

Cordial Greetings and Good Wishes

Diwali : 1959

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BANGALORE 4,
(INDIA)

SUMMARY OF Mr and Mrs P. KODANDA RAO's

ACTIVITIES in 1958-59

Generous friends have made kindly enquiries of our activities since my resignation from the Servants of India Society in June 1958. The following summary of our work may interest them.

SASTRI:- My main work during the period was the preparation of the biography of the late Rt. Hon. V.S. Srinivasa Sastri. It is estimated that, in print it may come to about 450 pages. Some publishers are examining the typescript.

I spoke on Sastri on his 90th birthday celebration in Madras on September 22, 1959, and I wrote three articles on him and his work.

INDIAN COUNCIL OF WORLD AFFAIRS, BANGALORE BRANCH:- As its President, I participated in its monthly meetings when current international problems were discussed, such as Turkey, India and America, United Nations and West Asia, India's Foreign Policy, Indonesia, Malaya, Tibet, India and China, Pakistan and America etc.

Mrs Rao attended them and took part in the discussions.

INTERNATIONAL FAMILY PLANNING CONFERENCE:- Mrs Rao and I attended it in February 1959 in Delhi.

We contributed jointly an article on Family Planning, which was published in the Journal of Family Planning, Bombay, June 1959.

KASHMIR:- My article on the Kashmir Dispute in the American magazine Current History of March 1959 was rated by an American Council of Librarians as among the "Ten Outstanding Magazine Articles of the Month." I contributed articles on the same subject to some Indian journals also.

ENGLISH AS UNION LANGUAGE:- I inaugurated the Union Official Language Conventions in Hyderabad and Bangalore and pleaded for the retention of English as the Official Language of the Indian Union. I was a member of the Deputation which waited on President Rajendra Prasad and a signatory to the Petition presented to Parliament on the same subject. I wrote and spoke pretty frequently on it.

TYAGI COMMITTEE:- I gave written and oral evidence before the Tyagi Committee on Tax Evasion and Its Control.

SOCIAL WELFARE BOARD:- I attended the Zonal meeting in Madras of the Board and spoke on Beggary and Social Defence.

Mrs Rao and I revised and abbreviated our joint article on Beggary for "Social Welfare in India."

SPEECHES, WRITING and RADIO TALKS:- My work has always been primarily to study public questions and speak and write about them. I continued that work. I spoke and/or wrote on Gokhale, Sastri, Jayakar, Abul Kalam Azad, Mirza M. Ismail, J.C. Bose, Sir M. Visvesvaraya and Mahatma Gandhi, and on subjects like World Brotherhood, World State, World Language, United Nations, Human Rights, Nuclear Tests, Race Relations, Tibet, Parliamentary Democracy, Party System, Judicial Reform, Fundamental Rights, Second Chambers, Indian Constitution, Democracy in India, Political Freedom, Swatantra Party, Trusteeship, Kerala,

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Private vs. Public Enterprise, Tax Evasion, Corruption, Business Ethics, Family Planning, Culture, Unitary Government for India, Compulsory Social Service by Students, Examinations etc..

TOURISM:• Mrs Rao and I spoke at the inauguration of the Mysore Government's Tourist Guides Training Class.

Mrs Rao contributed an article on "International Tourism" in the Mysore Dasara Souvenir, 1959.

TOURS:• In connection with my work, I visited Delhi, Ambala, Bombay, Madras, Mysore, Udipi and Ooty. Mrs Rao accompanied me to Delhi, Madras, Mysore and Udipi.

PERSONAL CORRESPONDENCE:- I wrote personal letters to several leaders, official and non-official, including the President, the Prime Minister and Mr C. Rajagopalachari, on several public questions.

HOSPITALITY:- We entertained, mostly at tea and sometimes as house-guests, a fairly continuous stream of visitors, particularly foreigners, and helped them to meet local people and visit local institutions.

MYSORE GOVT. ARTS & CRAFTS EMPORIUM, BANGALORE:- Mrs Rao continued as an Honorary Director and worked at the Emporium on three, and very often more, mornings a week. She visited several places in the State to see craftsmen at their work.

CHILD STUDY ASSOCIATION:- Mrs Rao has been an active participant in the work of the Association and of its Executive.

She contributed an article on "Women Teachers" to the Mysore Dasara Souvenir, 1958.

We take this opportunity to convey our profound gratitude to our friends who, by their kindness as well as their generous and spontaneous gifts, have made it possible for us to continue our public activities without interruption or much diminution.

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October 1959

SOME REMINISCENCES OF MAHATMA GANDHI

P. Kodanda Rao

By the time I joined the Servants of India Society in 1921, Mahatma Gandhi's Non-cooperation movement was in full swing. He had failed to secure the cooperation of the late Rt. Hon. V.S. Srinivasa Sastri and the Servants of India Society for his movement. The Servant of India opposed the Mahatma's policy and programme vigorously. It fell to me to join in the criticism almost every week in its columns. I was young, and loved occasionally to barb my shafts with sharp stings. My note on the "Violence of Non-violence" gave mighty offence to many a devotee of the Mahatma. But he read the stuff in forgiving tolerance rather than in resentful anger.

Once I angered him. Sastri wrote to me during the Gandhi-Irwin negotiations in 1931 that it was the first time that he saw the Mahatma in anything like a temper. I had toured some parts of Gujarat to investigate the truth of the statement that, in order to escape from British tyranny, the inhabitants of several villages had deserted them and migrated to the more hospitable Indian States next door. It was reported to the Mahatma that I had discounted the statement and called the villages, to which I was conducted, as "show villages". The Mahatma was upset, and requested Sastri to call for an explanation from me. I readily gave it, and he was satisfied.

In 1932 the Mahatma undertook a campaign against untouchability from the Yervada Prison, Poona. He asked me to see him in the prison, take down his statements and give them maximum publicity through the news agencies and otherwise. It was a remarkable instance of his magnanimity that, though I was his unsparing critic with respect to his politics, he invited me, of all others, to help him in his Harijan work.

He asked me to see him generally at noon, the hottest part of the day. The distance between the Servants of India Society and the Yervada Prison was more than five miles. A friend kindly placed his car at my disposal, and I knew to drive. In the first few days I saw the Mahatma daily, took down his messages, typed them in my office and furnished copies thereof to the press. Gradually a regular office with steno-typists was opened in the prison. When I was no longer needed for publicity work, the Mahatma invited me to visit him whenever I wished and also to introduce visitors to him. I was a frequent caller, but rarely took part in serious discussion on the Harijan question, which was the only topic which was allowed and about which he was very strict and scrupulous. Many persons who wished to bask in his sunshine and perhaps secure publicity professed to discuss the Harijan question with him to gain access to him. When any of them ventured to touch on any other subject, particularly politics, the Mahatma politely and firmly pulled him up.

The Mahatma graciously made a generous reference to my assistance in his Harijan work in the letter of introduction which he was pleased to give me when I was in America in 1934-35. In the course of it he said:

"Sjt. Kodanda Rao is a member of the Servants of India Society, founded by the late Mr. G.K. Gokhale whom I have regarded as my political guru. * * * He is a moderate in politics and an ardent social

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reformer holding advanced views on many social problems. He rendered me great assistance whilst I was permitted to carry on the anti-untouchability movement from the Yervada Prison."

During those hectic days several visitors to him, Indian and foreign, used to stay in the Servants of India Society. As Secretary of the Society and resident member, it fell to me to receive them as my guests and help them to meet the Mahatma in the prison. They were an assorted collection, very varied in their dress, food and other habits and in their attitude towards the Mahatma. There was a European couple. The wife must have coffee and would not touch tea; the husband must have tea and would not touch coffee !

Among the visitors to the Mahatma was a foreign lady, young and beautiful, who circulated in high society in Bangalore for a time and then suddenly dropped to the level of a Harijan street-sweeper and indulged in spectacular sweeping of the market-place in the same town. Her devotion to the Harijan cause was conveyed to the Mahatma, and it was arranged that she should go to Poona to meet him and stay in the Servants of India Society. But before she left Bangalore for the purpose, I happened to visit it. From reliable and chivalrous sources I heard allegations which were not flattering to her.

I wished to meet her as my prospective guest, but failed. On my return to Poona, I thought I would do a good turn and whispered a hint to Mahadev Desai that the Mahatma would do well to be cautious in his estimate of the lady. A few days after, I was summoned to the prison and Mahadev showed me a copy of the Mahatma's letter to her in which he had said that a good friend of his had cautioned him against her, and asked her to meet him in Poona at once for a critical examination. I felt betrayed. I felt guilty of unchivalrous conduct towards a lady, and a foreigner at that. If the Mahatma found her innocent of the allegations, I could not be too ashamed of myself. However, the mischief was done; the letter had already been posted. The only consolation was that my name was not mentioned in the letter.

But it was short-lived. I was soon summoned again and told that the lady had arrived and was billeted with another host and that I should meet her either at my place or at her place, or in the Mahatma's presence in the prison. My protest unheeded, I chose to meet her in his presence. To my utter consternation, the Mahatma told her that I was the friend who was his informant ! He then asked me to examine her regarding the allegations and report to him. I protested against this assignment; I pleaded that I had no right to probe into her personal affairs, and I would be guilty of unpardonable impertinence if I did. He was adamant. He was in search of truth, and the whole truth. It was for his sake and at his instance that I was to undertake the unpleasant task, and no blame attached to me. Would I kindly oblige him ? I was miserable. The lady pitied my plight and came to my rescue; she volunteered her explanations; she denied the allegations. She had only behaved in Bangalore as she would in New York where her conduct would not have offended the proprieties; she failed to make allowance for the different social milieu in Bangalore. That was all. I reported to the Mahatma that without a much fuller investigation I could not form any opinion. He agreed that it was very difficult to judge persons accurately. But from such examination as he was able to make, he thought that the lady was the victim of malicious propaganda. My humiliation was complete. I hated myself as never

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before. I swore: never again. I apologized to the lady and sought some consolation in the thought that the ways of the Mahatma were mysterious.

But that was not the end of the chapter. A few weeks later I was summoned again and the Mahatma told me that he had cross-examined her further; that she had confessed and that he was satisfied that the allegations were true, and thanked me for my earlier hint and warning! While I was sorry that he should find the allegations to be true, I felt relieved that I had not maligned an innocent lady. I felt reprieved.

The Mahatma seriously proposed to publish her confessions, implicating many eminent personages. He was persuaded to drop the fantastic idea: Nobody would publish the confessions and face a battery of defamation suits! Whereupon, he undertook a "purificatory" fast because all his agents were not "pure!" The lady felt that the Mahatma was fasting for her "sins", and blamed herself no end. She begged him to desist from his fast and not risk his precious life, and offered to go through any ordeal which he might ordain for her. She asked to stay by him during his fast. The Mahatma told her that, if she was his true Chela, she should obey him implicitly and leave Poona at once. She did.

The Mahatma was in the Yervada Prison again, and asked for permission to resume his Harijan service. This time the Government refused. Whereupon the Mahatma went on an indefinite fast and began to sink rapidly. The Government did not want him to die in the prison, and sounded me if he could be accommodated in the Servants of India Society. I eagerly welcomed it. Who would not? Besides, the Mahatma had often described himself as an "unofficial member" of the Society and in some ways a truer disciple of Gokhale. I however enquired what his status would be when he was transferred to the Society. I was told that when he was transferred, the question would not arise! I declined to receive the Mahatma if he was still a prisoner; he was welcome as a free man. The Society stood for cooperation with Government, but it would not cooperate to the extent of converting its premises into a jail-annexe for the convenience of Government. The matter was dropped. The Mahatma was then transferred to the Sassoon Hospital, still a prisoner!

While I was at the Yale University in 1934-35, some American friends expressed the view that the Mahatma derived his idea of civil disobedience from the American philosopher Henry David Thoreau. I thought it best to verify it from the Mahatma direct. In his letter to me from Wardha, dated September 10, 1935, he said:

The statement that I derived my idea of civil disobedience from the writings of Thoreau is wrong. The resistance to authority in South Africa was well advanced before I got the essay of Thoreau on Civil Disobedience. But the movement was then known as "Passive Resistance". As it was incomplete, I had coined the word "SATYAGRAHA" for the Gujarati readers. When I saw the title of Thoreau's great essay, I began to use his phrase to explain our struggle to the English readers. But I found that even "civil disobedience" failed to convey the full meaning of the struggle. I, therefore, adopted the phrase "Civil Resistance". Non-violence was always an integral part of our struggle.