gujarati
by
GOPALKRISHNA GANDHI



NAVAJIVAN PUBLISHING HOUSE
AHMEDABAD-14

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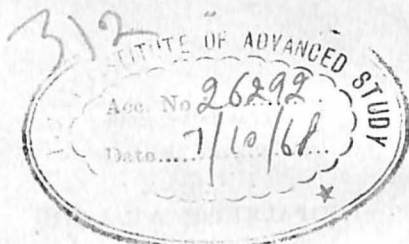


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CONTENTS

FOREWORD (By C. Rajagopalachari)	iii
INTRODUCTION	v
1 BAPU	3
2 BA	64

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FOREWORD

I commend this book of Manu's, translated from Gujarati into English by the late Shri Devadas Gandhi's son. Manubahen was one of those whom Bapu had adopted as his grandchildren. He showered his affection on her. Gopalkrishna, the translator, is Gandhiji's and my grandson and is one of the best students in St. Stephen's College working for an Honours Degree in English literature. This book on Gandhiji's last days deserves to be read by all admirers and lovers of Gandhiji.

5-2-1962

C. RAJAGOPALACHARI

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INTRODUCTION

About five years ago, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, on behalf of the Ministry of Education, asked me to undertake the job of giving series of talks on the life of Mahatma Gandhi to schools and colleges in different parts of the country. Therefore, for the last five years, I have been touring various States, such as Bombay, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan in connection with this.

During the course of my talks, I had the opportunity of coming into contact with the student community. In almost every city I visited, I was asked by the students to write a booklet on the last days of Mahatma Gandhi and Kasturba. This pamphlet has been written to satisfy their demand. I hope that my student friends as well as other readers of Gandhian literature will be pleased with this effort of mine.

I am grateful to the Rajkot unit of the All-India Radio for allowing me to publish

excerpts from my talks which have been relayed over the radio from time to time. I am also indebted to those persons who are in charge of the educational institutions at which I had the privilege of speaking, for having given me the opportunity of meeting their students.

1-9-1961

MANUBAHEN GANDHI

THE END OF AN EPOCH



By Stella Brown

THE ASSASSINATION

1

BAPU

India's history is noteworthy for its uniqueness in many ways. Its eventful years are crammed with outstanding occurrences. But the years in which Gautama Buddha and Mahatma Gandhi lived are the years which attract the maximum attention, not only of the educated elite, but also of the humblest of the common people. This is so because the lives of these two great men are vivid examples of man's infinite possibilities for good, if he cultivates them. The findings of the scholars who participated in the Buddha Jayanti celebrations held some years ago throw light on the great similarity that exists between the Buddha and the Gandhi eras and the struggles that took place in them.

But I for one, can have only a mental picture of Buddha's life, because all my knowledge regarding that great man has been derived entirely from books. On the other hand, my knowledge of Mahatma

Gandhi and his mission is concrete because I was a constant witness to the historic events that were being enacted during Bapuji's last years. Therefore, it is with such a background that I venture to narrate the following events.

August 9, 1942 can be considered the beginning of the chain of events that finally led to the attainment of India's Independence. It was on this day that Bapuji, revered Kasturba and the late Mahadev Desai were arrested and sentenced to their last prison terms. By a great stroke of good fortune, I was given the priceless opportunity of being allowed to stay at the Aga Khan Palace, Poona, where Ba and Bapuji were being detained, and to serve Ba who was ill. Both Ba and Mahadevkaka passed away while in detention and, I can never forget the iron courage that Bapuji displayed when faced with the loss of his beloved wife, and co-worker.

Finally, however, his methods of peaceful resistance and non-violence emerged victorious and the British Government was humbled. We are all familiar with the rigorous experiments with Truth, which Bapuji had

carried on for over fifty years. But his striving towards Truth and his services to our country, reached their zenith only in these, his last years. In fact, his last year of life proved the most momentous. The months between the 30th of January 1947 and the 30th of January 1948, saw the supreme demonstration of the principles that Bapuji stood for and the policies he upheld. He has left us a rich legacy which raises us in the esteem of the world.

During the end of 1946, communal riots tore Noakhali apart. Mass killing and looting were the order of the day, and brother fought brother. At that time Bapuji was in Delhi. But he could not be a silent witness to the atrocities that were reported to be going on in Noakhali. Leaving his other duties, Bapuji left the capital city and rushed to this tiny village that was situated in a small corner State of India. On seeing those pathetic scenes, Bapuji's soft heart was touched. He directed his co-workers to establish themselves in different riot-torn villages and redress the grievances of the villagers. Bapuji stationed himself at village Shrirampur.

At this time, I expressed a desire to be with him and help him in his heroic mission.

Bapuji immediately agreed and sent me a telegram asking me to join him. But at the same time, he sent another telegram to my father which read: "If you and Manu sincerely anxious for her to be with me at your risk you can bring her to be with me — Bapu." From this wire one can judge the seriousness of the situation that existed there. Bapu and his party were about to undertake a tour among the huts and hamlets of that area. It was to be a walking tour and in order to protect Bapuji from the inclemencies of the Noakhali weather, Shri Satish Babu had a portable hut constructed for Bapu at a cost of Rs. 300. But would Bapuji ever accept such comforts? No. He was determined to make the people's troubles his own.

Noakhali was a difficult place. Over and above the cold climate, we had to contend with fierce rains and strong winds. Amidst the thick foliage of coconut and betel trees, we could hardly see the sun. The roads and the pathways were slimy and slippery, and we had to wind our way through the mud and silt of several fields, and cross big marshy puddles by building improvised bamboo

bridges. These were flimsy things and if one lost one's balance while on the bridge, one fell straight into the mess underneath. Bapuji discarded his chappals and walked barefoot on those thorny and difficult roads. Many times, his toes would begin to bleed. But he would not care. He persevered undaunted. He was the living embodiment of Rabindranath Tagore's song, "If they answer not thy call, walk alone!", which bids man to march ahead, unperturbed by the many obstacles that litter the path of progress. Many a time we could not even get shelter for the night. On such occasions, Bapu willingly spent the night under some wayside tree. And if Bapu could not get his glassful of goat's milk, he drank plain coconut water. And if a handful of wheat was not available for making his *khakhra* (thin bread), Bapu ate *mamra* (puffed rice) instead! He used to get up at 2 a.m. in the morning and begin dealing with his correspondence. Bapuji had vowed to 'do or die'. This vow of his and his principles of Truth and non-violence were, here exercised to the full. The following outpouring of his heart speaks for itself:

"It is 3 a.m. I am dictating this lying in bed....At four, I will get up and

wash. Then will come the morning prayer. If God helps me, I will survive the ordeal. But there is no cause for worry about my health. My body is responding. But I am being tested through and through. My truth and Ahimsa are being weighed in a balance, more delicate than any pearl merchant ever used...a balance so sensitive as to show the difference of even a hundredth part of a hair. Truth and Ahimsa are perfect. They can never fail. But I, their exponent, may. This much however I do hope that before that happens, merciful God will take me away from here and send a worthier instrument to carry out His will....

I am sad to find that the work Pyarelal was doing, I am unable to do. But with the help of others around me, I hope to set things in order. For the last three days, Manu, whom her father Jaisukhlal brought here, has been with me. She was prepared to undertake the risk involved in coming here. So I allowed her to come. I am now lying down, with my eyes closed and am dictating this letter to Manu, so that I don't have

any trouble. In this very hut, sleeps Sucheta. She is fast asleep and so as not to wake her up, I am dictating this letter in a soft tone....No one is trying to deliberately exaggerate. People do not know what is exaggeration. The situation here is most baffling. It is so hard to get at the Truth. *Himsa* masquerades as Ahimsa, irreligion as religion. But is it not under such circumstances that Truth and Ahimsa are truly tested? I know it; I fully realize it; that is why I am here. Do not call me away from here. If I run away from here like a coward, defeated, it must be my fate. But I have no such fear. I do not see any such signs for India. I am out to do or die....”

In another letter Bapu wrote:

“If I am practising irreligion, then it becomes the duty of all my friends to oppose me. If a Satyagrahi ceases to understand the difference between truth and untruth, he ceases to be a Satyagrahi. I am not like that. But what if I am not? I am not God! I am liable to commit mistakes! I have committed mistakes. And at times

big mistakes can also be committed. But if and when I am making mistakes, my well-wishers can correct me. If they do not, then I will have to continue like this till I die. But whatever I am doing here is part of my *yajna*. I do not try to deliberately do things that are not part of my *yajna*. If I take some rest, that is for my *yajna*. At this time my eyes are closed, I have the medicinal mud-pack on my stomach, and Manu is taking down this letter—all for the *yajna*. And it is for the *yajna* that Manu is with me. . . .”

These words of Bapuji provide an intimate glimpse into the mental struggle, that was going on in him. For about two months, we endured such hardships and kept our work going. Bapuji’s being in Noakhali was a great boon to the inhabitants of that place. His stay there was similar to Lord Ramachandra’s sojourn in the forests.

Given below is an extract from Tulasidas:

“From the time Rama took up abode
in this place

Saints in happiness lived; of their fears
now no trace!

Some new glory on hills, woods and
streams seemed to glow,
And their beautiful splendour each
day seemed to grow!"

How relevant this stanza is! Just like Rama in the forest, Bapuji in Noakhali, brought enlightenment to souls that had lost hope and brought happiness from sorrow. At places where temples had been forcibly converted into mosques, Bapuji got the guilty Musalmans to turn them into temples again, as atonement for their acts of sacrilege.

But as soon as order was restored in Noakhali, Bihar went mad. Stories of communal atrocities there sorely wounded Bapuji's heart. He was a devout Hindu and could not stand any atrocities being done in the name of Hinduism. Therefore, in March 1946, Bapuji rushed to Bihar. The situation there was as bad as it had been in Noakhali. Under a scorching sun, we toured the villages of Bihar. There was trouble everywhere, and this meant more work for Bapuji. On some days he worked for eighteen hours. Any ordinary man's health would have given way. But the amazing control that Bapuji exercised over himself and the remarkable

manner in which he overcame various ills, gave him superhuman strength to go through the rigours of the journey. Very often I would shave his beard with a safety razor and he would pop off to sleep and sleep very soundly for ten minutes after which he would suddenly wake up, as fresh as ever. Wonderful, indeed!

The work in Bihar was extremely difficult as we had to face much hostility. But Bapuji of course treated everyone with kindness and affection. Several guilty persons came and confessed their sins to Bapu. Some Hindus opened a Muslim Relief Fund as a token of their freshly awakened sympathy for the aggrieved Musalmans.

It was while we were working in Noakhali and Bihar and propagating Ahimsa among violent rioters with amazing results, that the new Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten arrived in Delhi. He invited Bapuji to come to Delhi to discuss the current situation and find a solution. Bapuji had always been opposed to the theory of partition. In no uncertain terms he declared:

“If it does not suit two brothers to live together, then they can between

themselves come to an amicable decision to separate. I am not against such a move. But what will remain of the prestige of the two brothers if an outsider comes in to mediate?...Let Mr. Jinnah take over the leadership of India. If such an arrangement is not practicable, then let Mr. Jinnah and the Congress, within themselves, agree to partition the country and thus separate from each other. But let not the British Government intervene and split the country for us. There can be no greater blemish on India's face than such a happening."

Bapuji had made this declaration from Mr. Jinnah's bungalow. But his attempts to bring about a decision of the type he wanted, failed. On the third of June, the government-sponsored Partition Plan was announced. This left a deep hurt in Bapuji's heart. He was pained. Surrounded by turmoil on all four sides, Bapuji said: "On all four sides of me wicked fires are burning. It is strange that they are not consuming me. Is this due to God's mercy, or is He making fun of me?"

In the last days of July and the beginning of August, we had to visit Kashmir, at

the request of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. From Kashmir we were scheduled to go straight back to Noakhali, via Calcutta. But man proposes and God disposes! Calcutta was so aflame with communal fires, that heeding to the then Chief Minister Suhrawardy Saheb's requests, Bapuji decided to stay on at Calcutta and not to proceed any further. But the decision was taken only after Bapuji was given certain assurances like: 1. That if after the 15th of August, any untoward incident took place in Noakhali, Suhrawardy Saheb would be considered directly responsible; and 2. That during such time as Bapuji was in Calcutta, Suhrawardy Saheb would leave his official residence and come and stay with Bapuji, wherever that might be. Suhrawardy Saheb was not only supposed to eat, drink and sleep where Bapu was, but was even expected to carry out his administrative functions from the same place. We stayed in a small house in a locality called Belia-ghat, and Suhrawardy Saheb, joined us here. Here, Bapuji met poor people, students, officials, dignitaries and all kinds of people. Prayer meetings were held in various parts of the disturbed city, in order to soothe the citizens' minds.

It was in such an atmosphere that, on the 15th of August, India heralded her Independence. The chains of slavery that had bound India for centuries were at last broken, and the golden dawn of freedom appeared on the Indian horizon. The entire population of Calcutta that day, went mad in jubilation. The people flocked into our house to have *darshan* of Bapu. It was the month of Ramzan, a period of festivity and fasting for the Musalmans. So on the 15th of August, many Musalmans had decided first to catch a glimpse of Bapuji and then alone break their day's fast.

On the night of the 14th of August, the eve of Independence, crowds of happy people, irrespective of caste or religion, flocked to our Beliaghata house, to be with Bapu.

But what was Bapu's condition then? His visage was grave. While the people in his room rejoiced, his mind kept thinking of the suffering people in riot-torn regions. Bapuji—the Shankara of our age—spent the day fasting and spinning. He observed silence that day and his mind was immersed in deep meditation. Thousands of people rushed to Bapuji and fell at his feet. But he was

calm. He was all sobriety and humility. At times Bapuji would join his palms together in a grateful *namaskar*, as if thanking the people for the co-operation they offered to him during the struggle for liberation.

But in the midst of this joyful atmosphere, lay seeds of hatred and violence. Hardly a week elapsed, when on the 31st of August, large-scale fighting and massacre broke out in the city, bringing misery to lakhs of innocent people. At 10 p.m. that night, a crowd of hot-headed young men began hammering the front gate of the house shouting slogans like "Kill! Murder!" and they forced their way into the house and jammed Bapuji's room. At that time there were only three or four of us in the house. Suhrawardy Saheb had gone to the city to make arrangements for our scheduled departure for Noakhali. There was fearful tension in the room, but Bapuji got up from his bed and faced the intruders. It was a silence day, but Bapuji broke his silence and said: "What is it? Kill me, kill me.... Why don't you kill me? My God asks me, where are you?... I am deeply pained. Does your 'observance of peace on August 15' mean only this?"

After several endeavours, at 12-30 p.m. the crowd began to disperse. While we were discussing as to what would happen in this riot-torn city the next day, our entire Noakhali programme got shelved as Bapuji decided to start an indefinite fast so as to bring about a *rapprochement* between the aggrieved and the violent citizens of Calcutta. The anxiety that prevailed in his heart is best expressed by these words of his:

“Communal fight is going on here at present. I have just returned after seeing the corpses of two Muslims who have died of wounds. I hear that conflagration has burst out at many places. What was regarded as the ‘Calcutta Miracle’ has proved to be a nine days’ wonder. I am pondering what my duty is, in the circumstances. I am searching deep within me. In that, silence helps. (This was dictated last evening)... Since writing yesterday, I have heard a lot of more news. A number of people also have come and seen me. I was pondering as to what my duty was. The news that I received, clinched the issue for me. I decided to undertake a fast. It commenced at 8-15 last evening.

Rajaji came last night. I patiently listened to all that he had to say. He exhausted all the resources of his logic... But none of his arguments went home. I clearly saw what my duty was. Let no one be perturbed. Perturbation won't help. If the leaders are sincere, the killing will stop and the fast will end, and if the killing continues, what use is my life? If I cannot prevent people from running amuck, what else is left for me to do?..."

But by God's infinite grace, the passions did subside. God cleansed the hearts of the people. Numerous dangerous weapons were surrendered at Bapuji's feet by miscreants who confessed their guilt. These weapons representing brute violence, looked miserable in front of that small frail human being—that apostle of peace. It was a sanctifying spectacle. Bapuji had triumphed. I thanked God for giving me this opportunity of being near Bapuji during his most triumphant moments.

At the termination of his fast, the leaders of Bengal signed the following pledge:

“We, the undersigned, promise to Gandhiji that now that peace and quiet have been restored in Calcutta once again,

we shall never allow communal strife in the city and shall strive unto death to prevent it.”

After the signing of this pledge, Bapuji spoke a few words before he broke his fast by drinking the juice of sweet lemon, offered by Sulhawardy Saheb. He had received a wire from Panditji, which said that the Punjab was now in the grip of communal riots and that Bapuji's presence there was urgently needed. Therefore Bapuji decided to leave Calcutta and go to the Punjab the next day. He had only just broken his fast and was making preparations to leave! Rajaji and other leaders prevailed upon him not to undertake the journey in such a weak state of health. But Bapuji placed duty before discomfort and stuck to his programme.

On the morning of September 9, 1947, we stepped into Delhi's Birla House. I can never forget that September, for it was marred with blood and violence. It was not possible for Bapuji to stay in the Bhangi Colony, because that place had become overcrowded with refugees. So this time, we stayed at Birla House. As an arrival of the

head of a family brings relief and peace among its quarrelsome members, Panditji and the late Sardar Patel felt immensely relieved to see Bapuji in their midst. In the five months that Bapuji spent in Delhi, he met and discussed important matters with leaders of national and international repute. In the course of Bapu's visits to refugee camps, prayer meetings were organized at urbanized localities as well as in the surrounding rural districts which had suffered owing to riots. Bapuji actively assisted the Government leaders in their administrative work. It was through his tact and kind persuasion that the Sardar succeeded in bringing round the Princes of the various Indian States to accept the Government's proposals. This was Bapu's principle of love made applicable in the sphere of politics which made rulers only the trustees of their property. Bapu simultaneously worked for the removal of controls.

January 12th was a day of silence for Bapuji. Many local Musalmans came to meet him on that day, as they did every day. But on this day, they had something special to say to him. They said: "We are nationalist Muslims.

We have spent our entire lives in the Congress, fighting for independence. But now after the attainment of independence, we are asked to leave India and go to Pakistan. But there is no place for us in Pakistan. If leave we must, then we can go only to England. Please arrange for our passage to England (i.e. England). The people there will accept us.”

Bapuji could not stand these words. He tried hard to think of ways and means of bringing about understanding between the Hindus and the Muslims. He held talks with Panditji and various other leaders about this matter.

On his days of silence, Bapuji used to write his evening discourse in English. This was to help newspapers in reporting the discourse correctly. This practice was adopted as the English newspapers for want of authentic translation of Hindi prayer speech reported distorted translations. And some of us used to translate it into Hindi. On this particular day, when Sushilababen and I were translating Bapuji's discourse into Hindi, we learnt, to our great surprise, that Bapuji had embarked upon a decision to begin

another fast from the 13th of January. He had come to this decision due to the continuing communal disharmony in Delhi. Bapuji had stated that his decision was firm and that no one should ask him to change his decision. Yet several people asked him to give up the idea. But Bapuji of course was adamant. Finally, Bapuji's youngest son, Devadas wrote a letter to his father, imploring him to give up his idea. Devadaskaka gave me this letter to be read out to Bapuji, whenever he was free. This was the last exchange of letters that took place between father and son.

Devadaskaka's letter to Bapuji:

13-1-1948,
Tuesday

In my revered father's service,

I am afraid the statement has been written in haste. Many improvements could have been made in it....I had wished to tell you my views about the propriety of your fasting. But as I had no hint of the oncoming fast, I made no attempts to tell you these. No one informed me of the decision and so I could not come to you before you started your

fast. It is only now that, through Manu, I come to know of the decision. My chief concern and my argument against your fast is that you have surrendered to impatience, whereas your mission by its very nature calls for infinite patience. You do not seem to have realized what a tremendous success your patient labour has achieved. It has saved now millions of lives and will save many more. By your death you will not be able to accomplish what you can by living. I would therefore beseech you to pay heed to my entreaty and give up your decision to fast.

Devadas's respects

And this was Bapuji's reply:

Makar Sankranti,
14-1-1948,
4 a.m.

Dear Devadas,

I read your letter early morning after the prayer. I have also pondered over what little conversation you had with me yesterday.

The decision was quick no doubt, so far as the drafting of the statement was

concerned. But behind this lightning quickness was my four days' heart-searching and prayers. It cannot therefore be called 'hasty' according to my definition, or for that matter, anybody's definition. In a statement like this, there is always room for improving the language. It took me no time therefore to accept the verbal changes you suggested. As for the propriety of the decision, I did not feel called upon to consult you or anybody else. The fact that I listened to you only bespeaks my patience and my humility. . . . Your worry as well as your pleading are equally vain. . . . You are of course a friend and a friend of a very high order at that. But you cannot get over the son in you. Your concern is natural, and I respect it. But your argument betrays impatience and superficial thinking. . . . I regard this step of mine as the acme of patience. Is patience that which kills its very object, patience or folly? I cannot accept the credit for what has been achieved since my arrival in Delhi. It would be sheer conceit on my part to do so. How can any mortal say with

assurance that so many lives were saved as a result of his or anybody's labours? God alone could do that. And does it not betray sheer ignorance to attribute sudden loss of patience to one who has been patience personified since September last?

It was only when in terms of human effort that I had exhausted all resources and realized my utter helplessness, that I laid my head in God's lap. That is the inner meaning and significance of my fast. You would do well to read and ponder over Gajendra-moksha, the greatest of devotional poems as I have called it. Then alone perhaps will you be able to appreciate the step I have taken. Your last sentence is a charming token of your affection. But your affection is rooted in either attachment or in delusion. Attachment does not become enlightenment because it relates to a public cause. As long as one has not shed all attachments and learnt to regard both life and death as the same, it would be idle to pretend that he wants to live only because his life is indispensable to a certain cause.

‘Strive while you live’ is a beautiful saying, but there is a hiatus in it. Striving has to be in a spirit of detachment. Now perhaps you will understand why I cannot comply with your request. God sent this fast. He alone will end it if and when it pleases Him. In the meantime, it behoves you, me and everybody to have faith that it is equally well whether He preserves my life or not. I can therefore only pray that He may lend strength to my spirit lest the desire to live may tempt me into premature termination of my fast....

Bapu’s blessings

But again due to God’s infinite mercy, Bapu successfully passed through this ordeal. The leaders of Delhi, like their counterparts in Calcutta, undertook the responsibility of maintaining peace and harmony in the city. And therefore on the 18th of January, at 12-36 p.m. Bapuji ended his fast, as Maulana Saheb held a glass of *musambi* juice to his lips. As soon as Bapuji regained some strength, he began making preparations to leave. No one knew then that his slogan of 1942—‘do or die’, would turn out to be true here.

On the evening of the 20th January, as Bapuji's post-prayer discourse was coming to a close, there was a loud explosion. Bapuji was sitting on his usual prayer seat and I was seated close to him. As soon as the explosion took place, I clung to his legs in sheer fright. There was a good deal of commotion in the audience and people began running here and there. But Bapuji was as calm and serene as ever. Bapuji then said to me: "So you got frightened! That must have been the military, carrying on their routine target practice. But suppose someone really came to shoot us down, then what would you do?" Bapuji's words were said in a humorous vein. But at that time we were not aware that these words of his were actually portending the oncoming calamity.

It was some time later that we came to know that the explosion was that of a genuine bomb that had been planted near Bapu and was meant to kill him on the spot. But Bapuji remained absolutely unconcerned about his life. He believed that if God wanted him to continue his work, he would let him live.

Whenever he heard tales of atrocities in Delhi, Bapuji became immensely worried and anxious. He even started becoming irritable with his close associates. On the night of the 29th, Bapu was extremely exhausted. As I massaged his body with oil, he said: "My head is reeling. I am again and again getting the thought, where am I? What am I doing? How can one bring peace in this present atmosphere of violence?"

After saying this, with a marked sadness in his tone, he repeated the famous Urdu verse: "Shortlived is the splendour of Spring in the garden of the world..." He said these words less than 24 hours before the calamity! How true they turned out to be!

After a while, that night, Devadaskaka came. Bapu immediately began talking to him and while doing so, suffered from a serious bout of cough. I asked him to take some penicillin lozenges. But he refused and in a voice choked with emotion, said: "You have participated in my *yajna* and you are the only one among all these people to have done so. I have given you training and education as a mother does to a child. You know my faith in Ramanama. If I die due

to a lingering illness, nay even by as much as a boil or a pimple, it will be your duty to proclaim to the world, even at the risk of making people angry at you, that I was not the man of God that I claimed to be. If you do that, my spirit will have peace. Note down this also that if someone were to end my life by putting a bullet through me, as someone tried to do with a bomb the other day, and I met this bullet without a groan, and breathed my last taking God's name, then alone would I have made good my claim." On hearing these words, tears welled up in my eyes and I could not say anything in reply.

30-1-1948

Bapuji woke up punctually at 3-30 a.m. and then awoke us. With Sushilabahen away, I had to conduct the Gita recitation all by myself. Bapuji was clearly annoyed due to ...'s not getting up in time. He said: "I see that I do not have much effect even on some of my closest associates. Prayer is a purifier. And I am a firm believer in prayer. If...does not like it, then...can leave me and go away. That will be good for both of us. If you have the courage, tell her this.

Explain the position to her....I do not like these signs. I hope God does not keep me here very long to witness these things.”

After saying this, Bapuji expressed a desire to hear the Gujarati song, which, when translated, reads:

Whether weary or unwearied, O Man,
do not tarry,

Stop not, your struggle if single-
handed—continue

And do not tarry!

The paths that you'll cross

Will bewilder and confuse,

The lives that you'll save

Will be pitiable and mute.

Lose not, your confidence, O Man—

Do not tarry.

The life that you'll live

Will exhaust and enrage,

Growing difficulties

Will continually frustrate.

But bearing these burdens all, O Man—

Do not tarry.

Jump over your troubles

That are big like mountains,

Behind whom are fields

That are dried up and barren.
Yet try and till that land, O Man—
Do not tarry.

The world will be dark
You shall enlighten it,
All around will be blackness
You shall erase it.
And even if Life deserts you then,
O Man—
Do not tarry.

Never Stop to *take* rest, O Man—
Ever strive to *give* rest, O Man
And do not tarry.*

* The full text of the song is as follows:

थाके न थाके छत्ताये हो मानवी, न लेजे विसामो,
ने झूझजे एकल बाये, हो मानवी, न लेजे विसामो।

तारे उर्लव्वाना मारग भुलामणा,

तारे उद्धारवानां जीवन दयामणां।

हिमत म हारजे तुं क्याये, हो मानवी, न लेजे विसामो!

जीवनने पंथ जतां ताप थाक लागशे,

वधती विडंबणा सहतां तुं थाकशे।

सहतां संफट ए वधाये, हो मानवी, न लेजे विसामो!

जाजे वटावी तुज आफतनी टेकरो,

आगे आगे हरो वणलेड्यां खेतरो।

खते खेडे ए वधाये, हो मानवी, न लेजे विसामो!

झांवा जगतमां एकलो प्रकाशजे,

आवे अंधार तेने एकलो विदारजे।

छोने आ आयखुं हणाये, हो मानवी, न लेजे विसामो!

लेजे विसामो न क्याये, हे मानवी, देजे विसामो।

तारी हया वरखडनि छाये, हो मानवी, देजे विसामो।

This song is full of power and meaning. It tells man not to tarry and keep marching on, on the road of life. All these things proved Bapuji's serious outlook to life.

He still suffered from serious bouts of coughing. I once again asked him whether I should give him some penicillin lozenges. To this query of mine, Bapuji gave the same answer as before, and wondered how I, having been part of his *yajna*, could offer him medicines! Did I not know his irrevocable faith in Ramanama and in prayer? He said, "If someone fires bullets at me and I die without a groan and with God's name on my lips, then you should tell the world that here was a real Mahatma...." Bapuji talked of such a death barely 12 hours before it actually happened!

Bapuji then sent a letter to the late Kishorlalbhai Mashruwala, which was as follows:

"I am utilizing the time after the morning prayer to write this....The plan about my going to Sevagram is still indefinite. If I could be said to have "done" in Delhi, it might not be necessary for me to be here to keep my pledge

(of 'do or die'). But that is for the people to judge....”

That afternoon, Sardar Patel was to see Bapuji to discuss important matters in private. On the next day, i.e. on the 31st, the entire Cabinet was scheduled to meet Bapuji to discuss matters of importance. My father was also expected to arrive in Delhi on the 31st.

After prayers, I brought Bapuji into the room and covered his legs with a warm blanket. He began correcting his draft of the new Congress constitution which he had drafted last night. It is now known as his Last Will and Testament to the nation. At a quarter to five in the morning, he had some warm water with honey and lime-juice. At a quarter to six, he had his daily glass of orange-juice.

He had not fully got over the weakness that followed his fast. Therefore, while writing, he got exhausted and fell asleep. We then massaged his aching limbs. I had wished to add a line or two to Bapuji's letter to Kishorlalkaka and so I asked him whether I could do it or whether we were leaving for Sevagram on the 2nd, in which case we would be seeing Kishorlalkaka in a day or two. To this, Bapuji said, “Who knows

about the future? If we come to decision regarding Sevagram, I shall announce it at the evening prayer meeting. It will then be relayed on the radio at night."

While he was having his stroll, Smt. Rajen Nehru came and joined him. I was not meant to join them but Bapu persuaded me to stroll along with them.

At 8 a.m., Bapuji had his massage and bath. During the massage, he read the newspapers and practised his Bengali exercise. Before going in for his bath, he said to Pyarelalji, "Please go through the draft I have prepared on the new Congress constitution, for publication in the *Harijan*. Fill any gaps that you may find in my thinking. I have worked on it under heavy strain."

While I was giving him his bath, he asked me whether I exercised my hands. I said that I did not like it, and so he said:

"I do not like this. I had asked you to do hand-exercises and so you should have been doing them. I am pained to note that you are not gaining any weight and your health is not showing signs of improvement. If your physical condition is unsatisfactory, I am the one who will

feel the maximum pain. When you came from your father's house, how healthy you were! Your sensitive nature is at the root of your weak health. Do not start feeling sad at other people's sorrow and do not get excited over other people's happiness. If a balanced state of mind is maintained, it is easier to feel the presence of God. I am not saying this on my own. This is a rule that has been, since time immemorial, recorded in the religious scriptures of the world. This is one of the many golden rules that a true Sthitaprajna should follow. You are a seventeen-year old growing girl and you do not know the care and deliberation with which I have moulded your mind. Since our Noakhali walking tour, I have made you pass through many trials and ordeals. They were indeed precious experiences which have contributed a great share in your growth, though you may not realize it at present. But in the years to come, my efforts will turn out to be greatly beneficial to you. Please remember me then if I am no longer living. This morning, when...did not get

up on time, I felt that...’s mistake was due to some fault in me and I wondered as to what that fault could be. Others have not been a part of my *yajna*. You have been part of my *yajna*. Therefore it is all the more necessary that, since your services are essential to my work, you take proper care of your health. You must imagine taking care of your health as being an inseparable part of your services to me.”

Bapuji said these words very kindly and with genuine affection. After the bath, I took his weight. It was 109½ lbs. During his morning meal he took 12 ounces of milk, boiled vegetables, a couple of radishes, three or four ripe tomatoes and the juice of an orange. While he was eating, he discussed matters regarding Noakhali with Pyarelalji. In reply to a question by Pyarelalji regarding planned evacuation in Noakhali Bapu said: “We have taken a vow to ‘do or die’ in Noakhali. I may be sitting here in New Delhi, but it is for Noakhali that I am here. People there should also be trained to stay there fearlessly and taught to work with the ‘do or die’ spirit while protecting their honour

and self-respect. There should be no running away from danger. Perhaps very few persons may be left in the end. But there is no other way of making the weak strong. Are not whole battalions wiped out in armed warfare? It is the same in non-violent war as well.” He asked Pyarelalji to go to Noakhali.

After this, he rested for a while. Very soon he was up again and began going towards the bathroom, without anyone’s assistance. Due to weakness, his legs seemed to buckle. I said, “Bapuji, how strange you look, walking all alone!” He laughed and said: “It’s nice, isn’t it? ‘Walk alone, Walk alone!’”

At 12-30 p.m., on that fateful day, Bapuji talked about securing a building for Dr. Bhargava’s nursing home and orphanage. He was very keen on this, and wanted to be reminded about it when the local Musalmans were with him. But when the Musalmans came and I reminded Bapu of the matter, he brushed it aside, saying, “Better not touch on that subject now.” Maulana Hifzur Rehman asked Bapuji as to what his plans about visiting Sevagram were, and said, “Even if you have decided about going to Sevagram, please see that you are back

here on the 14th.” Bapuji replied, “Yes, on the 14th I shall be back here. But everything is, after all, in the hands of God.”

Later, during the day, Shantikumarbhai Morarjee came and he and Bapuji discussed matters regarding the writing of the late Mahadev Desai’s biography, and the editing of his various diaries. Shantikumarbhai said that there was disagreement between the Navajivan and Chandrashankar Shukla, on financial terms. Bapuji said: “Wherever I see, I find internal rifts, like the rifts that existed among the warring Yadavas. Owing to personal differences, we are doing great harm to society. You people are not to blame. The fault lies in me. When God has blinded me what else can others do? But I better try to remove the faults that I see, if I am to be saved from the curses of coming generations.

“Mahadev’s diaries have to be serialized and edited. Narahari is not well enough to do it. And . . . has stopped doing my work and has left. But how can we blame...? Everyone is a free individual, free to do whatever he or she wishes to. Chandrashankar is the right person to do it. His handwriting

is also so very similar to that of Mahadev's! I shall write to him."

Among other callers were Dr. De Silva and his daughter. Bapu gave his autograph to the girl.

During the afternoon, Bapu attended to his post and dictated letters. At 2 p.m. he had his mud-pack treatment. He rested for a while as I pressed his tired legs. When he got up, some of us got permission from him to go and see relatives of ours in the city.

Sardar Patel had already arrived when we returned at 4 p.m. Bapu and he discussed the current situation and also talked about Kathiawad matters. Meanwhile, the two Kathiawad leaders, Dhebarbhai and Rasikbhai Parikh came and expressed their desire to meet Bapuji. I went into the room and found Bapu and the Sardar engrossed in deep conversation. When I asked the former whether he would see the two gentlemen, he replied, "Tell them that I will, but only after the prayer meeting, and that too if I am still living. We shall then talk things over." I therefore went to the two visitors and asked them to stay for prayers, so that they could meet Bapuji immediately after it.

(This much I wrote in my diary at 5 p.m. on the 30th. The rest was written at past midnight, on the 31st, by which time, all had happened.)

Yesterday, Bapuji was so deeply immersed in conversation with Sardar Patel, that he was ten minutes late for the prayer meeting. None of us had had the courage to disturb so serious a conference and had thus left the two leaders to themselves. Bapuji had eaten his supper during the conversation. It had consisted of 14 ounces of goat's milk, 14 ounces of vegetable soup and three oranges. He also kept spinning during the conversation. During the morning prayer, Bapuji had 'थाके न थाके छताये हो मानवी, न लेजे विसामो,' specially sung and according to the advice of the song—'Do not tarry and keep marching ...'—Bapuji tarried not. The minute Manibahen Patel, the Sardar's daughter, told Bapuji that he was late for the prayer meeting, and he got up. Like every other day, I picked up his pen, spittoon, spectacle case, my notebook and the holy *mala* and joined Bapuji as he set out for the prayer ground.

Reflecting on the ten minutes' delay, Bapuji said, "You are my timekeepers;"

and then added, "when you are there, why should I consult a watch?" These days, Bapuji had literally stopped consulting his watch. We had been doing everything for him and were helping him all the time. He did not even have to wind his watch; even this we did for him. So, on the way to the prayer ground, we told him, "Bapuji, your watch must be feeling quite neglected!" But Bapuji kept reiterating, "You are my watches, my timekeepers." Then, after a pause, he said: "I do not like being late for the prayer meeting. Today's delay is due to your negligence. It is a good nurse's duty to see that her patient's work is done in time. If the nurse does not attend to the patient regularly, and in time, then the poor man will die! This is just like that. Even a minute's delay for the prayer causes me great discomfort." I was on Bapuji's right. His hand was resting on my right shoulder as we walked along.

Just after we had ascended the few steps that led to the prayer dias, a well-built young man, clad in Khaki clothes, tore through the crowd from the right. As he approached Bapuji, he joined his palms as if in a reverent obeisance. Bapuji had never liked the idea

of people bowing before him or touching his feet. He had often said, "I am an ordinary human being. Why touch my feet?" So we used to tell people not to do such things. On this particular day, moreover, we were already late for prayers and therefore did not want Bapuji to be further delayed on the way. Hence, I stopped this man and said to him: "Brother, Bapuji is already late for prayers. Why are you bothering him?" But the man pushed me away rudely, and the things in my hand—the notebook, the spittoon, the spectacle case and the *mala*, fell on the ground. I did not try to immediately pick them up and kept arguing with the man. But as soon as the holy *mala* dropped out of my hands, I stooped to pick it up. But before I could pick it up, three deafening bullet shots rent the air. The shots had been fired at point blank range. There was sudden darkness, and the air was filled with smoke. The crowd began to surge forward. And in the midst of this sudden darkness, smoke and confusion, Bapu fell.

And as he lost consciousness, he called out the name of God: "*He Rama! He Rama!*" Bapuji too had been deceived by the

assassin's false *namaskar*, and in acknowledgement, he had joined his own palms. And as he fell, his palms remained joined, as if pleading for forgiveness and mercy from the people.

Many people had attempted to save Bapuji from falling, but their efforts were in vain. He had already begun his eternal sleep in Mother Earth's green lap! All this had happened within three or four minutes. The bullets had been fired so near me, that for a while, my ears were deaf and I could not hear a thing. It took me some moments before I could fully grasp the situation — so bewildered had I become. It is almost impossible to express our mental condition at that moment. Bapuji's white clothes were stained with streaks of blood. According to Bapuji's watch, the time was 5-17 p.m. It took us ten minutes to take him back to his room. Due to utter misfortune, no doctor could be immediately found. Sushilabahen's first-aid box had no effective medicines in it.

Bapuji had often said that Rama alone was his doctor. And now no one but Rama could help him. Hardly had Sardar Patel got back to his bungalow when he heard the sad news and came rushing back to Birla House

While we sobbed in the room, and crowds thronged the place, Bapuji lay still. Whenever I had felt sad, he had tried to console me. But on this day, no amount of wailing on my part could induce Bapuji to open his eyes.

Some time afterwards, we were told that the shots had been fired from a seven-chambered automatic pistol. The first bullet had entered the abdomen two and a half inches above the navel, and three and half inches to the right of the sternum. The second bullet pierced the chest at a spot one inch to the right of the breast-bone. The third bullet entered and remained enclosed in the right lung, while the first two bullets pierced him and came out at the back. These bullets were recovered from the prayer ground. Due to a heavy loss of blood, Bapuji's face had gone pale. Although it was quite obvious that there was no life in Bapuji's body, several people like Bhaisaheb (Brijkrishna Chandi-wala) went on telephoning hospital after hospital. In fact, Bhaisaheb even went to the Willingdon Hospital in search of some help. But on getting no help at such short notice, he had to turn back.

Shri K. M. Munshi arrived next. Manibahen consoled us and asked me to begin a Bhagavadgita recitation. I started it straightaway and was helped by Shri K. M. Munshi.

At this juncture, Dr. Bhargava came and examined Bapuji. At the very first glance, he realized that all was over. But as all doctors have the habit of postponing judgment till the last minute, Dr. Bhargava carried out a detailed examination. We felt a glimmer of hope that Dr. Bhargava would come and tell us that it was still possible to save Bapuji. It was a fact that one, Nathuram Godse had shot Bapuji down. But the people still would not believe that the Father of the Nation was actually no more. Our association with Dr. Bhargava had been continued over several years. He used to treat me like his own daughter. It was he who had performed my appendicitis operation in Patna. And it was about his nursing home and orphanage that Bapuji had been talking about a few hours before the assassination. Finally, Dr. Bhargava came out and told me: "Manu, child, Bapu is now no more!" The judgment had been passed.

This room in which, till a few hours ago, we had been joking and talking to Bapuji had now become a scene of painful mourning. In a short while, Devadaskaka came along with his youngest son, and Bapuji's youngest grandson, Gopu. They bent their heads over Bapuji's body and mourned their bereavement.

And Panditji ! He hid his face in Sardar Patel's lap and sobbed like a child. The crowd of thousands of people had now swollen into a multitude of lakhs ! And Sardar Patel, that 'Iron Man' showed iron courage and gave solace to one and all.

In the confusion that followed the assassination, Bapuji's spectacles and chappals had vanished. That afternoon, when he was talking to the Sardar, Bapuji had clipped his finger nails. He had given these finger nails to me to throw away. But as I was busy talking to Dhebarbhai and Rasikbhai, I could not throw them away then and had instead kept them aside to be thrown away later. But now that all this had happened, I carefully picked up these nails, and, as if they were precious jewels, I safely tucked them into my box. These finger nails, the last remains of Bapuji's body, are still in my custody.

Finally, the Governor-General, Lord Mountbatten, arrived. His arrival brought solace and relief to all of us. The swelling masses outside were waiting to get news about Bapuji. And so Sardar Patel made an announcement over the radio, informing the world of the calamity. Panditji also was to speak over the radio. But he was so heart-broken, that he could not speak properly. Mustering up his courage, he started, "Our Bapu . . ." and then again broke down and could proceed no further. It was with considerable difficulty that he finally managed to say, "Bapu is now no more with us. . . ." The anguish in people's hearts became so acute that it seemed as if the Earth itself shivered.

The public wished to pay their respect to the mortal remains of their beloved Bapu. Therefore, we were thinking of removing the body to the balcony, so that the people gathered below could see it. At this time, I happened to leave the room on some errand. Panditji stopped me and, in a momentary mental lapse, said: "Manu, go and ask Bapu what arrangements we should make ! ! " I was shocked on hearing such words from a man like

Panditji. I wondered what could have happened to him. And in my bewilderment, I began crying. Panditji now realized the blunder that he had made and he too was surprised at his own words !

By this time, the members of the Diplomatic Corps representing various nations, began coming. The Gita recitation was going on and I was leading it. Bhaisaheb and Devadas-kaka were busy making other arrangements. Those who knew the Gita and could join in the recitation, did so. Panditji came again. He caressed Bapuji's body and said : " Manu, sing louder still ! Bapu may awaken ! " This was our Nehru's mental state ! Every hour he would come and carefully stroke Bapuji's limbs as if to make sure that they were there, and that Bapuji was actually no more !

Bapuji's face was very peaceful and the body lay in such a relaxed posture, that it seemed as if Bapuji was in a deep, deep sleep—as indeed he was. The crowd had become a densely packed mass of humanity, and photographers swarmed all over the place.

When the arrangements to move the body to the balcony were completed, it was carefully taken there and placed at a position

from which the people could see it. Young and old flocked to have their last *darshan*. *Mahatma Gandhi ki jai !* they thundered and again and again the same slogan filled the air. They showered flowers and coins on Bapu and wept as they prayed for peace to his soul. It was a sad but uplifting spectacle.

At 2 a.m. we took his body into the bathroom and cleansed it with the water of the river Yamuna. As we removed Bapuji's clothes one by one, we saw clearly the extent of the assassin's work. Bapuji's Australian shawl had been badly burnt at three places by the cruel bullets. His dhoti and chaddar were soaked with blood. Devadaskaka and all of us wept as we saw the body, pierced with bullets through and through. In that cold weather, it was difficult to pour ice-cold water over Bapuji. But we hardened our hearts and did it. After the body had been properly cleansed, we took it and placed it in the centre of the room. The *mala*, which Bapuji had always used and which had fallen from my hand at that terrible moment, was placed round Bapuji's neck. A garland of hand-spun yarn was also placed along with it, in recognition of its vital role in winning Swaraj.

We anointed the body with sandal-wood paste, and on the forehead we drew a *kumkum tilak*. This *tilak* seemed to be the glorious sign of the great victory that Bapuji had achieved ! Near his head, was written with rose petals, 'He Rama' and near the feet was inscribed the holy 'OM'. The room was filled with innumerable flowers and rose petals.

Bapuji used to wake me up every morning at 3.30 a.m., with a kind stroke on my ear. But at 3.30 a.m., on the morning of the 31st, I did not feel his kind hand. Bhaisaheb, who also used to be awakened by Bapuji, did not hear the familiar 'Brijkrishna' ! Bapuji's departure from the world was already being felt.

In accordance with his usual practice, we started the morning prayer at the appointed *Brahmamuhurta*. But even while praying, we missed his "Nam-yo" and his appeal to maintain "Peace for two minutes". We had become so used to Bapuji leading the morning prayer, that it was with great difficulty that we finally managed to finish it. We sang the song:

“ कर ले सिगार चतुर अलबेली ।
साजन के घर जाना होगा ॥ ध्रु०॥

मिट्टी ओढावन, मिट्टी विछावन ।

मिट्टी से मिल जाना होगा ॥ १ ॥

न्हा ले धो ले, सीस गुंथा ले ।

फिर वहां से नहीं आना होगा ॥ २ ॥”

This is a song which deals with the transitoriness of life and the inevitability of death. When translated, it reads in part:

“ Never again can we come back from
there—

So prepare yourself . . .
With dust we shall mingle.”

And this song had made me wonder: Shall I never again see Bapuji's dear face? Shall I never see those loving eyes again? His affectionate laugh? The glimmer of his pure body?

Meanwhile, the crowds again demanded that they be shown the body. So once again it was taken to the balcony. Ambassadors from all lands, officers of the Government and other important personages joined the crowd to have a last look at one of the world's great apostles of peace.

The sun rose very inconspicuously on the 31st and hid its face in various clouds, as if it was sad with the sorrow of men.

It is strange how I had witnessed all the queer portents heralding the calamity. Bapuji had sung to himself : “ Short-lived is the splendour of spring, in the garden of the world . . . ”, on the day of his assassination! Then he had said that he wished to go away from the atmosphere of violence to an atmosphere of infinite peace, and I heard this wish of his ! And when, barely 24 hours before the assassination, he said : “ If I die due to a lingering illness . . . it will be your duty to proclaim to the world . . . that I was not the man of God that I claimed to be . . . If someone were to end my life by putting a bullet through me . . . and I met this bullet without a groan and breathed my last, taking God’s name, then alone would I have made good my claim . . . ” I was the one who was listening. And, finally, at that fateful moment, I was not even an inch removed from Bapuji; it was from near my side, that the assassin elbowed his way in; the bullets were fired right before my eyes, and on my shoulder, during his last minutes, Bapuji had kept his hand. And thus, I had the opportunity to see the end of that great couple—revered Kasturba some years ago, and now, Bapuji.

Lakhs of citizens crowded into Birla House to join Bapuji on his last journey. The day was declared to be a day of State mourning all over the country. At various points in the disconsolate city, our National Flag fluttered at half-mast. The crowd was so thick, that Albuquerque Road was cordoned off to keep the surging multitude away. There was a heavy guard everywhere. After many hours of hurried discussions and consultations, it was decided to take the body to the cremation ground, in an army weapon-carrier. This was a huge vehicle and if the body was placed on top of it, the people along the 5½ mile route, could see it. It was decided to keep the wooden *takhta* that Bapuji had been using, on top of the carrier, and over this *takhta*, was to be kept another low cot on which the body was finally laid.

Punctually, at 11 a.m., the body was brought and placed on the top of the carrier. A spotless white sheet covered the body. At this juncture, my father arrived from Mahuva. It then seemed that even in heaven, Bapuji had kept me in mind and before he could be removed from Birla House, saw to it that I was safely returned to my father's paternal care. Ramadaskaka had, some time back,

flown in from Nagpur. And minutes before the procession began moving, Sushilababen, in a terrible state of anguish and sorrow, came rushing to see all that remained of Bapuji. We clung to each other to find comfort in our sorrow and bowed our heads over Bapuji's body and our tears dropped on his lifeless remains, but to no avail ! Bapuji was sleeping his eternal sleep. He would not be disturbed. Quietly, in my heart, I begged Bapuji to forgive me if I could not extend or expand the mental and spiritual gifts that he had bestowed on me and asked him to give me the requisite strength, necessary to preserve whatever he had given, and not lose it.

The funeral procession was to be led by uniformed units of the three armed forces, that is, the Army, the Navy and the Air Force. Batches of armed policemen were also to be present.

The crowd was immense. Flowers and more flowers were strewn over Bapuji. The main entrance to Birla House was under strict guard. The number of people who wished to come and personally condole was so large, that we had to resort to a system of allowing in only those who held 'passes'.

When we lifted the bier and took it out to the carrier, I had also offered my shoulder. And as the bier rested on my shoulder, I wondered: "Am I fortunate or unfortunate? I am lifting Bapuji's body, his lifeless body; is it good luck or ill luck?" I did a lot of work for Bapuji, but I had never imagined that this job of taking Bapuji on his last journey, would also be included in services to him, but I did it willingly.

As the procession began to move, we could hear the commentary from the radio. The announcer's remarks were so moving that they tore our hearts apart. . . . "Bapu's body is now being brought out into the open. . . . Lakhs of people have gathered here. They are immersed in sorrow. But they are quiet and there is a strange peace in the atmosphere. Bapu, the Father of the Nation, is leaving the gates of Birla House to begin his last journey of peace, his last pilgrimage. . . . There are lakhs of people here, but there is no life in them! Their life, their light was the man who is now leaving on his last journey. . . . Go ahead, great soul, go ahead! . . . On your last journey. . . . Your own people are flocking along the roads

to shower on you their loving respects. . . . Crores of souls, giving you, the Father of the Nation, the saint of our age, their affectionate farewell. Go ahead, great soul. . . .”

As the procession inched its way, through the winding roads, Panditji was busy pleading with the people to move aside and let the procession pass more quickly. Panditji had had a trying time. His eyes were swollen and anyone familiar with his generally smiling face, would have been shocked by the pallor that was writ thereon on this historic day. The three units of the armed forces were to pull the carrier with strong, ceremonial ropes and thus take the procession to the cremation ground, which was situated on the banks of the river Yamuna. On the carrier sat Sardar Patel, Ramadaskaka, Maulana Saheb, Kripalaniji and other important persons. Panditji sat and walked by turns. Some of us sang the Ramadhun while walking. In front of us was a police unit. Right at the beginning of the procession were four gun carriages. Then came the military units. These were followed by the police regiment, after which came our band of Bapuji's fellow-workers, behind

whom, was the massive carrier. Behind the carrier, were the Governor-General Lord Mountbatten, the Provincial Governors, State Chief Ministers, the Military Chiefs, members of the Congress Working Committee, members of legislatures, officers of the Government, the Maharaja Jamsahab, other ex-Maharajas, the Birla family, friends and relatives. There were present, four thousand army men, one thousand air-force men, one thousand policemen — all of them dressed in their respective uniforms. At the instance of the Chinese Ambassador in Delhi, all the Chinese residents of the city, holding aloft a Chinese banner saying “ Gandhi has become immortal ”, joined the procession.

It took the procession about five hours to reach the cremation ground, that was later named Rajghat. The route that the procession took, was as follows : Albuquerque Road, Kingsway, Memorial Church, Princes Park, Shahjehan Road, Delhi Gate, and via Daryaganj to Rajghat. The procession had been moving amidst the shouting of slogans like “ Victory to Mahatma Gandhi ” and “ Mahatma Gandhi has become immortal ” and the blowing of holy conch-shells. After

about an hour of our leaving Birla House, we reached the Memorial Porch. While passing in front of this 150 feet high War Memorial, we could see that people were watching the procession even from top of the monument! They climbed telegraph poles, tree tops, house tops, to see the procession move. People belonging to different religious communities came and with folded palms and with tears streaming down their cheeks, made obeisance to their Mahatma's *cortege*.

Those of us who were walking and singing the Ramadhun, were often taken by Panditji and Devadaskaka and seated on the carrier, so that we would not get too exhausted. Gurkhas and Scouts kept the roads clear. Panditji also tried to keep the crowds in order by frequent requests. He often jumped over the cordons, went right into the crowds and told them not to block the road or the path of the carrier. The security officials were concerned about Panditji. They wanted to give him adequate protection. But whenever they approached him, he would get angry and say: "But you could not save Bapu, could you?"

The 5½ mile route was littered with flowers and coins. Dakotas belonging to the Indian

Air Force, reverentially circled thrice round the *cortege* and sent down rains of scented flowers. We were reminded of the Pushpaka Vimana scene in the Ramayana. It was a beautiful sight.

Going via the Delhi Gate, and Daryaganj, the funeral procession turned towards the banks of the Yamuna. On the way, it passed in front of the District Jail. Bapuji had spent a prison term here, but on this day, the employees in the jail, the wardens, the chowkidars, and such other officers, saluted the passing carrier, carrying one who had been a prisoner and in their charge!

Dr. Rajendra Prasad was in Ceylon when the assassination took place. But on hearing the news he immediately flew straight to Delhi, and along with other visitors from different cities like Bombay, he joined the procession when it was half way to the cremation ground. The area around Delhi Gate was a vast sea of humanity. People from the nearby villages had also flocked hither.

A raised platform (12' by 12') was constructed on a special spot near the river. It was purified by the Yamuna water and was decorated with a number of *panchapallava* or

five-petalled flowers. All the provisions necessary for a cremation like sandal-wood, ghee, incense, *shriphal*, camphor etc., had been obtained in sufficient quantities. The cremation spot was cordoned off. But people still continued to gather. All of them, after all, had a right to actively participate in the last rites of the Father of the Nation! A crowd had accumulated in Rajghat even before the funeral procession reached there. In the scramble, several people were injured and some even fainted. Ambulance vans were waiting to help those in need.

At last, the procession reached Rajghat. And as we lifted the bier and took it towards the platform, it got completely covered with flowers and flower petals. Only Bapuji's dynamic face, resplendent with *chandana* and *kumkum*, was visible. One by one, all of us got out of the carrier. Panditji had, like a true Hindu, donned a dhoti. Everyone requested him to perform the last rites. But Panditji was keen that Ramadaskaka should do it. And so Ramadaskaka did it. Elaborate arrangements had been made. After being purified by the Yamuna water, Bapuji was laid on the pyre, his head facing the

East. Shastri Ramadhan Sharma performed the Vedic ceremony. And we sang the usual *sarvadharmā* (all religion) prayer.

Normally, even a needle touching Bapuji's finger, by accident, made us shiver. But on this day, we hardened our hearts, and arranged thick logs of sandal-wood on Bapuji's delicate body! The reader can well imagine that touching scene. As the pyre was about to be lit, I buried my face in Sardar Patel's lap and wept and wept. Panditji too could not refrain from crying.

Panditji and Sardar Patel seemed to have aged in a day! Near them were Lord and Lady Mountbatten, their two daughters, their son-in-law Lord Brabourne; the Governor of Uttar Pradesh, Smt. Sarojini Naidu; the Governor of East Punjab, Sir Chandulal Trivedi; Dr. Rajendra Prasad and Rajkumari Amrit Kaur. And in the midst of them, Panditji was weeping. Finally, Lady Mountbatten got up to console him and like a loving sister soothes a distressed brother, she tried to cheer him up. But the tears kept coming.

Very soon, the pyre was ablaze. The wind fanned the fire and the flames soared high. The fire became too hot for people to stay

near it. It seemed as if the flames were re-primanding us for our sins and telling us that the great world citizen whom it was now transporting to another world, was a victim of the wicked passions that consume us humans. The flames seemed to be telling us that we had no right to go near one who had tried to rid society of its passions, but had, alas ! died in the attempt. And so the flames kept us away from Bapuji.

Due to our pitiable mental state, Sardar Patel had us taken back to Birla House and did not allow us to stay at Rajghat. It was with great hesitation that we re-entered Birla House. For without Bapuji what right had we to stay in Birla House ? Soon, we were all alone. And for a long time, we wept and cried. But in the end, our tears also dried up. Late at night, despite the cold weather, we all had a bath.

We had wished to stay on at Rajghat, but due to our mental distress, we had been sent back. But our thoughts had remained there with Bapu. Later, due to our intense desire to be there, Devadaskaka took us back to Rajghat. This was past midnight. An old friend of Bapuji, Sorabjibhai had kept a night-long vigil.

But when we went there what did we see?

“इस तन घन की कौन बड़ाई ।
हाड़ जलें जैसे लकड़ी की मोली ।
बाल जलें जैसे घास की पोली ॥”

These words of Kabirdas mean:

What is there so great in our bodies?
Our bones shall burn like a pile of faggots,
And our hair shall burn like a bunch of
grass!

The pyre was still smouldering. But I did not have the courage to either see or even imagine Bapuji in such a state. I rushed back to the car. And as Kaka drove us back, my head began to reel.

(Some portion of the above diary was written on 2nd February.)

यदा यदा हि धर्मस्य ग्लानिर्भवति भारत ।

अभ्युत्थानमधर्मस्य तदात्मानं सृजाम्यहम् ॥*

भगवद्गीता, ४-७

Our country's history is such that in every age or *Yuga*, we find outstanding events. A perusal of our scriptures reveals the descent of so many *Avataras* (incarnations) and shows the dramatic end of the lives of these *Avataras*, after which their names are enshrined in the hearts of the people for all time to come. It is natural for people today to ask and wonder whether such divine incarnations actually did exist and whether the stories that have grown round their names, did actually take place. But the events of our present *Yuga* should dispel their

*When Righteousness

Declines, O Bharata! when Wickedness

Is strong, I rise, from age to age, and take

Visible shape.

Bhagavadgita, 4-7

Sir Edwin Arnold, *The Song Celestial*, (1939), pp. 23-24



KASTURBA

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doubts, for the incidents that have taken place in it are as unbelievable and baffling as the 'stories' of those, now 'legendary' *Yugas*.

The reader has had a peep into a part of Bapuji's eventful life. And now I am honoured to give the reader glimpses of that dramatic period in which our revered Kasturba lay indisposed and ultimately, breathed her last.

The purity and pathos that marked the 30th of January 1948, were present in equal measure on the 22nd of February 1944, or Mahashivaratri, according to Hindu calendar.

Kasturba was an ideal, not only for Indian womenfolk, but in fact, for entire womanhood. During her early years, the condition of Indian women was pitiable. They spent their lives imprisoned within the four walls of their homes. Kasturba effectively helped these miserable women to emerge from the privacy of their homes and view the world outside. It was with the inspiration she provided, that mass awakening among Indian women took place. The life-story of this great Indian woman has appeared in several other books. Therefore, I shall not dwell on it here. But I shall just describe

the events that took place on that last day of her life. Those 24 hours are a short period. But they are full of great moments—moments that reflect Ba's golden character.

Mahashivaratri,
22-2-1944

Devadaskaka had arrived yesterday. But all of us are aware that this day is a day full of possibilities of dangerous developments. None of us slept last night. Ba has been ill for some days, but now her condition is quite serious. She is becoming impatient. Since this morning, her confidence has been breaking down. She was lying with her head in Sushilabahen's lap this morning while I pressed her legs. Bapuji has been unperturbed. This morning, as usual, he noted down the calories in his day's meals. *Bhajans* were sung constantly for Ba. And there had been a non-stop Gita recitation. But Ba has now placed herself in God's hands and has even declined to take any medicines.

Ba had had a strange premonition of her impending death, and therefore insisted on being near Bapuji all the time. She was not prepared to be away from Bapuji even for a minute. Though she was in Bapu's room,

she said to Sushilabahen, "Take me to Bapuji's room." This was the sign of her losing consciousness.

Later during the day, the jail official, Kateli Saheb came into the room with some letters. He and Bapuji began talking, and Bapuji told him:

"Churchill considers me to be his chief enemy. But by putting me and other Indian leaders behind prison bars, he cannot crush the struggle. But if the Indian people have genuine faith, then even if I die in detention, my purpose would have been served. But I am anxious to see the liberation of our country and therefore, I will continue fighting with Death. I was noting down the food's calories. That is part of my efforts to live. Due to Ba's indisposition I have given up doing a lot of things. But I am continuing doing all those things that are necessary to stay alive!"

Bapuji said this much and then, after washing his face, joined Ba. After a while, he asked Ba if she would allow him to go out for his usual stroll on the lawns of the camp. On all other days, Ba would be only

too glad to let Bapuji go out and have a refreshing walk. But on this day, she flatly refused to let him go! It was clear that she had some sort of a premonition.

Bapuji sat near Ba and Ba placed her head on Bapuji's lap. For a while there was peace. Then Bapuji again requested Ba to allow him to go out for his stroll. "Shall I go now?", he had asked. But Ba was adamant. She simply would not let Bapuji leave her. And Bapuji too acquiesced and stayed on with Ba for some time more, so great was their mutual affection. That morning, we had somehow or the other forgotten to wash Ba's soiled handkerchiefs. And, unconsciously displaying his deep affection for Ba, Bapuji took up these handkerchiefs and washed them himself! Bapuji stayed with Ba till 10 a.m. It was only then that Ba finally agreed to let him go.

Bapuji had told her : " If I don't keep up my practice of walking in the morning, then I will most certainly fall ill. Therefore it is necessary for me to have my stroll." While walking also, Bapuji's thoughts kept wandering towards Ba's grave condition. He said, " Ba is now like a day's guest. . . . She will

not last for more than 24 hours now.... We have to decide as to on whose lap she is to breathe her last....” After finishing his stroll, he came straight back to Ba’s bed. Dr. Gilder had been coming to examine Ba every five minutes. Sushilabahen was of course all the time with Ba. Bapuji had become extremely anxious about Ba’s fast deteriorating health. For the past few days, Bapuji had been taking a preparation of almond paste. But today, he refused to take this. When I asked him why he would not take it, he said, “ If Ba recovers, I will be able to take it. If she goes to God, then also I will resume taking it. But now, when, for Ba, every moment is precious, it is pointless to spend any time on preparing this almond paste and then on eating it. And if I begin swallowing all sorts of things without being able to digest them, then I too will become bedridden.” So he did not take it. Instead, he was content to eat boiled and mashed vegetables, with milk poured over them.

At 12-30 p.m., Bapuji again sat near Ba. We had several anxious moments. Very often, the end would seem very near. The members of Ba’s family were seated around her. My

father was also there. We were aware that Ba was having a painful time. But Ba was pleasant in her pain. She talked lovingly of me to my father. In her painful struggle for existence, she kept thinking of Bapuji and his troubles. She expressed her worry over the way Bapuji was tiring himself, and asked him to take sufficient rest and look after his health. She asked me to massage Bapuji's legs with ghee. Such was her character. Even at Death's door, she thought of others' pain and difficulties.

At 3-30 p.m., Devadaskaka came. He had brought some '*Gangajala*' or the water of the holy river Ganga, and a few *Tulasi* leaves. Ba happily opened her mouth to drink this water, that had come all the way from the north, where the Ganga flows. Then, she asked for everyone's forgiveness and said, "There should be no unnecessary weeping and mourning for me. O God, give me your mercy and your forgiveness! Give me faith and infinite devotion!"

At about 5 p.m. some *gur* was being heated for Bapuji. Ba's thoughts immediately went to this. She asked me, "Is the *gur* being heated? Have you attended to it?"

I told her that it was on the oven and that it would soon be ready. Ba had spent her entire life serving Bapuji and looking after his minutest needs. She had been specially careful about matters pertaining to Bapuji's food. She had always seen that he got what he wanted and when he wanted it. And even in her last lingering moments, she had been trying to find out if Bapuji's *gur* was ready! Her rapidly deteriorating condition was making her tense and fatigued. But she still said, "The *gur* must almost be ready by now. Jaisukhlal will be with me. You go and attend to it." Ba had said these words with great difficulty and with tremendous effort. Even in her dying moments her heart had worried about Bapuji! It was only when I left and attended to the *gur* that Ba was satisfied. Bapuji had been taking this *gur* to gain strength. And it was essential that he got it in time.

The evening supper went off normally at 6-30 p.m. It being Shivaratri, many of the visitors had fasted.

As Bapuji was about to move towards the lawns, he was accosted by Devadaskaka. They discussed the giving of penicillin

injections to Ba at this stage. Ba had asked me to light an oil lamp and burn some incense. I lighted the lamp and Ba folded her palms in a devotional *namaskar*. Prabhavati-bahen (Mrs. Jayaprakash Narayan)was with Ba. All of a sudden, Ba shouted, "Bapuji!". I ran and told Bapuji that Ba was calling him. Bapuji at once went to Ba. Ba's brother Madhavdasmama also came in. He is Ba's one and only brother. So Ba looked at him affectionately. Then forgetting everything she put her head on Bapuji's lap. He lovingly stroked her forehead. She said to Bapu, "I am now going. No one should cry after I am gone. I am at peace. . . ." After she had said this, her breath became abnormal. And signs of the end became clearly visible. We, her closest associates, stood around her bed and sang the Ramadhun. Hearing the holy name of Lord Rama, and with her head resting on Bapuji's lap, Ba fell into her eternal slumber. A couple of tears dropped from Bapu's eyes.

It was a pathetic scene. An attempt to describe that scene would be in vain. It was redolent of Ba and Bapuji's sixty years of married life and portrayed a beautiful picture of true and loyal companionship.

Bapuji had been wondering since morning as to who would be the fortunate person in whose lap Ba would breathe her last. The honour had fallen on him. Bapuji had been under great strain. He had kept pacing up and down the rooms in nervous anxiety. Devadaskaka would often come and plead for administering penicillin to Ba. But Bapuji had felt that it was not worthwhile prolonging life for a few hours more with some painful injections of penicillin and that it was better to allow Ba to pass peacefully into God's hands.

At 7-35 p.m. on that Shivaratri day, amidst the festive ringing of temple bells, God had taken Ba away, and we were left lamenting. After about five minutes, Bapuji got up and consoled all of us. We took Ba's lifeless body into the bath-room to cleanse it.

In the year 1942, before leaving for the August meeting of the All-India Congress Committee, Ba had given me a red-bordered sari, the yarn of which was spun by Bapuji himself, to preserve. While entrusting this precious sari to my care, Ba had said, "Preserve this carefully. I would like it to be on me when I am being cremated."

At that time, I had been twelve or thirteen years old. And although there had been so many other Ashramites, Ba had chosen me to take care of this precious sari! Later, when I was a prisoner in the Nagpur Jail, at Ba's special request, I was transferred to the Aga Khan Palace Detention Camp, where Ba and Bapuji also were in detention. As soon as I heard that I was going to be transferred to Poona, I instinctively sent for the afore-mentioned sari. I had heard Ba say, "I would like it to be on me when I am being cremated." And so somehow or other, I got this sari and with it, proceeded to Poona. Now, when all this happened, I recall this incident. With trembling hands, I covered Ba's body with this sari, before the pyre was lit, and thus fulfilled one of her dearest wishes.

Later, during the night, arrangements for the cremation began. The cremation spot was purified. We removed the bangles that were round Ba's wrist during her last moments, and instead, replaced them with a few strings of yarn that had been spun by Bapuji. The necklace of *Tulasi* beads was also removed from Ba's neck. These two things

(the bangles and the necklace), Bapuji gave to me, as Ba was being made ready for the cremation. The red-bordered sari was dipped in *Gangajala* and Ba was covered with it. Another sari sent by Lady Premlilabehen Thackersey was also placed on Ba. Near Ba's body, was a lamp burning with ghee. On her forehead, was spread sandal-wood paste. Near her head, was written the holy *OM* and near her feet was drawn the famous *swastika*. The fragrance emanating from the burning incense, together with the recitation of holy Mantras filled the room with a unique pathos and purity. Ba's face looked peaceful and yet lustrous. She looked like a Goddess incarnate.

When it was suggested that sandal-wood logs be brought for Ba's cremation, Bapuji had said, "Ba was a poor man's wife. If the poor people of India can easily obtain sandal-wood logs for purposes of cremation, then alone can Ba have them."

This day was, for me, the first of its kind. I had never before seen the elaborate obsequies that precede a cremation. A priest conducted the ceremonies. Five glass bangles, among other things, were placed on Ba's body. The cremation was to take place near

the spot where the late Mahadev Desai had been cremated. This spot was inside the precincts of the Aga Khan Palace.

Soon, the pyre was lit. None of us wanted to leave the place even for a minute. And so we stayed as near the pyre as was possible. We, however, implored Bapuji to go back to his room, lest he get exhausted. But Bapuji too was in no mood to leave the place. He said, "For 62 years have I been Ba's constant companion. Then how can I leave her alone during her last moments on this earth? She would never forgive me if I did."

On the 24th of February, when we were collecting the *asthi*, all the five glass bangles that had been on Ba, were found to be lying there intact and unbroken! They had survived the heat of the pyre! These bangles I still have and cherish to this day.

India is truly fortunate in that it has given birth to several great and noble women! Women, who are to be given the credit for having striven to preserve the sanctity of our culture. If our nation is proud about its heritage, it has reason to be so.

If Ba's story is compared to the story that is told in the Ramayana, one cannot help feeling that there is a great similarity

between the lives of Sita and Kasturba. Sita considered Rama's sorrows to be her own and had identified Rama's difficulties with her own. In the very same manner, Kasturba merged her sorrows and difficulties with the sorrows and difficulties of Bapuji. Sita had followed Rama into the forest. And Ba threw herself into Bapuji's struggle for liberation. It is the tradition in India that the wife always tries to walk in the footsteps of her husband. Ba lived up to this tradition and, accepting Bapuji's strict discipline and principles, followed him right through to the bitter end.

Ba was of course old-fashioned and orthodox by nature. But she had fully grasped the modern trends that had begun appearing in Indian society. Ba was a full-fledged Vaishnavite, and wore the holy string around her neck. But she had completely shunned noxious Hindu customs like untouchability and had even adopted a Harijan girl as her own.

Her devotion for Bapuji had been intense. And yet, although it reached its zenith during their later years, she never failed to correct Bapuji whenever and wherever, she felt, he erred. In days of old, the wives of saints, in order to win God's favour, followed their

mendicant-husbands into the forests. Similarly, the life-companion of this Mahatma, in order to win freedom for her motherland and its 400 million people, gave up her comforts and joined the difficult liberation struggle that had been launched by her husband, finally sacrificing her very life for the movement.

And her end also came in such a lovely manner! She breathed her last breath in the lap of this era's Mahatma—her husband—and amidst the holy chanting of scriptural teachings. She chose to die in jail, in bondage, why? Because her motherland was in bondage.

Ba was like a true Ba (mother) to everyone. Whether child, youth, man or woman, Ba became their mother. And in the end, she even became Bapuji's mother! Bapuji had often said, "If I have any status in this world, it is due to Ba. . . ." It would not be incorrect to say that, very often, Ba would enlighten Bapuji and thus become a veritable *guru* to him!

Such was our Ba. She has left us a rich heritage—not only for the womenfolk of India, but for entire womanhood! On us falls the duty of preserving that proud heritage!

May God give us strength to be able to

