

SOCIAL HARMONY

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Narendra Modi

Edited by
Kishor Makwana



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by Narendra Modi

Edited by
Kishor Makwana

Translated into English by
Devang Nanavati

Translation Edited by
Dr. Avani Desai, Dr. Alpa Shah
and Dr. Radhika Nagrath

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*Respectfully dedicated to all those who
have offered continuous sacrifices for
the unity and integrity of society.*

Preface

The underlying foundation of Indian civilization has always been spirituality. Our innate belief that every being has been formed from the same essence is what makes our culture unique. Our civilization has always held that the Earth is our Mother and all of us are Her children, implying that all the people of the world are our siblings. Such a philosophy ensured that there were no distinctions of class or status, in ancient times. The importance of every individual in the development of society was acknowledged and this belief led to the establishment of relevant social systems from time-to-time. We were successful in attaining the highest peaks of progress and our ideology was hailed by the world.

Unfortunately, we were unable to sustain this status through the annals of time. We failed to remember the feelings of universality and ended up distancing ourselves from each other. We compelled our own brethren to move towards anti-national and anti-social activities and, at the same time, became more and more bigoted. In these circumstances, Lord Buddha put forth the principles of, "Panchshil" and gave society a new lease of life. Society took a turn for the better and we were able to resume control over the world. This historical chain of events is known to all of us.

The development of our nation has been heralded by leaders from all castes of the society. These were the people who reached the pinnacle of the social order only through the strength of their character and their strong sense of duty. As one of the verses in the *Chittavinodini* says:

Vēśyāgarbhasamutpannō Vasiṣṭhaśca Mahāmuni:.

Dāsīgarbhasamutpannō Nāradaśca Mahāmuni:..

Kaivartīgarbhasañjātō Vyāsaśca Mahāmuni:
 Kṣaatriyāgarbhasañjātō Viśvāmitrō Mahāmuni:..
 Śṛṅgīgarbha Samutpannō Ṛṣyaśṛṅgō Mahāmuni:
 Kumbhīgarbhasamutpannō Agastaścaiva Mahāmuni:..
 Śūdrīgarbhasamutpannō Kuśakaśca Mahāmuni:
 Tapasā Brāhmaṇō Bhūyāt Tasmājjātirna Kāraṇam..

(Great sages were born from different castes, viz. Vashistha was born from the womb of Prostitute, Narada from slave, Vyasa from Kaivart caste, Vishwamitra from Kshatriya caste, Shringi Rishi from womb of Shringi and Agasta Rishi from Pitcher and Kushaka from Shudra caste. Therefore, penance plays main role to become Brahman and the caste is not a cause to become Brahmana.)

A person's caste can never lead to his spiritual ascendancy. Supremacy of the mind and the spirit comes only from the strength of resolute penance. Sage Vashishtha was born from the womb of a prostitute; Sage Narada was the son of a maidservant; a fisherwoman gave birth to Sage Vyasa and a Kshatriya woman to Sage Vishwamitra; Sage Shringi entered the world from a 'shringi' (deer horn) and Sage Agastya did so from a pot; Kushak was born to a lower-caste woman; and yet all these were the greatest sages that the world has ever known.

Our ancient sages, who pointed out the right direction to the society, usually came from all castes. They had achieved pre-eminence only through the power of their rigorous penance. Our country has been ruled by the Mughals and the British. To further their own political aims, they sought to divide and split up our society into innumerable factions. They conspired to weaken Hindutva and Indian nationalism. But Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar saw through this conspiracy. He put in tireless efforts to turn into reality the dream of a harmonious society as envisaged by Lord Buddha. He took it upon himself to rid society of its evils and inspired the downtrodden to rise to a higher stature.

The state of affairs that ails our society today is well-understood by thinkers who are concerned about its development. The evil powers who are interested in disrupting our social harmony are stronger today than ever before. Our task is to overcome these forces and take society to the highest echelons of prosperity. This will only be possible if we sincerely believe that the entire society is an extension of the individual and revere it akin to God. This feeling of oneness with society will have to be practically evoked at all levels – individual, family, community, and profession – and it will have to be ingrained into our very culture. The inspiration of the volunteers and sages of the RSS has created awareness about this need and some results have been accomplished in this direction.

Shri Narendra Modi, who is also a volunteer of the Sangh, has pledged to eradicate these ills from the society, which is evident from his conduct. He has been deeply involved in attempts to establish the principle of social harmony. He has his own vision for arriving at a solution to the various social problems. Shri Narendra Modi's inherent sensitivity, sense of duty towards the underprivileged and his commitment towards social harmony is reflected in his actions, his speeches and his writings. We must congratulate Shri Kishor Makwana for editing these thoughts and putting them in front of people. I am confident that this book will inspire and enthuse all those who are working towards social harmony.

—K.S. Sudarshan

The Social Responsibility of Shri Narendra Modi

Vadnagar village, Shri Narendra Modi aged 12 years studying in class 8, he wrote and acted in a soliloquy named, "The Yellow Flower," with the theme of untouchability, at the school. The story is about the only child of a poor mother who falls severely ill. The mother runs helter-skelter for his treatment, but nobody is ready to treat an untouchable child. Someone advises her to get some yellow flowers offered to God in the temple so that she can save her child's life. The mother runs towards the temple but is not allowed to enter. Finally, when she reaches home, broken, insulted and condemned, she finds that her child is no more.

As a student of class 8, Shri Narendra Modi conveyed the message—Everybody is equal and should have equal right on God's blessings.

Dholka, 1984. A lecture by RSS campaigner Shri Narendra Modi at a Jain Upashray near the Kuberji Temple at Kharakua on the occasion of *Makarsankranti* celebrations organised by the RSS : The words flowed from his heart. "There is a social science behind every Indian festival. This festival of kite-flying binds society in one thread. It urges us to create an environment of friendship, belonging and cooperation to each other in society. *Makarsankranti* brings pleasure, zeal and velocity to society and initiates the slow but firm process of removing the perverted mentality and maintaining social unity, social harmony and social vigilance. It creates emotions of social development and progress."

Gandhinagar, *Dhanteras*, 2001. Narendra Modi took charge as Chief Minister of Gujarat on October 7, 2001, after which he

was about to enter his official residence, for which the auspicious day of *Dhanteras* was chosen. For Shri Narendra Modi, this was not only the ceremony for entering his new residence, but also an occasion to bring forth the emotion of social harmony flowing in his heart for a long time. Shri Narendra Modi decided that the ceremonial *Kalash* (earthen pot) would be placed in his new residence by a Dalit girl. What other than this could be a message of social harmony? On *Dhanteras*, a Dalit girl named Ravina Nareshkumar Jadav, placed the ceremonial pot and Shri Narendra Modi entered his official residence after this ceremony.

There was a long gap between these three incidents. Shri Narendra Modi went through different stages of life, but his thoughts and actions have always been consistent. The strong flow of feelings towards society and social harmony has been flowing continuously in his heart.

Shri Narendra Modi is known for giving an emotional touch to any situation. Once *Rakshabandhan* was being celebrated at the Chief Minister's residence and numerous sisters had come to tie a *rakhi* to Shri Narendra Modi. The black commandos deployed for Shri Narendra Modi's security were standing outside. When Shri Narendra Modi entered the marquee, the assembled sisters started tying *rakhis* on his wrist. But for Shri Narendra Modi, *Rakshabandhan* was not only a festival of the love between a brother and sister, it was also a festival of social harmony. He felt those *rakhis* should also be tied on the wrists of the black commandos working for his security. He called all the commandos inside and asked the sisters to tie those *rakhis*. The commandos, who were away from their families on *Rakshabandhan*, were rendered emotional and they found their eyes brimming with tears.

I have seen Shri Narendra Modi working since the day of his lecture on *Makarsankranti*. Initially, a question arose in my mind: Does Shri Narendra Modi only talk? Does he only present ideas or does he put them in action too? After observing his life and lifestyle, I realize that there is absolutely no difference between the thoughts and actions of Shri Narendra Modi. This book is the result of efforts undertaken to understand his ideas.

It is such an exciting and revolutionary event to see a daughter of the backward tribal community being honoured by Jagat Guru Shankaracharya. This historical event occurred almost twenty years ago, before the reservation movement gained strength and it is one that the entire Hindu society can take pride in. Shri Narendra Modi was the behind-the-scene inspiration for establishing harmony, love and equality. He was a campaigner for the RSS and the Sangh had encouraged him to enter politics. Within a year, politics in Gujarat saw a tremendous change. Under Shri Narendra Modi's guidance, for the first time in the state, the BJP won the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation elections. Around the same time the Jagat Guru Shankaracharya of Dwarkapith, Swami Swarupanandji was in Ahmedabad to spend the four months of *Chaturmaas*. The Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation decided to organize a public ceremony to honour him.

At that time, Shri Narendra Modi shaped a socially revolutionary event behind the curtain. He asked his party colleagues to honour a girl from the backward tribal class, who was the first in her community to get a PhD degree in the presence of Jagat Guru Shankaracharya.

And thus, for the first time in the history of Gujarat, Shardaben Vadadara from the backward Valmiki community was honoured by Jagat Guru Shankaracharya Swami Swarupanandji. Shri Narendra Modi's innovative thought and dedication created a revolutionary event in the social life of Gujarat.

Shri Narendra Modi has a unique vision and approach towards society. His radical thought extends to his social dealings too and his focus is always on the happiness of the common man. This is clearly visible in his day-to-day working style. This intensity has been a part of his personality since childhood. It is this intensity that prodded him when still a child to convey the message of promoting equality and opposing untouchability through a play at school. It is the same intensity that gave him the strength to spend days on end carrying out relief work in flood-stricken Morbi district. The same intensity

made him go from house-to-house collecting *sukhdi* (a Gujarati dish) for the hungry people and fodder for animals during the harsh drought in 1986-87. It is only his passion for the happiness for the common man that made him celebrate *Diwali* with earthquake victims in Kutch and relish a simple 'Rotla' made by a poor girl at the end of the day.

Even after assuming the office of the Chief Minister, Shri Narendra Modi worked tirelessly for equality, love and harmony. His persona signifies consistency in thoughts, beliefs and lifestyle, whether in 1984 or 2009.

Every year, Shri Narendra Modi celebrates his birthday in the service of the poor. Unlike other political leaders who celebrate their birthdays with pomp and grandeur, Shri Narendra Modi believes in simplicity. He sent a train load of goods worth five and a half crore rupees to flood victims in Bihar, and his total aid to them has been around twenty crore rupees so far. Forty-three years ago, at the age of 18, he had worked dedicatedly for the people who had lost everything in the Bihar floods.

When Shri Narendra Modi was studying in the ninth standard, the month of *Shravan* (as per lunar calendar) brought severe floods to many parts of the country. The inhabitants of those areas were badly affected in floods and many lost everything. When Shri Narendra Modi heard about this, he felt a strong urge to help the flood-affected people by sending something. But what could he send? His family was not financially sound enough to justify his taking money from his parents. Even at such a young age, his intelligence shone through. A religious fair had been organized at Gaurikund in his town Vadnagar to mark the holy month of *Shravan*. Narendrabhai's father gave a rupee to spend at the fair. Any 13-14 years-old would have preferred to enjoy himself at the fair, but Narendrabhai's concern for the flood victims was paramount. He felt that even the one rupee given by his father should be sent to the flood-affected people, but he knew that it was too little. He convinced all his friends to set up a tea stall at the fair instead of spending money for their own enjoyment

and send their earnings to the flood victims. He collected one rupee from each friend, bought the necessary items, got the vessels and stove from home, and was successful in sending a sizeable amount to the victims of floods.

Shri Narendra Modi is known to be strict, but his heart flows with love and compassion for the deprived and persecuted, enabling him to feel their pain. He understands the true concept of, 'Vaishnava Jan' and has the inborn quality of empathizing with the suffering of others.

Shri Narendra Modi's emotions can be summed up by 'Ātmavat Sarvabhūteṣu' and 'Paradravyeṣu Lōṣṭhavat'. (The wise man looks upon all creatures as him and the wealth of the others as the clods of earth.) He is intensely focused on finding measures to eradicate sorrows from the lives of the deprived and persecuted. This focus has been consistent within him, whether in his role as an RSS campaigner or as the Chief Minister. His passion for this is evident in his actions, lectures and articles.

Today this passion for service flows uninterruptedly for Gujarat. Shri Narendra Modi is devoted to Gujarat and he believes in bringing justice even to people of the lowest strata. Here is one of the many examples of this noble thought.

Sample this situation : In the Public Relations Unit of the Chief Minister on the ground floor of Block 1 in Gandhinagar, five to seven officers are sitting on simple chairs. There is a laptop on a small table and a TV screen in front of it. The Chief Minister is sitting on the chair against the table and some chairs have been placed opposite him for visitors. Several people are sitting outside the room, some young, some old, some literate and many illiterate. A thin, dark-skinned tribal man called Ranchhodbhai is sitting on the floor because he cannot walk. He has dragged himself to Gandhinagar all the way from Wadhvaniya village of Bardoli sub-district in Surat, almost 300 kms away. This handicapped, helpless man dressed in ragged clothes and a dirty old scarf carries a small bundle in his hand and has come for justice. Thus begins the dialogue between a poor tribal and the Chief Minister: Shri Narendra Modi: Why have you come here from so far.

Tribal: Sir, I am an illiterate person. Some people in my village advised me to meet you to get justice. That is why I have left my village for the first time in my life and come to meet you.

Shri Narendra Modi: Tell me what your problem is.

Tribal: Sir, as per the instructions of the collector and *Mamlatdar*, my friend in Wadhvaniya village, Dhansukhbhai Ramanbhai Halpati was given the contract of building my house. He has started the work, but instead of sand, he uses this inferior material (shows some from his bundle) and very little cement. Also, he has broken down all the doors of my house and is now pressurizing me to provide new doors. How will I get more doors – I have no money. They are making a raw and inferior house. If I protest, they threaten to get me thrashed by the police.

Shri Narendra Modi looks at the TV screen and asks the Surat Collector, "What is this matter?"

(On behalf of the non-Gujarati Collector of Surat his assistant replies. The Chief Minister and the complainant can listen and watch on the TV screen).

Assistant to Collector: Sir, the house was in his son's name and was built by the Halpati Housing Construction Board. It was demolished in 1996-97 following a dispute over the open land beside the house. Later, after a settlement between the parties, the Talati Baburbhai Dahyabhai Chaudhari and the husband of village lady Sarpanch Dhansukhbhai Ramanbhai Halpati had started rebuilding the complainant's house. But the construction quality was not good. The complaint had been lodged for the demand of doors and windows. The Halpati Housing Construction Board has visited the site and reviewed the situation. The answers of the applicant and Talati-cum-Secretary Baburbhai Dhyabhai Chaudhari and Dineshbhai Ranchhodhbhai Halpati, the complainant's son were noted. After examining the details of the complaint it seems that there was external pressure to demolish the complainant's house.

Shri Narendra Modi took strict action on the Talati. Is harassing poor people part of his duty? Secondly, the samples show the inferior quality of material used, which will never

lead to a good quality house being constructed. This shows the extent of malpractices going on. He asked him to go there personally and ensure that the construction of the house is completed in a timely and satisfactory manner.

The complainant tribal Ranchhodbhai expresses his gratitude to Shri Narendra Modi. Overwhelmed with emotions, he praises Shri Narendra Modi for giving him justice, thanks the other officers and leaves.

This is only one of the numerous such incidents during the tenure of Shri Narendra Modi when he has given justice to the poor, deprived, persecuted and downtrodden people.

An incident published around seven years ago in the Kannada daily *Samyukt* just prior to Shri Narendra Modi's visit to Hubli in Karnataka, gives a glimpse of his sensitivity and shows how serving the poor is not a matter of garnering fame for Shri Narendra Modi, but is driven by his innate sense of duty towards them.

The article written by Vishvanath Kulkarni goes thus. Where is Hubli? And where is Ahmedabad? These two cities have had business relations for centuries. There is even a direct railway connection now. But this story talks about human relations and the person who made it possible is Shri Narendra Modi. It is possible that Shri Narendra Modi has forgotten this incident; after all he must have helped innumerable people in a similar manner. But it is the duty of us Kannadigas (speakers of Kannada language) to remember those who have helped them. This story is about a poor tailor from Hubli called Chandrakant Mahervade.

Chandrakant was told that there is a good demand for tailors in Ahmedabad and hence, after obtaining some preliminary information from his relatives in Gujarat, he set off for Ahmedabad. Newly married, he rented a house in Maninagar area of Ahmedabad and started working as a tailor. Work started flowing in, life was good. Meanwhile, his wife Shobha's pregnancy reached term and she was admitted to LG Hospital in Maninagar, where she gave birth to a baby girl.

Chandrakant's wife was in hospital for five days. At the time of discharge he was stunned to see the huge bill which

was way beyond his means. He was not even allowed to take his wife and new-born daughter home until he paid the bill in full. The place was unknown and even his relatives refused to help him. On one hand, he was overjoyed on the birth of his daughter and on the other, he was worried about how to pay the hospital bill. Seeing his distress, the security officer at the hospital suggested that he should approach the Chief Minister Shri Narendra Modi in Gandhinagar for assistance, as Maninagar is his constituency.

The very same day Chandrakant reached Shri Narendra Modi's residence in Gandhinagar. He showed the hospital bill to the police officer on duty, who took it inside while Chandrakant waited outside. After a few minutes, Shri Narendra Modi came out and asked Chandrakant to talk about himself and his problem. He gave him a letter on his letterhead and asked him to show it to the hospital. "Don't worry, everything will be alright. Convey my good wishes to your wife and daughter," he assured Chandrakant.

Chandrakant thanked Shri Narendra Modi, and left for Ahmedabad. When he showed the Chief Minister's letter to the hospital authorities, they waived the complete bill amount and Chandrakant was able to take his wife and daughter home. After three years Chandrakant moved back to Hubli, but he cannot forget Shri Narendra Modi. Whenever he sees his picture in the newspaper or on TV, he still feels the thrill of that incident and retells the story countless times.

At the tender age of 14, Shri Narendra Modi expressed his resentment of the unfair practice of untouchability and made up his mind to serve the downtrodden; and he continues to act as their guardian after becoming the Chief Minister.

The concept of a welfare state which gives the highest priority to the well-being and happiness of its people has long been advocated by our Indian culture. The true measure of the progress of any state is the extent of progress achieved by the underprivileged. True development is that which brings the fruits of happiness even to the last person in the remotest backward area. Shri Narendra Modi's administration believes

in this concept. His focus has always been the upliftment of the lowest strata of society.

This book is a compilation of the articles written by Shri Narendra Modi before assuming the Chief Minister's Office and his lectures thereafter. Any error or defect is my own.

I am extremely fortunate that Shri K.S. Sudarshanji, former RSS Chief and a person dedicated to the concept of social harmony, has written the preface for this book.

And finally, I have constantly experienced Shri Narendra Modi's love for the underprivileged, his endeavour to share in their joys and sorrows, the excellence of his thought processes and his sensitivity towards the society during the compilation of this book. I trust that every Gujarati will experience the same while reading this book.

—Kishor Makwana

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1

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: The Revolutionary Social Reformer

*(Based on speeches given in various districts on the
occasion of inauguration of Ambedkar Bhavan)*

Our nation and society have been fortunate to have inherited a history, culture and civilization dating thousands of years back. Each moment of the past years has been a continuous source of inspiration for us. Our capacity and ability to understand our great inheritance will decide our future. In every age, it has to be accepted that at every stage of human development, each stratum of society has had its own importance and existence. Despite everyone having equal opportunities of development, there were many examples of people who were not successful. In spite of many diversities and opposition, there are a series of inspirational incidents which continue to nurture new forces in today's society. If we look back at our scriptures, history and great lives, it is clear that, in the achievement of every age, the great people of that age had made efforts to include people even from the lowest strata of society. The success of these achievements was only due to these efforts.

Even Lord Rama had to rely on the support of Kevat to cross the banks of the river *Saryu*. There is no reason to believe that the very incarnation of God, Lord Rama would have encountered any difficulty in building a bridge to go to Lanka or to endure the *Vanvas* (confinement to forests) of fourteen years. Yet, even He took the help of monkeys for this task. Lord

Rama had put Mata Shabri on the same pedestal as Mata Kaushalya.

If there is any pillar of strength, to which the victory of Mahabharat can be attributed to, it has to be Lord Krishna. The very Lord Krishna who in His childhood could show the entire Universe to Mata Yashodha in His mouth, had to rely on the support of the cowherds welding their sticks, while lifting the Govardhan mountain. Even a personality like Lord Krishna had to rely on the cowherds. If we look at history, the role of the smallest strata of society is omnipresent in the success of every great person like Chatrapati Shivaji, Maharana Pratap or Guru Gobind Singhji. There is no greater teacher of truth than history. Therefore, it is necessary for us to learn what is essential from history.

Gandhiji's word, "Harijan," is not enough to cover the ambit and scope of the word "Dalit". Dalits constitute a human community which is socially neglected, untouchable, poor and destitute. This community has its own way of life and its own value system. They have their own pride and culture. They also have their likes and dislikes, emotions, love, sensitivities and life-values. The sorrows and pains of this community are different from those of other communities. When I was a student of history and social science, I had heard stories of customs wherein a person belonging to Valmiki community had to tie a broom on his back so that if he passed through a village, his footprints would not remain on the ground! Such grave tortures were meted out by our ancestors on the ancestors of these brothers. This resulted in revolts erupting among Dalits who had suffered such exploitation and humiliation. They developed a feeling of hate and anger due to the rigid traditions and blind beliefs of the society, as well as their continuous oppression by those who were spreading inequalities and imbalances in the society. Many great people had tried to give voice to these emotions. In the modern age, the Dalit community has given several social reformers who contributed to the foundation of Modern Bharat. Amongst these names, the name of Babasaheb Ambedkar as a revolutionary social reformer is at the forefront.

We are pained when we look at the prevailing situation of our society today! We need to arouse our inner consciousness.

Social Revolution

An incorrect belief that performing menial labour is undignified has crept into our society. Until we are able to remove this evil from its very roots, the situation will not change. Our social reformers have always been concerned about this matter. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was one of the great reformers, who initiated the fight for the equality of the last person of the social strata. Even before Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, the Dalit community produced many social reformers. In this series of social revolutionaries, one inspirational name is that of Vir Meghmaya, who managed to educate and enlighten the society. His personality was such that he was able to influence the government of the day, in addition to the Dalit community. He sacrificed his entire life to ensure that society does not suffer. This great person, who possessed all the 32 virtues described in our scriptures, gave a new lease of life to society. From the visionary foresight of Vir Meghmaya, one can imagine the intensity of the evil of untouchability created in our society. Even his demands from the government were noteworthy. He demanded the facility of worshiping *Tulsi* and the *Pipal* tree. In fact, in these small demands, one could see the vision and direction of the times to come. Otherwise, why should somebody think like this? We might think of asking for a two acre plot of land, so that our children would be prosperous. Vir Meghmaya did not raise any demand for his personal and material benefit. In fact, he thought about the happiness about the entire society. He is an example of the kind of Navratnas that existed in our society. It was his desire to integrate the entire Hindu community. The very thought that my community should not get detached from the cultural mainstream, which came to the mind of Dr. Ambedkar in the 20th century, in fact, first came to the mind of Vir Meghmaya, nearly a thousand years ago.

We should realize that the history of social revolution does not end with Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi.

Vir Meghmaya was also a part of the history of this revolution, to whom history owes a golden page.

Struggling for a Fearless Society

Dr. Babasaheb was a fearless revolutionary. His pain was endless. In the background of the tyranny of a so-called golden society, he wanted to uplift the Dalit community, but not through a feeling of revenge. He did not say that one should grow by hurting or killing others. "I will inspire the whole society to present my truth and existence with all their might." This emotion was seen in his entire thinking.

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was such a personality who fought for the deprived. He fought for the rights of the Dalits. He struggled for their self-respect and dignity. If there was somebody who could sit amongst the Dalits and tell them the harshest of truths, that was Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. This required immense courage and he displayed this. Those who have studied the life of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar would be aware of this fact. The Dalit ladies used to feel that if they wore jewellery just like the women of higher classes, they too would appear like them. About 100-150 years ago, they used to wear with pride, jewellery made of gold, silver or even polished metal. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar told them to stop presenting this facade. According to Babasaheb, "There is no need for this facade. Just be what you are with self-confidence and courage. Stand up with a straight look in your eyes and you too can be great." Babasaheb had the courage to say this. He used to tell the Dalits to first study and struggle, and then do anything else. He was also aware of the contribution that women could give to social transformation. Hence, in the 1942 Convention of Federation of Schedule Caste, he invited 20,000 untouchable women. "Be clean. Stay away from evils. Educate your children well and eradicate their inferiority complex. If you follow this advice of mine, then you will be on the path of progress and you will be able to take the society on the path of development." Dr. Babasaheb did not stop by saying only this. He further said, "You are the *Lakshmi* of the house. You have to be cautious that

nothing unfortunate befalls the household." I think that in order to ensure the happiness of the family, not only Dalit women but the women of the entire India should accept this advice of Babasaheb.

He talked to the Dalit men not only of education, but also of good values and character. He told on one occasion, "Our mind should be pure. There should be an attraction towards good values. Just because we are studying, does not mean that it is enough. Along with education, one's character should also improve. Education without character is worthless. Character is an important facet of *dharma*."

At the time of prevailing circumstances, the mean persecution of the Dalits, changed the very goal of Babasaheb's life. He became an intellectual rebel. On one hand, the upper classes enjoyed special privileges and rights, while the lower classes were cursed with poverty throughout their life. They lived a deprived life worse than animals. This reality sent shivers through him. He adopted the path of law and politics to change this situation. He struggled to bring transformation into the financial and social life of Dalits and people who were suffering and persecuted. This was a struggle against the prevailing inequalities and imbalances in the society. The pain and suffering of the deprived class of the society was evident in his struggle. Once the goal of the life of Dr. Ambedkar became a social revolution, he no longer remained an individual, but became synonymous with the entire struggle.

A Feeling of Belongingness in Harmony

What is the direction of the Dalit community - Equality or harmony? This question is very important. This country will acquire strength only when there is a harmonious atmosphere. Only equality is not enough. Without harmony, there can be no equality. The matter does not end when a Dalit child becomes a doctor. Till a Dalit doctor is able to get the same amount of love and respect, the situation will not change. Education and job by themselves are not enough. One has to go further than these two. This is the very thing that Dr. Babasaheb used to say. He

said, "Think well, study well, work for the progress of the society, and self-labour day and night. Only then will the people benefit. You might earn 100-150 crore rupees which may give you business and enable you to build your house. However, in our society, the building of a house, the success of your business, the wearing of good clothes or speaking in fluent English will not guarantee that the attitude of the society will change. Social imbalances result into the breaking down of the nation. The only solution to this is the creation of a feeling that there is no inequality between one's self and everyone else. Till I do not consider you to be my brother, even if you achieve equality in your life, the attainment of the final goal will not be possible. There is a need for harmony. Only from equality of everyone with one's own self, the nectar of harmony flows. And this nectar will become the *sanjivani* of life."

Only equality is not enough. *Mambhav* must merge with *Sambhav*. ('My' feeling must merge with a feeling of unanimity with everyone) *Sambhav* + *mambhav* = *samrasta*. Thus, harmony is the only effective medicine for the diseases of the society. If everyone becomes an income-tax officer, teacher or a businessman, then equality would be achieved by this. But, if there is a daughter of a higher class who is a nurse and there is a daughter of a Dalit who is also a nurse; there is a son of a higher class who is a teacher and there is a son of a Dalit who is also a teacher, only then balance is achieved. Unless there is *sambhav*, harmony won't be achieved. The responsibility of *sambhav* remains with those in the country who possess harmony.

The Power of Hindu Society

The world has seen more Hindu religious reformers than from any other religion. These religious reformers carried out reforms to eradicate the evils of their own religion, which is a big thing in itself. Opposing the very customs and traditions of the society, a Raja Rammohan Roy would stand up and say that widow re-marriage is inevitable. To state this 200 years ago was not a small matter. The custom of *Sati* was considered a matter of pride of the entire Kshatriya clan. The society which permitted

sati and *jowhar*, that society itself gave birth to a personality, who said that the tradition of a lady climbing onto a burning pyre may have been a matter of pride in the past, but this tradition had no place in today's day and age. The burning of widows in today's society would be considered a stigma. Practically, this fight has not been fought by any one not belonging to this *Dharma*, but has been fought by people born in this society, those who glorified Hindutva, believed in Hindutva, were wedded to Hindutva and were born as Hindus. In this dark age of slavery, even untouchability and class inequalities entered the society as grave deformities. Unfortunately, it got religious support. The saints and *mahants* started approving untouchability and class inequalities. What must have been the state of the society? When this evil was at its peak, in this atmosphere, a Narsinhao in a Nagar Brahmin family, a Mohandas in a Gandhi family, a Thakkar Bapa, in some corner of Hindustan, a Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Swami Vivekananda and Swami Shraddhananada were born, who within a period of 300-400 years dedicated their entire lives to remove this stigma of untouchability from the society. These people, in the face of stark opposition from society, continued to fight against its evils. It is the speciality of the Hindu society that it could give birth to Gandhi, Vivekananda and Narasimha.

At a time when untouchability was at its peak, the son of a Nagar Brahmin, Narsinhao, smashed the evil of untouchability by singing *bhajans* in the colony of untouchables in Junagadh. This is a big contribution of Gujarat. Even though he was born in a Nagar Brahmin family, considered a high Brahmin caste, Narshinao broke all the evil traditions of the society and raised his head. He embarked upon in the society with a resolve to remove the evil of untouchability. Mahatma Gandhi, a son of a *bania*, took great pride in calling himself a Harijan. Whether it was Bhimrao or Narsinhao, whether it was Mahatma Gandhi or Sardar Patel, Swami Vivekananda or Swami Dayananda Saraswati, they were pearls of the same string. They tried to create an atmosphere which would worry about the future. We have a joint responsibility towards thinking about tomorrow's

society. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar wrote such a modern principle and gave it to us, which would continue to guide this nation for centuries to come. This framer of the Constitution has given the responsibility of sacrificing many things for the society to many people.

Everybody's Messiah

The extent to which the atmosphere of awakening has spread in society, the depth it has reached indicates the change taking place in the common life of the society. Unfortunately, in our country, such a deformity has been formed, which instead of ensuring all-round development and thinking of the society has given way to a tradition which would divide the society into fragments. If any society divides great people, inheritance and identity into fragments, then one should believe that the society is heading towards self-destruction. It is the need of the day that irrespective of the belief and ideology, one should encourage a respectable person who is trying to do something for the country. Unfortunately, many evils have crept into society after independence. It seems that the great traditions of our society have died and gone. There is a large section of the country which is ashamed to remember the names of Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev, Rajguru, Shyamji Krishna Verma, Vir Savarkar, etc. It is necessary to bring the society out of such mindsets. Every great man who lived and died for the country belongs to us.

Dr. Babasaheb worked for the country and therefore he should be revered. But we have limited Babasaheb Ambedkar as the Messiah of the Dalits. Actually, he was the Messiah of the entire deprived world. Even unknowingly, we should not commit the sin of reducing the stature of Babasaheb by portraying him as the Messiah of Dalits alone. We should not limit this immense personality in a small sphere.

Give Up Inferiority Complex

Our difficulty is that as part of our inherent nature, we see everything as being bad. If we have to introduce Tulsidas, we

say that this is the Shakespeare of Hindustan. Whereas, we should say that Shakespeare means our Tulsidas. This inferiority complex of ours is a result of slavery. We tend to remember Shakespeare before Tulsidas. Because of this complex, we have put a rare personality like Babasaheb in a small shell. With self-confidence, Babasaheb should be recognized as a world personality and a great man who struggled for the deprived.

If we all develop this attitude, then imagine where we can take this society. The names of great people continue to inspire us generation after generation. This striving is so that we may not forget our great people.

Even to honour Babasaheb with the Bharat Ratna Award, a movement was required. What can be a bigger misfortune than this? Dalits should get a permanent place in the stream of society. Hence, it is necessary to continuously enjoin a person with his proud heritage. The Constitution was framed by Babasaheb, the country was given a new code of conduct and hence this contribution of Dr. Ambedkar has to be accepted by the whole country.

The Interest of the Country is Supreme

In every corner of the world, the nature of discrimination between human beings can be observed. One can also observe the class that is fighting this discrimination. In this world, the names of the people who fought for the blacks are on everybody's lips. However, if there is any Son of India who has been fighting for the downtrodden, the world does not recognize them. If a writer or a poet in any other country of the world would raise his voice against the evils of that society, he would be worshipped as a Universal Man. In our country, even though our achievements have not been any less than in other society, the names of these public leaders do not figure in the annals of world history. As a society, this is a matter of pain for all of us. It is our joint responsibility to ensure that these public leaders also become an inspiration to the rest of the societies of the world.

One can see a lot of similarities in the upbringing of two personalities, who fought for the deprived - Babasaheb and

Martin Luther. Both Martin Luther King in America and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar spent their lives to ensure that the downtrodden get justice. Martin Luther King struggled for the rights of the blacks of America throughout his life. Both were born and brought up amidst difficulties. Both continued to fight, not for themselves, but for the deprived. In order to fill the gap of social imbalance and inequalities, while fighting the battle for the rights, both emphasized the need for education. With every step, it seems that Babasaheb and Martin Luther King walked in the same direction and on the same path. Despite this hard truth, Babasaheb does not figure on the world stage. This requires introspection on our part.

It is the need of the time that such great human beings should be brought on the world stage. It is our responsibility as a nation and society that we should introduce these great men to the world in the language that they would understand. This would be possible only when we step out of the mentality of slavery. We should have the courage to take pride in our best. We continuously strive to overcome our weaknesses, and become strong. The teaching of Dr. Babasaheb, "Associate, struggle and become educated," should be put to actual use.

The attitude of slavery is still so prevalent amongst us, that even our best attributes are accepted as best, only if they come to us from America or the West. Even Swami Vivekananda was accepted by us through America. Even our precious inheritance of the practice of Yoga was gathering dust. Only when it came into vogue through the West, did we start practicing it. As a society, if we nurture a temperament of living with what is best with us, then automatically our nature to overcome our weakness will be aroused. The reason of this mental weakness of ours is as a result of the acceptance of an imported ideology and the state of mental slavery. This shows to what extent these deformities had spread. In order to divide the nation into fragments, the British spread a thought that India was never united as nation. It was not a one society, and there was no unity here. By defaming the fundamental ancient principles of Dravidians and Aryans, meaningless discussions of the Aryan

invasion, sometimes by saying that India did not have any aboriginal people, they diseased the minds of many generations of our people. In such a deceptive atmosphere, Dr. Babasaheb gave us a message of love and equality. His dream was for the creation of a casteless society, meaning thereby that the whole society unites harmoniously without any difference of high and low castes.

Babasaheb's Message

Babasaheb had made up his mind that though he was born as a Hindu, he will not die as a Hindu. When he decided to relinquish Hindu religion, several communities were willing to take him into their fold. On one hand, he was promised vast riches if he agreed to convert to Christianity and on the other, the Islamic community was eager to convert him to Islam. The Nizam of Hyderabad was ready to shower gold coins on him. Babasaheb observed this frenzy with a cool detachment and made a very important statement. His words will prove to be golden words for the unity and integrity of India in coming years. Even if people do not appreciate his decision today, the thinking behind it was of the highest order. He had said: "I will relinquish Hinduism because I am against the evils that have crept into Hindu society. But I love Hindustan and will live and die for Hindustan. I feel that my very birth has taken place so that every cell of my body and every second of my life can be given up in service of Hindustan. I will let go of Hinduism but I will embrace a religion whose seeds have been sown in the soil of Hindustan. Only a religion that has not come from foreign shores is acceptable to me. Hence, I shall embrace Buddhism." His idea behind converting to Buddhism was to reach the pinnacle of patriotism and fight against the evils of society, but not in a manner that the entire Dalit community would be ostracized after his death. What depth of thinking! What immaculate vision! Those involved in conversions should accept this message of Babasaheb unconditionally. Babasaheb was able to free Dalits from the tortures of untouchability without being disloyal to his country and his religion.

Babasaheb's campaign for the upliftment of the Dalits had several key points. One of them was the expression of one's personality. He dreamt that every Dalit child should have a strong will, a healthy body, a good education, be full of self-confidence and have the strength to look the world in the eye.

The mere name of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar brings a ripple of energy. He was a great man and he belonged to the whole world.

Gujarat played a vital role in the life of Babasaheb. He had received his higher education with the help of a scholarship provided by the Maharaja of Vadodara and had later settled in Vadodara. It is important to understand the contribution of Sayajirao in social equality and harmony. He was instrumental in bringing great men such as Maharshi Arvind to Vadodara and utilizing their capabilities for the welfare of the kingdom. Dr. Babasaheb was one of the, 'Nav-Ratnas' of the Vadodara court. He arrived in Vadodara as part of the administrative services but some bitter experiences there ignited the fire for the struggle towards equality. This struggle led to Babasaheb being recognized as the saviour of the deprived.

On Babasaheb's Path

It is true that we will have to tread on the path shown by Babasaheb if we want to achieve progress. Buddhist tradition and religion talk about, "Ap Divo Bhav" (Be the light yourself). Babasaheb never allowed darkness near him in his entire life. There is no other option except being enlightened oneself if we wish to achieve social development. Light given by others is short-lived. Only a life that is self-enlightened can take one on the path of light forever.

Babasaheb is the greatest inspiration for education. We have never had to face the struggles which he faced as a student. The troubles he endured would rarely befall anyone. In spite of such adverse circumstances, he was able to reach the highest levels of education. One of his qualities was that he never preached what he did not practice himself. Till he attained education himself, he did not ask others to do so. This is the correct way.

We should pledge to read about Babasaheb, and think over his lessons. You will get a new direction for living your life and a new inspiration for overcoming your own difficulties from the life of this great person.

I had the good fortune to read and do research on Babasaheb. I come from a marginalized family myself and hence I can empathize with the pain.

Babasaheb always fought for the truth, but there was no place for hatred in his life. He wanted to join society, not fragment it. He commented upon society, warned it, but never fragmented it. His struggle for equality and harmony was lifelong. Whether it was the issue of entry to the Kalaram Temple or making the water of the Chavadar Lake available to all, his programmes were always oriented towards social unity. These campaigns spurred from his great love for society. A close examination of Babasaheb's work will only reveal harmony; his rage was only towards attaining this harmony.

A Dedicated Life

The intelligent usually earn a lot of money. Only those who are obsessed with social welfare can give their all to society. Our country has seen several presidents, many of whom we are not even able to recall. However, everyone remembers Mahatma Gandhi, who never contested any election or occupied the office of President. That was the time of such obsessed people. Gandhiji was one such person who was obsessed with the country. He could have used his intelligence to earn money for himself, but he was obsessively dedicated to the nation. Hence, he became immortal and also transferred his obsession onto many others.

Prince Siddharth had all that life could offer – A rich kingdom, a beautiful wife Yashodhara and a bonny child. But he was obsessed and this obsession took him away from his royal life and led him to being worshipped as Lord Buddha.

Similarly, Babasaheb obtained his higher degrees of education from England and could have achieved a high standing in life, but he abandoned it. In spite of being a barrister,

he ignored the riches that England had in store for him and decided to spend his entire life in the service of his countrymen. This concern for the society over himself was his madness, which became the nectar of his life. Babasaheb was the Law Minister in Pandit Nehru's ministry, but the strong flow of concern for society made him resign from this post. This sacrifice and dedication towards society can be seen only in the greatest of men.

The Duty of Today's Generation

Dr. Babasaheb's life provides a huge inspiration to be committed in life. At a time when the entire ruling Congress Party was against Babasaheb and being an Ambedkarwadi was akin to being a criminal, there was a planned effort to ensure that people in India would not know about Babasaheb. The Congress has methodically carried out injustice against two great men – Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. The nation was not allowed to find out more about these great souls, who were strong and connected to the people and whose lives were entwined with the soil of the country. Even today, there is a huge gap where these great men once stood. They could have done even more for the country, but they were denied opportunities and several obstacles created in their paths. They had the ability to recognize the pulse of the nation and work for its welfare. By not utilizing this ability to its fullest extent, a huge injustice has been done to these great men as well as society at large. Today, when the truth has emerged, we only have ourselves to blame.

I Am What You Are

Hindu society has been ever-evolving and fighting against the evils that it has had to face. Untouchability and caste distinctions are evils that everyone will have to fight with a strong determination. Mere jobs and slight improvements in financial position will not change the whole scenario. There will have to be a feeling of belonging. The same God that resides in you also resides in me. You are me and I am you. It is time to go

back to these teachings from our scriptures. When I greet someone, it means that I am greeting the God residing in him. This God also resides in me. The concept of, 'namaste' is part of our tradition. Hence, we need to change all the bitterness and hatred in society and fight against the evils.

The Feeling of Belonging

Does anyone ask a postman delivering letters in the harsh sun if he would like to have a glass of water? Do we ever ask about his health if he does not show up for two days? If a collector is absent for some days, there is a tide of concern about his health. We need to change our behaviour towards lower class people in society. Do we ever ask our maidservant about her son's studies and celebrate his results? Should we not feel like celebrating the good results of the child of a poor woman who serves us by cleaning our homes? Let us celebrate April 14 in order to change our viewpoint towards society. Only if we are able to inculcate a feeling of belongingness and truly believe that God resides in all of us, will we get the strength to create a divine environment of equality and harmony.



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Harmony Instead of Strife

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The miraculous strength of the Indian way of life and thought has the power to tide over all kinds of social, economic and political shocks and point out the path for the welfare of mankind. This powerful flow of India's innate energy has the potential to overcome any problem. This energy signifies the centuries-old journey of progress of Indian spirituality and culture. Whenever attempts have been made to solve problems by ignoring this powerful force, it has resulted into failure or negative reactions.

India's fight for freedom has been witness to this life force. Whether it was the lotus and *roti* symbol of freedom fighters in 1857, Lokmanya Tilak's exuberant *Ganeshotsav* or Gandhiji's message of *Ram Rajya* – they were all expressions of India's innate energy and that is why they had become successful media to create awareness among people.

Even the largest superpowers of the world are crumbling under the weight of their internal problems. An orientation towards progress through economy or technology will not go beyond making man a slave of convenience. In such times, once again, India finds itself bearing the essential responsibility of forging the path of human welfare. However, before taking up any such responsibility, India must recharge its inner energy and make itself competent. Unless and until India is able to rise above the petty disputes based on religion, region and language, it will neither prosper itself nor help others to do so.

Different communities and societies have come up with different solutions to their problems from time to time amid the struggle for rights, class distinctions or illusions of revolution. Whether it was the Russian Communist Revolution based on equality, or the French Revolution or Mao's Communism in China. Each of these purported solutions failed due to internal conflicts before they could achieve their goals. Since then, society has been trying to come out of the erroneous impression of revolution, reverse revolution and Cultural Revolution.

Freedom from Degenerate Social Systems

If India wants to come up as united, harmonious, and powerful nation, it must free itself from the degenerative systems, traditions and beliefs. What path is to be followed to achieve this goal? In the past, several such efforts have been made in India, but as most of them did not work in tandem with the country's inner energy, they lead to further problems instead of solutions. We have always had a stream of social reformers eager to solve our problems. Some of them turned critical of society. They earned temporary fame, but could not come up with concrete results. Some limited their sphere of work only to political and economic rights, which increased the influence of groups with vested interests, who started seeking personal achievements in social welfare and who encouraged hatred among different classes to further their own political ambitions, just as it happened in the West. Experience has taught us that any effort that does not recognize our inner energy will never succeed. Only a gradual but firm process of social acknowledgment and social unity that aims at the removal of social evils, can bring a ray of hope.

In spite of a definite desire to move towards a harmonious society, the actions of some people turned society into a battlefield. Some people used the mirage of revolution to poison minds and some pushed society into a deep slumber promising dreams of revolution. History has witnessed that a negative approach can bring short-lived fame but not long-lasting results.

Which method will help achieve social harmony? An analysis of the efforts towards social harmony in the twentieth century reveals that the path shown by Swami Vivekanand in the late 19th century will prove beneficial; it will help us to reawaken our inner energy.

Distress over the Class System

Swami Vivekanand had written in a letter to Justice Sir Subramaniam on January 3, 1895: "It is extremely essential to bring about a fundamental change in society. Several plans for reconstruction of society have failed in the past. According to me, what has been done in the past is not wrong. Our society is not bad; it is good, I simply wish to make it better. I do not want to take it from falsehood to truth or from bad to good; I want to take it from truth to the highest truth and from good to best." In the same letter, he has expressed his pain in these words: "The modern class is not the real caste. It is in fact an obstruction to progress, which disturbs the uninhibited activities of castes and classes amid their differences."

Swami Vivekanand strongly believed that India has a longstanding tradition of solving its own problems. The illusion that no efforts were made in the past towards the upliftment of the downtrodden and such efforts have started only recently is a deliberately constructed myth. He would ask: "Has India ever faced a shortage of reformers? Have you read the history of India? Who was Shankaracharya? Who was Nanak? Who was Chaitanya? Who was Kabir? Who was Dadu? All these preachers were like the shining stars of our galaxy. Did not Ramanuj empathize with the backward classes? Did he not try to bring them under his fold?"

The evils spread in society were associated with religion by some selfish people, which is why the God-fearing society is unable to come out of it. On other side, there is a class that has chosen the easy way out of attacking religion instead of the underlying evils. Swami Vivekanand understood this difference and hence he constantly tried to separate religion from the evils of society and tried to comprehend the truth. He would say,

“There is a swamp in front of us, where several people have died. At present, our religion is not in the Vedas, Puranas, devotion or deliverance; it has entered the kitchen. Currently, religion in India is neither on the path of knowledge nor intelligence; it only treads on untouchability. It has ended up getting condensed in, “Aatmavat sarvabhooteshu” (consider all the living beings as your own soul). Is this message meant to be confined to books only? How will those who themselves are sullied by someone’s breath purify others? Untouchability is a mental disease. Rigidity ultimately leads to death. Only absolute love can lead to progress. Narrow-mindedness is the extreme form of selfishness. That is why love is the only enduring truth of life.”

While worshipping Lord Buddha, Swami Vivekanand would say: “In the Buddha incarnation, God says that creating distinctions is at the root of all sorrows. Differences created on the basis of in-born characteristics, qualities or wealth will only lead to despair. The soul does not differentiate on the basis of sex, class or any other distinction. Just as mud cannot be cleansed by mud, spirituality can never be achieved by difference of thoughts.”

Unique Approach of Swami Vivekanand

Once during a discussion on non-duality, Swami Vivekanand told his disciples: “I belong to all people. We are followers of the Vedic Hindu Religion. We have nothing to do with untouchability as there is no such concept in the Hindu religion. Our scriptures do not mention untouchability; it is merely a superstition that keeps interfering with the routine concentration of work of the population.”

Swami Vivekanand never missed any opportunity to awake the society with his arguments based on religion, logic or devotion. He refuted irrational traditions and rigid mindsets with his irrefutable logic. He would say: “If virtue lies in obeying strict rules and regulations passed down over generations, then there can be nobody more virtuous than a tree? Has anyone ever seen a piece of stone defying nature? Has anyone ever seen animals indulging in sin?”

Swami Vivekanand had a unique approach towards the repressed and the suffering. He never accepted the system of obliging others, but propagated the path of unity. The strength of his attitude towards the so-called lower class people is evident in his words:

“I will not be offended if they call me a *Shudra* (person from lower caste). In a way, it would be a repentance for the tyranny of my ancestors on the poor. I will be happy to belong to the lower caste. I am the disciple of a man who, in spite of being one of the highest Brahmins, was willing to clean the toilets of a *Shudra*. The *Shudra* was aghast at the idea of a Brahmin saint cleaning his house, so he refused. But my Guru crept into his house at midnight, cleaned the toilets and wiped them with his long locks of hair. I bow down to such a great man. We Hindus should inculcate this spirit among the common people too. If we have a reformer who serves the lower castes, I will sit at his feet and learn from him. Concrete action is more valuable than mere principles. Today, the efforts for the progress of backward castes have been reduced to a game for political benefits. On other hand, the idea of caste distinctions has become a weapon for political exploitation.”

With a view towards overall development of society, Swami Vivekanand raised shackles against caste distinction around 100 years ago. He told the Brahmins: “If you argue that traditionally Brahmins are more inclined towards higher education than those from lower castes, then you should stop spending on education for Brahmins and use the money for educating people from lower castes instead. You should help the poor as they genuinely need help. If a Brahmin is clever by birth, he will be able to study without help. You need to provide education, teachers and other necessities to those who are not clever by birth. This is what justice and logical reasoning tell us. Our poor and backward people need to discover themselves. We need to explain to them greatness lies within the soul of each man, woman and child; without any riders of strength or weakness derived from caste distinctions. Hence, we need to wake up and shrug off our weakness. In reality, nobody is weak. The soul of every person is infinitely powerful and omnipotent.”

Harmonious Approach towards Political System

Swami Vivekanand showed the path for eradicating the evils of society on the basis of religion, love and mercy. He also envisaged a political system based on harmony for the progress of society. If we look at the politics of our country in the five decades post-independence, we will see that rulers from the higher castes created their own different groups and enjoyed power by exploiting people. This has changed slightly now. Some of the forerunners from each caste are exploiting people from their own castes for their personal benefits and ensuring that the shackles of caste distinction stay rigid. This means that caste distinctions are not removed and exploitation does not come to an end; only the persons responsible for the exploitation have changed. This cannot be the solution to the problem. Hence, Swami Vivekanand predicted:

“Over the ages, the *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas* and *Vaishyas* have been in power. It is now time for the lower castes to come to administrative power and nobody will be able to thwart it.” In the context of the nation’s character and with a view to pointing the right direction for solving the problem, Swami Vivekanand says: “If we can create a state, where the knowledge of the ages comes from the *Brahmins*, the civility of the ages comes from the *Kshatriyas*, the distribution of time from the *Vaishyas* and the ideal of equality from the *Shudras*, this combination will eradicate all the evils of every age and result into a model state”.

As a result of being under slavery, our country and its people have also become mental slaves; the feeling of self-respect had disappeared. When our social reformers and our thinkers have to worry only about social evils, it definitely points to a defect in our fundamental thinking. We live in the illusion that our systems, traditions, culture and religion are at the root of all disease; only the Western countries are the best; and we will not be able to progress until we come out of our traditional culture. Such depressing thoughts have become a way of life. Even today, there are many people with the mentality of slavery. Swami Vivekanand says about the mental weaknesses in society: “The boat of our nation has helped many souls to cross the

immense sea of life. It has been floating in the ocean of the world since centuries, and it has helped many lives to reach fulfillment. Today perhaps this boat has been a little damaged by your own fault, and developed a small leak. Does that mean that the boat is guilty? It is right to blame the national boat which has served its people better than any other nation? If there is a leak in the boat of our nation and our society, we are sitting in it and hence we have to work hard to plug the leak irrespective of whether we are successful in doing so or not. If we are unable to plug the leak, we should die trying. We should not utter a single word against our own society. We are sinking, our boat is sinking. I have come to sit with you. If we have to sink, we will sink together. But not a single curse or bad word should be uttered from our mouths."

Concern about the Progress of the Suppressed Class

Swami Vivekanand was not a narrow-minded monk who only focused on spiritual progress. Every suggestion of his was concerned with the upliftment of the deprived, the backward, the tyrannized, persecuted and downtrodden people. He had presented a new concept of the poor people to society and that illustrated the excellence of his thought processes. Unlike the vote-hungry politicians of the present, who only make false promises to the downtrodden, he was a high-order thinker who showed the best direction for the bright future of India. He originated the development of backward classes in the real sense. He was concerned about last person from the lowest strata of the society. He said: "Our resolution is to provide the highest prosperity even to the lowest person, and in doing so, to accept whatever comes our way." For Swami Vivekanand, the progress of the downtrodden and persecuted was more important than salvation.

Swami Vivekanand, who was devoted to the Vedant, was unhappy with social evils and firmly determined to eradicate them from society. He strongly believed that a harmonious society is the first step towards the welfare of mankind.

Swami Vivekanand chose the path of unity for achieving the highest goal. He worked very hard to build the bridge of

emotion that would reach even the last person of the society. According to him, until and unless a heartfelt bond is created with the entire society, all efforts in this direction were in vain. He felt that the best way to solve all the problems is to create a harmonious society which has a feeling of belonging to each other, sensitivity for the society and close feelings for every person of the society. To achieve social harmony and awaken the innate energy of India, he said: "Do not forget that you have ties of blood with people of the lower castes, the unenlightened, the sweepers and the cobblers. They are your brothers. Be fearless, strong and proud of being an Indian. Proclaim with pride that you are an Indian and that every Indian is your brother. Announce that every Indian – whether illiterate, poor, *Brahmin* or backward – is my brother. Even if you have only a loincloth on your body, declare that every Indian is my brother, everything Indian is my life, every Indian God and Goddess is my Lord."

The only solution for the welfare of the nation is to be free from social evils and adopt a harmonious way of life. There should be closeness instead of rage. We must strengthen the society instead of hankering after personal rights. We must care for the entire mankind and not only ourselves. A harmonious society will come into existence only on the basis of love and good feelings towards others. Today when elements with vested interests are turning society into a battlefield, let us decide:

*Leave the battle,
Let us go towards harmony.
We don't want to be soldiers in battle,
Let us become servants of harmony.*

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3

Rakshabandhan: The Unbroken Bond

(Published in Sadhana, August 24, 1985)

Festivals can be envisioned as the very energy of the social life. All over the world, festivals are central to the lives of people, perhaps more so for us Indians. In the land of Bharat, festivals are not merely limited to being expressions of personal joy or means of entertainment – some are instrumental in enabling a person transcend the boundaries between the individual and the society and even between the individual and entirety itself; they have transformed from celebrations to the means of attaining the highest element.

Some festivals chart the path of personal fulfillment, some point out the course from 'Nar' to 'Narayan'. Some provide glimpses of the various material joys that life has to offer, while some embellish one's visions of the afterlife. Some festivals are guides for us to conduct our daily lives, while some bring us closer to divinity. Some teach us to accept our all-encompassing destinies, while still others rake up the glorious memories of our rich cultural heritage.

A definite social science can be seen playing its part behind each festival. It is a science that is animate, that is full of zeal and enthusiasm that gives an impetus to life itself. It is ever evolving, not just a religious ritual, but a vital life force in itself. These characteristics make festivals the most suitable medium to help people imbibe the values that society stands for and believes in; in fact, they have been utilized for this purpose time and again, kept constant or changed as and when deemed fit.

Rakshabandhan: Yesterday and Today

Rakshabandhan festival celebrates the sacred bond between brothers and sisters. However, this manifestation of filial love has not always been what it is today – it has evolved over the ages. *Rakshabandhan* was originally a symbol of praying for the safety of a loved one – be it a husband, son or brother. There are innumerable incidents in our ancient texts where wives, mothers and sisters have tied the protective thread around the wrists of brave warriors – Indrani tying a ‘Raksha’ to Indra, Kunti blessing her grandson Abhimanyu with the sacred thread and Lakshmi praying for the safety of Baliraja.

In the Middle Ages, when India faced the threat of foreign invasions and the grave issue of protecting the honour of its women arose, *Rakshabandhan* took on a different form. This period saw thousands of brave brothers laying down their lives to shield their sisters who requested protection by tying the ‘Raksha’ on their wrists.

As time passed, *Rakshabandhan* came to be celebrated by families in major parts of India. The touching expression of the bond between a brother and a sister was ensconced as an integral part of our culture. *Rakshabandhan* unleashes a flood of emotions and spreads the fragrance of sibling love. In the midst of the celebrations, the ever-materialistic man comes up with innovative ways to extend this festival to his worldly belongings – the vendor ties ‘Raksha’ to his weighing scales, the scooterist to his scooter, the student to his book and the clerk to his pen – undoubtedly expecting some form of, ‘protection’ from them.

A Stream of Love

All of us need to ask ourselves – Have we been able to maintain the flow of emotions like love and brotherhood even after centuries of celebrating *Rakshabandhan*? Is it relevant in society today? We claim to be steeped in love and respect for our sisters, and yet women in our society have to face abuse, insults, rapes and many other forms of tyranny. If our sensibilities do not flinch at these incidents, what is the use of celebrating a festival signifying love for our sisters?

If we believe in “Mata Pruthvi Putro’ham Pruthvyah” (the Earth is my Mother and I am Her son), it makes all of us on earth each other’s’ brothers and sisters. Why, then, do we need to engage in war and strife? We talk about “Tatvmasi”, then how can we be capable of cruelty and barbarism towards our fellow human beings? If “Aham Brahmasmi” (God is within me), how have we degenerated to the stage where racial hatred blinds us to everything else? How could we Indians, who used to astound the world with our legendary unity, fall to the nadir of divisiveness and disarray? Our scriptures generously proclaim “Atmavat Sarvbhuteshu” (there is a soul in every being) and yet, how can our intolerance unravel the very fabric of our society?

We will have to find a solution to this problem ourselves. Our philosophers and thinkers are among the best in the world, and yet, when it comes to putting our philosophies into practice, we have failed miserably. Our actions are not in step with our lofty ideals. The need of the hour, then, is a social revolution that will use our own strengths and beliefs to infuse fresh life into our society.

Fortification

Our social unity, national integrity, the lines dividing the untouchables from the rest of the society and the impregnable walls that heads of religious sects build around themselves are matters of grave concern. *Rakshabandhan* has the potential to emerge as the solution to this grave problem. The festival which binds brothers and sisters with the symbolic cord of love also brings the message of “Balam Upasasva” (I worship the power). This power is the power of harmony. “Sanghe Shaktihi Kalauyuge” (the power of unity is stronger than any other in all ages). The strength of a united, harmonious society is what will prevail over that of any individual or kingdom and even of all the wealth in the world. Even if we want to venerate power, we shall need to cultivate the strength of unity and harmony.

Indrani had tied a “Raksha” to Indra as a prayer for his safety when he challenged the demons. Today, we face the

demons of social evils and mothers need to pray for the safety of our heroes who will ultimately triumph over them. Kunti blessed Abhimanyu with a “Raksha” when he took up the challenge of penetrating the *Chakravyuh* in Arjun’s absence. Today, we do not have the comforting presence of Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Mahatma Gandhi, Swami Vivekanand, Dr. Hedgevar or Dr. Ambedkar to help us with the *chakravyuh* of social ills. Only the blessings of our mothers can help us conquer the forces that are bent on shattering our society. Lakshmi’s symbolic string of love enabled Vishnu to emerge from Baliraja’s grip; every *Gruhlakshmi* (the lady of the house) today will have to pray fervently to free the society from the ropes of divisiveness that restrain it.

Yēna Baddhō Bali: Rājā Dānavēndrō Mahābala:.

Tēna Tvāmanubadhnāmi Rakṣē Mā Cala Mā Cala..

(I tie you by a thread as Bali, a great brave, king of demon was tied by this. O! Thread of protection! be steady and do not move.)

A Degenerative Disease

Several attempts have been made in the past to create harmony in the society; however, the more we tried to remedy it, the more the degenerative disease of disharmony raised its head. Though the efforts were backed with good intentions, they failed due to the negative approach of society as a whole. In fact, there are some people whose slogan is “Jati-Todo” (divide the race). People have created a new race by themselves. They engage in disgusting efforts to achieve their own vested interests in the name of reformation of society. It is their underlying aim to encourage diversity and continue backwardness. As if this is not enough, they also plot conspiracies to widen the chasm between factions of society through zealous sectarianism.

It is important to go back to the teachings of our great social scientists such as Yagnyavalkya, Parashar and Vashishth. Somewhere in their ideals will we find the key to solve the problems that confront us. After all, as each of these ancient thinkers have held, the individual is the most important unit of

society; it is only through the individual that we can tap the outlook, ambitions, effectiveness and even the very existence of the society as a whole.

A Society Directed by Religion

We have never believed that an individual is separate from the society. The welfare of the individual and the welfare of the society will always go hand in hand. To ensure this, our ancient sages had come up with a unique solution – they did not tie individuals with rights but bound them with religion and duty. They came up with a system wherein all social obligations are defined as religious duties. Hence, we have the religious duties of a mother, father, woman – Matrudharma, Pitrudharma, Stridharma. By equating social duties with religious ones, these sages were successful in extending the worldly life of people to their divine lives through “Dharmo Vishvasya Jagat Pratistha”.

Keeping the individual at the core, his social responsibilities were determined in conjunction with the indestructible bond of religion. No society can be stable if it is based only on self-seeking social interactions; neither can it be sound on the foundation of personal freedom alone. The individual and the society can co-exist and be mutually beneficial only if society nurtures the welfare of the individual and the individual associates his own duty with the society.

If this delicate equilibrium is broken, there is a clash between social welfare and personal interests. This leads to disruption of unity in the society, which is why there is a dire need of efforts to create and maintain the basic social unity. This end will be achieved only if long-lasting steps are taken, not merely from an election point of view. It is important to set up and achieve concrete goals. The process of development of individuals will strengthen the feeling that all of us are one. The sentiment of unity will spontaneously emerge and distinct objectives will be achieved without any feelings of bitterness. ‘Upāyaṃ Cintayan Prājña: Apāyamapi Cintayēt’ (A wise man should think about adversities, while thinking over the means of success.) It is imperative to create the attitudes of comradeship, righteousness and mutual cooperation among people. One of

the ways of doing this is by interpreting *Rakshabandhan* as solidarity in society.

Intense Self-Confidence

In the face of the forces that are bent on dividing our society, we shall have to proceed with immense patience and intense self-confidence. Our nation possesses enormous spiritual strength which is capable of vanquishing disruptive forces and establishing harmony. The only thing to be done is to awaken a faith in this spiritual strength.

Those who have always wanted us to be dominated by Western influences will now have to accept the decline of the West. Our glorious culture has seen many peaks and troughs and has emerged strong enough to face any challenge in the future. The Western philosopher William Johns exalts the glory of Indian culture in a metaphorical poem. Roughly translated it says, "Someone who has seen the harsh sunlight drying up every trace of greenery would perhaps doubt if he will ever be able to see it again. But the arrival of the rains and the first drops of water transform the desolation into a green paradise once again." Our culture is equally fertile and resilient; its inner strength inexhaustible.

A Society Devoid of Inequality

Many things happen in our social life. There are some faults in our direction of thinking, our principles of imaginations of social life, our statement of scripture. We cannot afford to sit and curse entrapping in illusions. The Vedas, the Upanishads, the Shrutis, the Smritis, the Puranas all of them have been guides for society at current.

Dr. Babasaheb proved that untouchability was not there in Vedic period, Upanishad period, or Manusmriti period. In creation of the Vedic riches, the contribution of the *Brahmin*, the *Vaishya*, the *Kshatriya* and the *Shudra* was equal. The creation of the best *Gayatri Mantra* is of non-*Brahmin*. He has written that in the age of Manusmriti society guilty man was boycotted by the society, *Brahmin* were also not an exception.

It is said in our culture that, “Jati Brahmin Chatna”. It is not true that one can be *Brahmin* by birth only. *Vatsyayan* has written that one who feels the religion truly is a *Rishi* however he may be a backward by birth. It is said in scripture that a king should take his work with backward class man instead of a *Brahmin* who is not well-behaved. In Shanti parva of Mahabharata, Bhishma Pitamah has described construction of a ministerial-assembly. In that, all of the thirty-seven, 4-*Brahmins*, 4- *Shrudras*, 8-*Kshatriyas* and 21-*Vaishyas* are included. Very important thing is that the number of *Brahmins* and *Shrudras* are same. Yudhisthira has said that to protect the nation and religion, if *Kshatriya* and *Brahmin* get failed then *Vaishya* and *Shudra* can handle the situation.

Swami Vivekanand has said: “If you hear the deft of lion of unity in Himalayan forests, in the deep sound of river the mix with the thunder of rain and hear the sound of ‘Asti Bhati Priya’ or hear the warbling of beloved in a grove of beautiful Vrindavan, or get into deep meditation with a holy saint in a monastery at Kashiura, or take part in an incentive dance with Shri Gaurang Mahaprabhu’s devotees, ‘Vadkel’ and ‘Tenkel’ etc. are very important principles of unity - take shelter of them. Or remember the preaching of preceptor of Madhva Sampraday. Hear the appealing voice of Shikh Guru’s ‘Vahe Guru Ki Fateh’ or hear a preaching of Vdasi or Nirma’s Granth Saheb. Or disciples salute to Kabir Saheb’s saying Sat Saheb. Enjoy by listening Sakhi or read a miraculous treasure of knowledge of reformer of Rajputs Daduor read his disciples like Sundardas to know writer of Vichar Sagar Nishaldas or you hear description of Lal Guru’s preaching from any person of lowest class. All of them are saying the same thing, only the tune of their preaching is from shruti and Geeta, Vedas and Upnishads. The saints of middle age have presented that message in a very simple language like, ‘Jaati Paati Puchhe Nahi Koi, Hari ko Jape So Hari ka Hoi.” (No one asks the caste or creed, whosoever remembers God becomes His)

We don’t believe in old senseless traditions and customs. We have always been revolving. That’s why it is said in our

culture, 'Purāṇamityēva Na Sādhu Sarvam' (Every old thing need not to be necessarily good.) It is not good only because it is old but we have to keep which is the best. And we have to walk ahead with faith and trust.

Efforts Towards Harmony

When one is trying to bring harmony in the society, the people of backward classes who were suppressed and crushed have lost their patience. Sometimes it appears that the tone which we hear from them is very disappointing as if they have lost everything. It is very natural but we must help them to improve their trust and confidence; we have to help them to sustain their patience and trust. This is a society which is trying to improve their faults very open-heartedly perhaps the expected result may not be there. The pilgrimage of development of people is always been accepting good changes. The knower of the Vedas must be knowing that Indra, Agni and Varun were our main Gods. Today Shiva, Rama, Datta and Krishna have taken their place. When belief of Shiv and Vishnu got established at that time controversy also related to the belief was there. Shankaracharya gave the conclusion by including it in reverence of Panchayatan. It is said that peacock, rat, bull, snake, swan, eagle, etc. were Gods of people living in forest. Hindus did not insult them but set them as companions of God. Peacock with Kartikey, Rat with Ganeshji, Ox with Shiv, Eagle with Vishnu, Swan with Saraswati. All animals have been the vehicles of Gods with the systematic sequence, the followers of this God got a good harmony.

Rishi Shrungi, Vishvamitra, Agastya were called *Brahmins* due to their religious nature. A son of backward class lady named Mahidas called *Brahmin* due to his qualities, and created "Aytarey Brahmin". A guru gave 'Upnayan sanskar' to Jabal who did not know even the name of his father and he turned *Brahmin*. A trustworthy minister and the best friend of King Dasharath was also from backward class. All the companions of Rama were people from forest. A queen and daughter-in-law of great Kshatriya family Meera took knowledge from Saint Raidasji,

who was from backward class. Guru Gobind Singh had founded a cult named Khalsa with the help of his five disciples of backward class and on the risk of his own life. Middle age is known by Bhakti Yug. The entire country was terrified by the attacks of foreign attackers. At that time saints and devotees had saved the society. Eight percent saints were *Brahmins* amongst them and they were much respected for people.

Shrimad Shankaracharya had seen God in a cruel man. Shrimad Ramanujacharya gave a message of freedom to the backward class people and tolerated the anger of his Guru. Shri Baseshwar produced a light of spiritual unity. Swami Dayanand had proven that untouchability is meaningless by the Vedas. Swami Vivekanand asked to serve poor needy person and reckon untouchability as madness. Ramkrishna Paramhans accepted to clean the toilets of backward class people as a part of efforts for realization of God. Swami Sahjanand spent his whole life for servicing Narayanguru of Kerala who was born in backward class named Ezva but known as the highest symbol of spirituality. Chokhmel of Maharashtra, Kanakdas of Karnataka, Ravidas of Varanasi, Pakarnar of Kerala, Nandanar of Tamil Nadu, Narsaiyo of Gujarat all these saints created Abhangs (Hymns), and songs of devotion and gave the message of equality and brotherhood to many people of the nation.

Efforts for a Revolution

Tilak, Gandhi, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Veer Savarkar, Thakkar Bapa, Mahatma Phule, Agarkar, Dr. Hedgevar, Shri Guruji all these great people were born in high class of the society, but they tried to remove the demerits of the society for the whole life.

In 1969, Vishva Hindu Parishad held its meeting in Udipi and in that meeting the proclamation was announced by our saints with the message that untouchability is a blot of society. This proclamation was in presence of all religious teachers and jagatguru.

In January 1979, there was a Vishva Hindu Sammelan at Prayaga. In that saints had come from each and every corner of

the nation and they declared untouchability as a blot. Jagat Guru Shankaracharya had said, 'Na Hindū Patitō Bhavēt!' (The hindu should not be deviated.)

Our society has tried hard for the revolution. Perhaps we don't get the expected result but the historical causes behind that should be remembered. We were surrounded by continuous terror and struggle in the last 1200 years of slavery, although the positive work of reconstruction went on throughout.

If there is darkness in a room, crying and cursing won't be able to remove darkness. One has to enter the room with a bright light. True and constructive is only long-lasting. Suffered people must be having a pain because of unexpected results. But they should forget that every class of the society has understood that the situation should be changed everyone should try in this direction with control and should use language and behaviour which can give strength to that work.

Muslim and Christian Society

"Dalit Muslim *bhai bhai*" – Can this slogan be the solution to the problem? This question warrants deep thinking. What would be the condition of a society which conspires for forcible religious conversions in the name of equality? Arab Muslims consider themselves to be superior as Islam originated in Arabia. The Egyptian Shia Muslims consider themselves the best and other Muslims as inferior. The Aga Khan Ismailis who separated from the mainstream Muslim society have to flee for their lives in their own country. In Pakistan, the Ahemadiyas are proclaimed as non-muslims and are kept away from regular Muslim rights. In Yahya Khan's military rule during the Bangladesh war, more than two lakh women were subjected to unspeakable tortures. Iran is also suffering from several problems.

Muslim women have to bear the brunt of several ills such as the Shariat laws, the custom of polygamy and oral divorces but not even their community heads are willing to pay heed to them.

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar has written in his enlightening book, *Pakistan Athva Bharat nu Vibhajan*:

“Islam talks about brotherhood, but even this religion has three sub-categories – Ashraf or Sharaf, Ajlaf and Arjaal. Ashraf means noble and includes the highest classes of Saiyad, Sheikh, Pathan, Mughal and Malik. Ajlaf covers the lower classes such as Pirani, Thakarai, Julaha, Fakir, Rangrej and Naliya. People belonging to the Arjaal category such as Bhaanara, Halaal, Khot and Jijara are neither allowed in mosques nor do other Muslims maintain any relations with them.

Christians are in more or less the same condition. The rift between Catholics and Protestants is known to the entire world. Christians associated with Saint Thomas consider themselves to be the best. In South India, the Nambudri Brahmins who converted to Christianity consider themselves superior to other Christians all over India. There is a strong influence of the caste system in church elections. The evil of dowry is rampant too.

The problem of divisiveness exists all over the world, in one form or the other. The Negroes and Red Indians are persecuted in the worst manner in America. The Russians who otherwise propagate equality, still favour the Slavic races. The underlying point is that the practice of creating differences and suppressing the weak is a manifestation of the perverted human ego. It is always found to exist – either in the name of religion, race, colour, physical beauty, wealth or education.”

It is not possible to find an external solution to this issue.

The Nizam of Hyderabad had offered huge wealth to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar if he converted to Islam; but Babasaheb rejected his offer as he understood that personal gains obtained in this manner would not be good for the nation.

The Highest Philosophy of India

In the midst of this quest for the elusive solution to the problem of divisiveness, we should look to our scriptures which have given us the solution in the form of Nir Vair (removing enmity).

Mitrasya Mā Cakṣuṣā Sarvāṇi Bhūtāni Samīkṣamtām.

Mitrasyāham Cakṣuṣā Sarvāṇi Bhūtāni Samīkṣē..

(If I want the entire world to see me as its friend, I also have to see the world as my friend.)

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) has brought a ray of hope through their passionate approach for enabling people to experience the unity of souls. Young and old alike come together as the children of Mother India and proclaim:

Pure love is fundamental of our work.

Love recognizes only devotion.

Doing this regularly helps strengthen their bond of brotherhood. The consistency in speech and behavior leads to strong bonding between hearts. This helps create a small model of the type of world that we want to create for everyone – friendly and harmonious; free from bitterness and inequality.

If the issue of cow-fat on a cartridge could become the seed of a massive revolution; if Tilak could turn the Ganesh festival into a symbol for the freedom fights; if Gandhiji could raise the cry for freedom in millions of Indian hearts using a humble spindle; if the procession of Mother Ganga and Mother India can go around the entire nation in thirty days; then why can *Rakshabandhan* not become the inspiration for social harmony?

Let us once again proclaim 'Amṛtasya Putrā:'. Let us strive towards enlivening our social fabric with the nectar of harmony and create a nation that pulsates with equality and brotherhood.

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The Clarion Call of Revolution

(Published in journal 'Sadhana', November 18, 1989)

Spirituality has never believed in racism. A person from the highest or lowest class could be a monk in ancient India. The monk Shakyamuni brought the hidden elements of the Vedas to the limelight. Not only did he propagate his religion all over the world but he was also the pioneer in inviting a person from other religions to his own.

The usual processes of improvements in society that take place in its normal course were thwarted by the suppressed mentality that overcame us during the long period of slavery. Our centuries-old cultural heritage helped us to fight and succeed against the social weaknesses. However, this fight was slowed down and the evils gained power during our period of oppression as divisiveness and untouchability had fragmented our society. Unfortunately, some elements gave a religious anchor to our weaknesses and hence, for a long time, it was believed that most of these social evils were rooted in religion.

Since these perversions entered society thousands of years ago under the cover of religion, removing them using the support of religion is the only way out.

Two events are important in the history of independent India – their significance may not be visible today, but the future will behold their impact and someday, the truth will be accepted.

The first of these is the *Kumbhmela* at Prayagraj. The *Kumbhmela* has its own unique importance in Hinduism and no saint or spiritual person can stay away from it. The whole

country feels the strong spiritual mood of the *Kumbhmela* whenever it is in progress. The *Kumbhmela* in the seventies was made all the more significant as a groundbreaking announcement was made by Sri Shankaracharya and the August gathering of Hindu leaders on the platform provided by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad – ‘Na Hindū Patitō Bhavēt!’ (The hindu should not be deviated). On the banks of the holy Ganges, a historic decision was taken to wash out the sins of thousands of years. The sages declared that caste discrimination and untouchability has no religious base. This announcement made with the inspiration of the respected RSS Guru Shri Golwalkarji was a massive achievement in itself.

The second event took place on 9th November 1989 at Ayodhya on the banks of the river Saryu, at the very place where Lord Rama was born. None of us can ignore the massive contribution of Mahatma Gandhi in removing the evil of untouchability socially, but even he faced several obstacles in eradicating untouchability culturally. Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) took a revolutionary step in this direction.

The entire nation raised a united voice to start a movement for building a temple on the birthplace of Lord Ram, led by renowned saints and monks. When the ceremony for laying the foundation stone of this temple (*shilanyas*) was held on November 9, 1989, instead of the head of any monastery, teacher, saint or monk, it was laid at the hands of a poor Dalit devotee of Lord Rama from Bihar. This event has a huge significance in the history of India’s cultural life. The laying of the *shilanyas* (foundation stone) did not lay the foundation of a temple alone – it laid the foundation for social harmony in India. Inevitably, the future will show the true worth of this event.

The very fact that the foundation stone for the Ram Temple, which is an establishment of the faith of crores of Indians, was laid by a Dalit, signals the new Cultural Revolution. This was a public acknowledgement of the support of religious leaders to the campaign for eradicating untouchability and promoting social harmony; it was the clarion call for the new revolution.

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5

Van Bandhu Kalyan Yojna: Not Empty Promises but a Functional Approach

(On the occasion of announcing the Vanbandhu Kalyan Yojna Package in the Gujarat Legislative Assembly. February 27, 2007)

Gujarat would complete five decades of journey of development in 2010. During this period, many parties came to the rule, and several plans were made. And yet, much more is still to be done in terms of holistic development. It is pointless to discuss how many plans were executed. Instead, there is an urgent need to achieve the goal of fulfilling Mahatma Gandhi's dream and let the development reach the lowest of the low level of the society.

There are many classes in the society that need more attention and we ought to elevate them to the same level as that of the mainstream – developed section of the society. The government aims at focusing on such classes and people.

In the eastern part – from Umargam to Ambaji, there are 43 sub-districts of schedule tribes. The population of schedule tribe in state is approximately 75 lakhs, which is 15% of the total population. The tribal section of the society has been the protector of our culture for centuries, the martyr in the Independence Movement, and the most hardworking section especially when it comes to the progress of the state. This section has become aware about its involvement in the development. They have learnt a lot from the experiences of the past sixty years.

We have been witnessing the consequences of the plans and the promises since the last 60 years. And we have to confess that following the Constitution in order to uplift the schedule tribe section is not enough. We accept this inevitable truth, and aim to fulfil the dream of making the schedule tribe section participate actively in the journey of development. We also wish that they get their right of development and achieve bright results.

There is a need to have an innovative functional method for the empowerment of the 15% tribal population, for the growth of their abilities so that they can take optimum advantage of the opportunities offered to them. The present government's result-oriented accomplishments and the qualitative improvement in the educational and economic progress programs is well-known to all.

The development plan for the tribals started with, *Adijati Peta Yojana*, in 1974. Since then till 2001 – which means during the period of 27 years, only ₹ 6500 crores have been spent. On the other hand, the present government spent approximately ₹ 6000 crores only in five years – from 2002 to 2007. This stark contrast is quite in plain sight. Apart from that, through the medium of, 'Gujarat Pattern,' Gujarat has achieved a noticeable success in the implementation of the *Adijati Kalayaan* model.

Gujarat has always been the foremost in the country in giving the land on lease to the tribal farmers. Moreover, the State Government is waiting for the Central Government's approval of the proposal to provide 2236 hectares of land for the rest of the 3344 families.

It is certainly a matter of pride and satisfaction for the State Government. However, we are aiming even higher and want to work harder for the prosperity of the *Adijati*.

The State Government clearly believes that the development is inclusive of all sections of the society. It fosters all, and must spread across the nation. In order to fulfill this approach, we aim to form a five-year plan for the holistic development of the tribals wherein we are planning to utilize the tribal package of ₹ 15000. This package is going to be an historical event because

it would be more than the total expense made in the period of 32 years since 1974. I am extremely proud to announce that “Van Bandhu Kalyan Yojna,” will make the dream of development true.

The Vision for the Tribals

We have a definite vision for taking forward this “Van Bandhu Kalyan Yojna,” worth ₹ 15000 crores. This includes the objectives such as doubling the income of all the tribal families, connecting them with the mainstream scheduled tribes, educating all the deserving tribal children, emphasizing the quality of education in line with the modern techniques, providing them with their own houses, facilities for a healthy life including pure water through pipelines, giving them water for farming and providing them guidance about modern farming methods by, ‘Vadi Yojna’ to increase the agricultural production. Apart from that, we also aim to provide them with the infrastructural facilities such as roads, bus stops, and energy network. We plan to work for the progress of the towns in the tribal areas so that they can be the role models for other nearby villages.

The government understands that this is a mammoth task and therefore I announce the ten objectives of the Chief Minister under the, ‘Van Bandhu Kalyan Package’.

(1) Starting daily wages oriented program for five lakh families to increase the agricultural production, in addition to increasing animal husbandry, daily business and agricultural activities; giving quality training to tribal youngsters and enrolling them in new programs to improve their modern scientific knowledge and technical expertise; giving priority to families in, “Adivasi Kalyan Yojna,” where a woman is the only earning member of the family.

(2) Emphasizing the quality of education and higher education in tribal areas; starting middle school for science stream in tribal districts, giving admissions to 1000 selected tribal students in the best boarding schools and planning for their good education so that a talent pool for tribal students can be

created; starting a boarding school like Navodaya or Eklatva in tribal districts and providing quality equivalent to city schools; Establishing more than 100 hostels for engineering, nursing, ITI, polytechnics and other colleges in the tribal areas; starting traditional arts, science and commerce colleges in the rural areas.

(3) Speeding up financial progress in tribal areas by providing proper markets to tribal products, supporting traditional skills and identifying the use of area and traditional activities; making a cluster and have the approach of combined financial progress; giving one crore rupees annually to every sub-district; developing infrastructural facilities and enlisting people in activities that they are interested in; improving the quality of traditional tools and ensuring that a better yield is obtained from raw materials.

(4) Ensuring that tribal women and infants get the benefit of "Chiranjivi Yojna"; providing nutrition to pregnant women and children under the age of six; special health check-ups for tribal families; financial assistance for heart surgeries of tribal living below the poverty line; creating awareness about the treatment of diseases such as sickle cell anaemia and leptospirosis.

(5) Planning to provide houses to all tribal families during the next five-year plan.

(6) Providing clean and pure drinking water to all tribal families in the next five-year plan and providing drinking water through pipelines to at least 25 per cent tribal families.

(7) Emphasizing "Juth Yojna"; constructing check dams and watersheds; providing technical assistance and loans for drip irrigation facilities.

(8) Improving the quality of roads in rural areas; renovating the existing roads; connecting every area with a population of less than 250 to the roads.

(9) Free electrification of tribal families below poverty line; electrification of all sub-areas and promoting alternative energy sources such as solar energy.

(10) Financial and cultural development of 13 cities having large tribal populations; providing broadband connectivity to the main centres of sub-districts in the coming five years.

These changes for the development of tribes will be carried out as top priority under the Chief Minister's Program. The use of professional expertise and impartial independent monitoring will enable the scheme to be successful at district levels. The development of tribal villages will be executed more effectively with the help of experts in local partnership. Gujarat is becoming the trendsetter for tribal prosperity and setting an agenda for the entire nation. Gujarat has taken the lead for enabling the tribal people to participate in the journey of progress. It is our joint responsibility that the Chief Minister's 10-point program for the, *Van Bandhu Kalyan Yojna*, should be the agenda of five crores Gujaratis rather than of the Chief Minister only.

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6

Service to the Progeny of Shabaridham

*(Speech delivered on the occasion of Shabarikumbh
Mahotsav, Dang district, Ahwa Taluka, Subir Village.
January 11, 2006)*

In the coming years, Shabaridham in Dang district will become a place of pilgrimage for forest people of the entire nation. Just as every Hindu from all over the country shares the desire of *Gangasnan* (bathing in river Ganga), similarly, every forest dweller of the country will nurture the desire to visit Shabaridham once in his lifetime. As the message of Shabaridham goes all over the country, many new opportunities for development will open up for Dang, enabling the forest people to have greater scope to earn their livelihood and bringing their art, grace and achievements into the limelight. I can envisage huge progress in Shabarikumbh.

Life in India is dotted with religious celebrations and fairs, which are celebrated almost once in every three days in different corners of India. It has been observed by experience that the middle and higher middle classes of the society have power and prosperity and hence they can arrange such functions according to their desire. However, the forest people are exceptions as they are the last to be noticed. But, today, they have been given first priority with respect to their feelings to pray to Mother Shabari. The Hindu society has a tradition of praying to Lord Rama; but for the forest people true fulfilment lies in remembering Mother Shabari who waited all her life for Lord Rama. Mother Shabari's long wait can be compared to the

forest people's yearning for a brighter future, for Ramrajya (rule of Lord Rama). Today we can see the glory of India in Shabarikumbh. The beginning of Shabarikumbh may become a cause of India's bright future.

If I express the underlying sentiment of the Indian Constitution, I may be accused by many due to the perversion that has spread into our social fabric. The Constitution of India talks about social life too. It specifically says that religious conversions should not be carried out by force, fear or greed. If I say this, I would be called wicked and guilty. What type of mentality do we have? It is the aim of our State Government to respect the wishes of the Indian Constitution and we are working in that direction. Even if Mahatma Gandhi were to express this desire today, the hypocrites would undoubtedly kill him. Gandhiji was opposed to the religious conversion as he felt that such conversions are not fair for any civilized society. Where is the root of this problem? Some people do not like the fact that Shabari is associated to Lord Rama and the forest people are associated with Shabari, which creates concern in their minds about the kind of relationship between Lord Rama and the forest people. No amount of effort by such perverted minds can separate the forest people of India from Lord Rama, who is their life. They will be separated from Lord Rama only when they part from life itself. It is the misfortune of our country that the English speaking descendants of Lord McKaulay are asking whether this is the rebirth of Shabari. These fools need to be told that their ancestors knew all about Shabari. God knows what has happened to these people? If we ourselves will not be proud of India's cultural heritage and its prestigious history then who will be? If the progeny of this nation will not take pride in its history, then will our neighbours do so? There should be some limit to the lies spread in our society. The history of the world has documented that Hindu society is the most tolerant. It is the only one to proclaim that God is one and there can be different paths for reaching Him. A person can choose his own path, tread righteously on it and be close to God. Others have always maintained that their own path is the only one that will

lead to God. I once had an opportunity to attend the UN Summit, where Sri Sri Ravishankar was also present. In the presence of Kofi Annan, and after a long discussion, a proposal was passed which mentioned that all cults in the world are equal and worthy of respect. You will be surprised to know that three days later, I received a 35-page long statement from the Christian head saying that we don't agree with this concept of equality as we are higher than other cults. Those who believe themselves to be higher than others are inviting destruction whereas those who believe in equality can never create trouble. Having love and respect for all is our tradition which we have got from our *Rishis*, saints and teachers, and it is an inherent part of our cultural heritage. I can love the entire world only if I love my own heritage. I can think about the welfare of the entire mankind, only when I start loving all people. That is why I say that we should bow down to Mother Shabari and together wait for Ramrajya, enjoying the process in the same manner as Mother Shabari enjoyed her lifelong wait for Lord Rama.

There will be immense change in the financial situation here. Already, I can see a huge difference today compared to my previous visit. This district gets sufficient rainfall in monsoons but there is always a great scarcity of water after the monsoon gets over. An improvement can be brought by the use of check-dams and other instruments of water conservation. You will be happy to know that even today some of the largest cities of India such as Kolkata, Mumbai, Chennai, and Delhi do not have 24-hour electricity. But every village of Dang district gets 24-hour, three-phase electricity as Dang was the first district to be covered under the *Jyoti Gram Scheme*.

Gujarat is the only state that has a concrete plan called "Gujarat Pattern" for the progress of backward classes. The Gujarat Government provides money to the deprived. The forest people themselves decide the developmental work that they wish to be carried out – be it a well in the village, a proper road or additional rooms for the village school. The State Government has paid out around ₹ 600-700 crores directly in the hands of the forest people and has experienced exemplary honesty. The

forest people have spent each and every penny for the development of their region, leading to more than fifty thousand projects materializing. Their own initiative and diligence has given shape to more than fifty thousand projects with the help of approximately 800 crores rupees. I am proud to say that if anyone wants to see the principle of trusteeship propounded by Mahatma Gandhi in action, they should visit the forest people and tribals of Gujarat. They have used each and every penny which they had been given for developmental tasks. We are ready to support such a pure community in their progress. For the first time, the Gujarat Government has conceptualized a plan which will open up new vistas of development for the forest people through the medium of infrastructure development.

It is our intention to serve the forest people in order to fulfil the debt towards Mother Shabari for her devotion to Lord Rama. Our government has taken a vow to work for great-grandsons of Mother Shabari who waited for Lord Rama's arrival and we are fully committed to it.



7

In the Service of the Forest Regions

*(Inauguration of the Panchayat at Dahod district,
Dhanpura Taluka. June 6, 2003)*

The Dahod district of Gujarat state is primarily inhabited by tribals belonging to the Bakshi Panch. This area is not unknown to me as I have spent my youth touring through it by bus, scooter and motor-bike. Hence, I know about the problems of this area. It is our endeavour to bring happiness to the people in the lowest strata of the society. With this aim in mind, the State Government has created a stream of progress plans. The discussions for the development of tribals and the plans for their upliftment have been ongoing for decades. Even in the past huge amounts of money have been spent on such development projects for tribals. I am not a fool to claim that my predecessors have not made plans for development or spent money for the tribals. However, the difference is the priority of plans.

In the past, assistance was available for the development of tribals from the government and grand programmes were held for the same. The government would give a loan for buying five hens, which would help a tribal to sell eggs and earn his livelihood. Rosy pictures of a happy life were shown to the tribals and many tempting words were spoken. However, most of the time, a tribal would take home five hens and end up killing two the same evening to feed his guests and still spend his life repaying the loan. I feel that this was a misuse of money. Why should the tribals spend their lives raising hens and cooking them? If we are determined to provide financial assistance to

them, why not for a tractor or for higher education? Our government has sent the children of tribals to Canada for higher education, spending upto rupees five lakhs. Individually, it might be a small step, but it symbolizes the change of direction. Representatives of other states such as Rajasthan and Maharashtra visit Gujarat to study our style of working for tribal development known as the "Gujarat Pattern". This is only because Gujarat provides an ideal example of the service and development of tribal areas.

The Power of Management

In the past, the financial assistance to villages was determined in Gandhinagar. A village might require a well and the government would sanction a tank. What use is a tank without a well? Even if a village has a road, the government would plan another road. There is no guarantee that the plans made in air-conditioned rooms in Gandhinagar would benefit the common people of the state. That is why under the Gujarat Pattern, we have formed committees in tribal areas, entrusted money in their hands and asked them to decide the area of development in their villages. This government has given a total of ₹ 1,54,508 crores to the tribal people in backward areas in a short span of time, and completed more than 61666 projects. I believe that no other state has achieved such a big target for tribal development in the past. We have succeeded because we placed trust in them, worked according to their needs and gave priority to their welfare. This has led to an organized and powerful management of financial assistance to the tribals.

Partnering with People in Villages

The Gram Sabha is a right step in the direction of development. During a Gram Sabha, a villager can question a government officer about pending proposals in the presence of 50-100 people who attend such Gram Sabhas regularly and keep track of the work being done in their village. This system has given people the courage to discuss problems related to the sanitation, cleanliness, road, or even school. The Gram Sabha

has emerged as an effective tool to overcome the hurdles that invariably crop up while resolving public issues. Villagers have become more aware about their own development because of the Gram Sabha, which has created an environment of partnership between the villagers, *talatis*, government officers, Sarpanch and even the village teacher, for bringing about a paradigm shift in the situation of the village.

The Gram Sabha has been successful in carrying out projects of tribal development due to collective efforts. Most of the problems are solved on the spot. Due to this arrangement, even the people belonging to the lowest strata have now found the confidence to openly present their problems.

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8

The Bravery of the Forest People

*(Unveiling of Adivasi Shahid Smarak, Pal Chitraya,
Vijaynagar District, Sabarkantha. June 22, 2003)*

The *Jallianwala Bagh* and *Pal Chitariya* massacres happened in 1919 at a time when Mahatma Gandhi was not yet in the limelight. More than a thousand freedom fighters, who had assembled for a peaceful discussion, were shot down mercilessly by General Dyer. This was a major embarrassment for the British and it greatly weakened their standing. However, an even crueller massacre took place three years later in 1922 when 1200 forest-dwellers were killed. The British Raj attempted to conceal news about this genocide and keep it away from the pages of history. However, some people who have recently arrived in this country and who believe that only their family should be given the credit for the freedom of the nation and that only they have made sacrifices, were not ready to accept this event as true till recently.

During the freedom struggle, the terrible punishment of *kala pani* (black waters) was inflicted at the island of Andaman Nicobar. The brave freedom fighters, some of them even barristers, were meted out harsh treatment at the Cellular Prison. They were locked up in tiny cells that could not even hold a single cot for twenty years. Even entering that prison today can bring tears to a person's eyes. However, our rulers chose to ignore the pain suffered by our freedom fighters in Andaman Nicobar. It was never declared as a national monument in memory of the freedom fighters who had sacrificed their lives.

Andaman Nicobar was first accepted as a national monument during the rule of the Janata Party, when Shri Lal Krishna Advani was the Minister of Information, Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee was the Foreign Minister and Shri Morarji Desai was the Prime Minister. This was after twenty-five years of freedom. Veer Savarkar was a barrister, who was among the first to begin the armed revolution against the British Government, and who sacrificed his entire life for the freedom struggle. He and his brother spent their entire youth in the prison of Andaman Nicobar. His third brother Narayan languished in the Sabarmati Prison, while the women of his family struggled to make ends meet. The picture of such a brave hero should have been displayed in the Parliament, but those who have monopolized the freedom struggle rejected this proposal as they believe that they alone deserve credit for the country's Independence. The Gujarat Government made a firm declaration to pay a respectful tribute to this legendary hero who has been so far neglected, by putting up his picture in the State Legislative Assembly. Unfortunately, even at that time, the monopolists of the freedom movement boycotted the program.

This is the reason for our miserable condition after independence. So many of our tribal ancestors have sacrificed their lives for the motherland. However, this sacrifice has never been acknowledged by our previous rulers who have monopolized the independence struggle. They have adopted a policy of keeping these sacrifices under wraps for the last fifty years. But we have now decided that we shall keep alive the monument of their heroic deeds – all of us need to come together and work to make this a reality.

Let me talk about the greatness of the people living in this area. Maharana Pratap spent some time in Vijaynagar, living in disguise. Once when he was resting, a gipsy couple came up to him, asking for water. During the ensuing conversation, Maharana Pratap casually asked them about their children. They replied that they had vowed to remain childless till their king Maharana Pratap recovered his kingdom Mewar from the Mughals, which came as a huge surprise to the disguised king.

This reflects the glory of Vijaynagar. Even during the freedom struggle, the people of this region had put in massive efforts. By creating a monument in memory of the brave martyrs of Pal Chitariya village, we have tried to express our gratitude for their heroic acts. This monument should develop into a place that radiates energy for the entire nation.



9

A Harmonious Village: A Journey towards Belonging and Prosperity

[Meeting of Sarpanches at Kamrej (Dec. 30, 2006), South Gujarat; Rajkot, Saurashtra (Dec. 29, 2006) and Mehsana, North Gujarat (Dec. 30, 2006)]

The soil of the nation, the water of the nation, the air of the nation,
Let them be good, O God! Let them be good.
The houses of the nation and its valleys, the forests of the nation and its roads,
Let them be simple, O God! Let them be simple.
The body of the nation and its soul, the brothers of the nation and its sisters,
Let them be pure, O God! Let them be pure.

—**Rabindranath Tagore**

In the last five years, thousands of villages in Gujarat have benefited from the Panchayati System that has taken them closer to the concept of the perfect harmonious village. The vision of an ideal society as given by the great poet Rabindranath Tagore is very similar to that of Shri Vinoba Bhave, outlined during his *padyatra* in the company of Dr. Dwarkadas. I feel that this shared vision is very important in creating a feeling of consensus in villages.

Vinobaji once said that it is imperative to keep the poison of elections away from the villages and ensure that an environment of mutual understanding in villages.

Shri Jayprakash Narayan had envisioned a Gram Panchayat which would have public activeness as its base. The concept of “Samras Gram Yojna,” was an attempt to fulfil the dream of harmonious villages as seen by these legends. During my experience of public life, I have seen that villages are not majorly affected by Parliament or Legislative Assembly elections, but the Panchayat elections can wreak havoc in villages, even leading to situations where married girls are forced to leave their homes and return to their parents.

Political parties may have their own agendas for competing at the state or national level elections. They may project their own goals and values during these elections, which is quite acceptable. However, our panchayats, which are the mainstay of our ancient culture, should be kept away from political biases. It is obvious that we need local partnership in order to achieve progress for our villages and provide them with modern infrastructure, but this can be done by keeping villages away from politics. The Rikhavdas Shah Committee has also supported the view that political parties should be kept away from panchayat elections and indicated that practical measures for doing this should be conceived. Some people consider the *Samras Gram Yojna*, to be against democracy; however if seen neutrally and in a practical manner, this would turn out to be an inspiring and enthusiastic model.

Dialogue Instead of Debate

The basis of democracy is decision making based on majority. However, our concept of a harmonious village expects decisions based on consensus arrived at after in-depth deliberation. The idea of consensus is definitely more desirable than that of majority because decisions so taken carry the strength of the entire group. The *Samras Gram* entails villagers choosing their representatives based on consensus. Many people inspire others by choosing to sacrifice their current achievement for the welfare of the village. The entire process emphasizes dialogue, not by debate.

I would like to congratulate those villages which have opted for consensus-based elections for sarpanch. I respect those who

have been selected as sarpanch with the idea of promoting harmony in their villages, as well as the members of the panchayat. However, those who have sacrificed their rights and stayed away from participating in the elections also deserve congratulations. My idea of a Samras Gram was based on the desire to see prosperity in the villages of Gujarat. There are some who object to this. They believe that the concept of Samras Gram does not match with democracy; it violates our Constitution; Modi has killed democracy because he does not allow elections to take place. I have never said that elections should not be allowed – I have said that the entire village should together take the decision of election. Democracy considers all proportions to be equal – whether it is a 60:40 ratio, 75:25, 80:20 or 90:10. If even a ratio of 99:1 is considered as democratic, how can a ratio of 100:0 not be democratic? When everyone agrees to one decision, it is not the murder of democracy but indicates its health. If elections are won without unnecessary expenditure and conflicts, what is the harm? If a sarpanch can be elected by all the villagers through consensus, how does it mean the end of democracy? Our friends in the Congress have declared that they will not allow a single village to function in this harmonious manner. I would like to ask them whether they know that the President of India, Dr. Abdul Kalam, has also been elected in this harmonious manner. All the political parties mutually decided not to have presidential elections and it worked. If the President of the country can be selected without election then what is the problem if villages also do so? We proudly proclaim our unity and progressiveness by saying that our President is selected, not elected; but if villagers select their Sarpanch, it becomes an issue. It is very important to save Gujarat from such people who have a negative mentality. In spite of such negative approach, 28% of villages in Gujarat have panchayat selected through consensus – this is not a small feat. It reiterates my strong belief that people are always interested in progress.

Taking Progress to the Villages

Gujarat has passed the test of real democracy as even the common man is interested in development of Gujarat. I do not

believe in lop-sided development of a handful of places in Gujarat. I want development to reach each village and each person in Gujarat. Today, Vibrant Gujarat is known all over the world, I want each village of Gujarat to be vibrant. I have absolute faith in the dedicated efforts of the village-people under the leadership of their sarpanches. It pains me to see the conditions of some of our villages. I remember that when I announced the Jyoti Gram Yojna, Shri Amarsingh Chaudhry, Leader of Opposition in the Assembly came to see me in private. He advised me not to go ahead with the Yojna as he felt that it is simply not possible to supply 24-hour electricity to villages. He told me that as I was inexperienced in governance, I was being misguided, but he was giving friendly counsel not to go ahead with this tough task. I joked that precisely because the task is tough, the people have chosen me to carry it out and not you! It was really a tough task, but I was genuinely concerned for the villages – if cities can get 24-hour electricity, then why not villages? Today, no place in India gets 24-hour electricity – whether it is Chennai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Kolkata or Delhi. Only Gujarat supplies 24-hour three-phase electricity to every village.

This is a huge revolution that has taken place in Gujarat, mainly due to the Jyoti Gram Scheme, which has been highly appreciated. Villages in Gujarat have started getting 24-hour electricity, and the shocks have been felt in Delhi. The “Sultans” of Delhi were shocked by our achievement and conspired to “teach a lesson” to “that Modi”. You will be stunned to know that the Delhi Government has stealthily snatched away 200 MV of our electricity. Why punish Gujarat by taking away electricity worth ₹ 600 crores? If they have a problem with Narendra Modi, they should attack him and not the farmers of Gujarat. I warn those who are sitting in Delhi – you are inviting trouble for yourself if you do not stop harassing the farmers of my state.

The Village as a Place of Pilgrimage

Our single-minded focus is on the development of Gujarat. The Gujarat Government has introduced several schemes

towards this end. We have conceptualized a model where every village will have its own structure of management and its own small set of ministers. We will recruit five *Gram-Mitras* who will basically act as the assistants to the *Sarpanch* and *Talati* of the village. They will work in different areas such as farming, healthcare, social welfare and will enable the completion of the various government schemes. More than seventy thousand jobs will be created under this model, which will enable each village to solve its problems quickly.

The *Tirth Gram Yojna*, that we have introduced provides for a reward of rupees one lakh for a village that has not witnessed disputes or court cases in the last five years and declares such a village as a Tirth Gram (place of pilgrimage). However, some suggestions were to provide incentives before five years, as it is a very long period. Hence, we came up with the Pavan Gram (pure village) scheme. A village that sees three peaceful years will be declared a Pavan Gam and be rewarded with ₹ 50,000 for its development. After spending two more peaceful years, it will go on to become a Tirth Gram. Also, in this age of information technology, when Gandhinagar is using modern technology to the fullest, we have decided to arrange for computers and IT connectivity for each village. This will ensure that the Chief Minister of the state can engage in video-conferencing not only at the district and taluka levels, but also with each and every village of the state.

The Resolve of the Village Sarpanch

2007 was celebrated as the 'Nirmal Gujarat' (Clean Gujarat) year. These days, even people from villages have started travelling abroad. Even those who have never gone out of the country have seen foreign lands on the television. The first thing that strikes us when we visit foreign countries or see them on TV is that the cities and even villages there are spotlessly clean. And, on the other hand, our villages are full of piles of garbage and dung. Who can bring a change in this situation? It has to be us. If we resolve to do so, we can rid Gujarat of all its dirt in just one day. If the five crores denizens of Gujarat decide to keep it

clean, not even the dirtiest government can spoil it. To make a mark and compare ourselves with the world, we must emphasize on cleanliness first. We must encourage ourselves to hate all that is dirty and unclean. In this mammoth task, I need the help of the village sarpanches, district and taluka level leaders, officers, social and religious leaders and every citizen – man, woman, young, old. Only if everyone comes together in a collective effort, will Gujarat become “nirmal” and we can compare ourselves with the world.

It gives me great pain to say that even after 60 years of independence, and 50 years of the existence of Gujarat as a separate state, our mothers, sisters and daughters do not have proper toilets to relieve themselves. Ladies have to painfully wait till sunset to answer nature’s call. This is a disgraceful situation. Why can’t we reduce the mental stress of our womenfolk by providing proper toilets for them? We spend crores of rupees on building temples, but as Respected Shri Morari Bapu has said, “Toilets first, temples later.” Let us take an initiative to keep our villages clean and provide these basic sanitation facilities to our mothers, sisters and daughters. My government plans to give a unique gift to each village in 2007. We are determined to take up this task, which even the village Sarpanches have not been able to accomplish. I am ready to spend as many resources as required for the welfare of the villages.

The Village as a Unit of Governance

I have another mission. When I first became the Chief Minister, my detractors were quick to point out that I had no experience in governance. They wanted to know how a person who has never been a member of a municipal corporation, never been inside the Parliament and has directly become the Chief Minister, would work for the welfare of the state. I publicly said that not only have I never been part of any municipal corporation, I was never even made the monitor of my class as a student. I had never planned it, but I was given the responsibility of being the Chief Minister. Similarly, there must

be several Sarpanches who have been given this responsibility for the first time. I want to assure them and tell them not to be afraid – I am a living example of a first-timer in a key position.

We have come up with a radical plan to provide good governance to the villages. Gujarat is perhaps the first state in the country that plans to develop the village organization with the concept of *Gujarat Gram Sachivalay*. Bringing about a revolution in governance will be possible only if good governance is taught. So many times the best of plans are not implemented – not for lack of funds, but due to lack of direction. When I was newly appointed as the Chief Minister, I decided that it is pointless to think that we know everything about running the government and extremely important to gain knowledge about good governance in the correct manner.

All my ministers and officers, totalling around 250, including myself, went to IIM Ahmedabad to learn about governance. We sat on benches like school students for three days and learnt a lot about what was lacking in Gujarat and how we can provide solutions to the problems of the state. After this eye-opening experience, we have decided to become students for three days every year. We invite eminent faculty to teach us and learn a lot about development. Since we have benefited from such learning, we want to share this benefit with the entire state. For the next year, we have planned to provide training to the sarpanches and members of Gram Panchayats about planning and managing the development of their villages. More than one and a half lakh elected representatives will be included in this training programme. The State Government will provide for a special budget for this important task that will change the direction of our villages. I urge the sarpanches and panchayat members to take one step – we will take two. My wish is to provide the fruits of development even to the last person in society, and my effort is to achieve this with the cooperation of the Sarpanches and panchayat members.

Showcasing the Skills of the Villages

Many villages in our state have showcased their skills and resourcefulness. For example, *Bhujodi* has become world

renowned for its handicrafts. Why can't the sarpanch of every village dream about making his/her own village famous? The villagers of Dharmaj, near Anand have come up with a unique concept. Instead of quarrelling among themselves over pasture, they have started growing grass and have developed an organization for supplying fodder to cattle owners. The income from this has enabled them to build a huge hall which even a large city would envy. Navalgadh in Surendranagar district has pioneered the Gobar Bank. Dung of around 1500 registered animals is collected and used to produce Gobar Gas, which supplies electricity for the village. Further plans include providing fertilizer to villagers in proportion of dung deposited by them and selling the excess fertilizer to generate income. The ladies of the Swaraj Group manage the Gobar Gas Plant and generate income for around 90 families. I request the sarpanch of every village to explore such options. Why can't every village have a Gobar Gas Plant or a centre for economic development? If villagers are determined, they can bring about an economic revolution and create history. This will happen if all the members of the Gram Panchayat truly understand their role as leaders and work for the development of their village and their state.

Lady Sarpanches Bring a New Ray of Hope

When a lady becomes the sarpanch of a village, some unusual problems are created. Let me relate a humorous incident when I was working in Haryana. At one of the meetings, a gentleman introduced himself as SP. I told him that this is a BJP meeting, not a government one, so he could not attend it. He countered that he had been attending all such meetings in the past. We kept on arguing, and would have argued even more, till he revealed that SP means 'Sarpanch Pati' (husband of the Sarpanch), not Superintendent of Police. I request all lady sarpanches to keep the responsibility of their position in their own hands, and not pass it on to their husbands.

I am reminded of a meeting with some 17 ladies from Umreth village about five years back. They informed me that

their village had collectively decided not to have any male member in the panchayat. I was pleased to see these ladies taking up the entire responsibility of the village. My conversation with them is still fresh in my mind as it was very inspiring for me. They told me that they wanted to free their village from poverty. In the past, I have seen panchayat members demanding grants and making applications to the government for building roads and schools, but the desire of these ladies to remove poverty from their entire village was a unique one. I instructed the district officer to support them for the next five years and in that time, they worked endlessly to give work to every poor person in the village. These elected ladies had thought of something that no-one else in India has seriously considered. We usually consider women to be weaker than men, but I feel that women are stronger. If I ask a man to go and talk to a group of ten women, he might hesitate; but if I ask a woman to give a message to ten men, she will go up to them at once without becoming nervous or conscious. It is important that women should have the desire to improve their village and stop wrong things from happening. I promise all ladies that if they undertake this task, the State Government will help them in all ways. I will personally ask the TDO and DDO to help them out in any task that they plan to carry out, even more than what they help the men, because women succeeding at this job will give a new ray of hope to everyone.

Farmers on the Path to Success

There is a village in Kutch by the name of Gorevadi, near the Pakistan border. The people of this village are always willing to work on construction sites, be it a five-star hotel or a palatial house. The village Linchakdi in South Gujarat exports cashewnuts and mangoes to the tune of ₹ 200 lakhs every year, creating financial independence for the natives. I request all the members of panchayats to create an environment where it is possible for the youth to find employment. Achievements such as these are possible if there is a vision and the willingness to work hard. Gujarat has carried out several projects for water

conservation. We can have another economic revolution if all villagers decide to build check-dams, sand-bag dams or small ponds in their fields to stop wastage of water. There was a time when Gujarat was earning ₹ 9,000 crores in the best of times. In 2007, Gujarat has earned ₹ 34,000 crores from agriculture. In states like Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra, farmers are committing suicide out of desperation, but farmers in Gujarat are progressing happily. Not unsurprisingly, the progress of the farmers in Gujarat has not gone down well with people in New Delhi. The toil and labour of our farmers goes in vain if they don't get urea on time, but nobody in Delhi is worried about this. If the government in Delhi has any problem with me, you can take action against me; don't harass my farmers. Power games will go on, but farmers should be kept out of dirty politics. Why is that when Gujarat is ready to pay for 2.75 lakh MT of urea, it gets only 1.98 lakh MT?

Let's Create a New History

The sole aim of my life is the development of Gujarat. I strongly believe that Sarpanches will play a crucial role in this mission of prosperity. People will definitely remember those who have worked for their welfare. Let us pledge to raise the banner of prominence. Undoubtedly, we will be able to create a new history.

Gujarat Gram Sachivalay

When I took charge of the state administration in October 2001, I declared the ambitious plan of Samras Gram. Seeing the widespread enthusiastic response received by the plan, our government decided to provide additional grants to every village as an incentive. Villages that have already embarked on this journey of harmony are divided into two sections based on their population – five thousands and above – and such incentives are provided.

In the first stage, villages where the Gram Panchayat was selected with mutual consensus without elections were given a grant of one lakh rupees if their population was upto five

thousand and one and a half lakh rupees if their population exceeded five thousand. Due to the encouraging response to this plan, the government decided to increase the grant amount by 25 per cent for such harmonious villages in the next election. To date, 3915 Harmonious Gram Panchayats have got a total of ₹ 2306.40 crores as development incentive. In the April 2007 elections for 1642 Gram Panchayats, 545 harmonious ones will get such incentive amounts. More than three thousand harmonious villages are currently working towards progress with the help of these incentives.

Samras Gaon

1. Until today, a total of 7,86,934 houses have been allotted.
2. By 2001, a grant of 6,884.94 lakh rupees was disbursed.
3. Until today, 8,044 Samras gram panchayats, 40 Mahila samras gram panchayats have come into being, and a total of 2,55,598 gram sabhas have been held.
4. Under the Swarna Jayanti Swarojgar Yojna, 44 crores rupees have been disbursed individually.
5. For self-employment of 3,100 people, an aid of 30 crores rupees and an allotment of 57 crores rupees have been released.
6. Under self-employment scheme, a total of 1,30,741 women students have been given self-employment.
7. An amount of ₹ 107 crores has been spent under the watershed scheme towards conservation of soil, storage of rainwater and recharge of water resources.
8. During the period 2001-02 to 2010-11, an amount of ₹ 2,36,515.83 lakh rupees have been spent under the Indira Avas Yojna.



10

O that I might have a House of My Own!

(On the occasion of announcing the ₹ 13000 crores Garib Samriddhi Yojna, Panchdev Mahadev Temple, Arbudanagar, Odhav, Ahmedabad. June 3, 2007)

Gujarat's journey of progress has been a rapid one. Whenever there is rapid industrialization we see massive migration of people from villages to cities. City dwellers are not only blessed with money, but also with immense luxuries. However, without the support of the menial workers, even their life tends to become uncomfortable. If a servant goes on leave for four days, the housewife falls sick. If the driver is not available, the factory-owner decides not to go to work. If two workers manning important machines don't turn up, the work of the factory is stalled. All of us have experienced how our social life feels scattered without our *panwalla*, *pakodawalla* or *rikshawwalla*. All our wealth stands to naught if this class of worker is not available. If this is true, it is our social responsibility to make life easier for this class. We are not obliging them by thinking about their welfare; it is part of our duty. Even the person belonging to the lowest strata of society has a claim on us. Haphazard schemes will not lead to a revolution. The State Government has come up with an all-encompassing scheme called "Garib Samriddhi Yojna" (scheme for prosperity of the poor) with an outlay of ₹ 13000 crores, targeted for the welfare of this important stratum of society.

The Poor are Always Hardworking

A poor man can earn his daily bread by his hard work, but he is always worried about a shelter. His life does not change until and unless he has a roof above his head. Once he has a decent house, he will think about other amenities. Once he possesses a house, his entire financial planning will change. Instead of earning hand-to-mouth, he will think about his future, the health and education of his children and his own social standing. Until he has his own house, he will hesitate to invite his relatives to visit him, worried about what they will think about him if they see him living in a shanty. Just the acquisition of a house brings about massive changes in his life. We have pledged to fulfil the dreams of all those who wish to own a house. This dream is shared by the entire state. Under the Garib Samriddhi Yojna, we are determined to provide reasonably-sized houses with two rooms and a kitchen to the poor people. This will of course increase the outlay, but we want to give good quality houses that will satisfy the recipients. In the past eight months, we have been able to construct 4000 strong and sturdy houses in Karnavati using Canadian technology. Our target is to build one lakh houses within one year using this technology. I am fortunate to have a team behind me which has the capability to convert my dream into a reality. My 5.5 lakh colleagues are working hard on this project, and this enables us to march ahead with our heads held high.

In the sixty years since independence, only 75 thousand houses had been built. Our government is racing ahead with a target of one lakh houses across 161 *nagarपालikas* and seven *mahanagarपालikas*. This is one of my most ambitious dreams.

The First Right should go to the Poor

In addition to completing one lakh houses in one year, my other dream is to complete three lakh houses by 2010, the year of 'Swarnim Gujarat'. People often ask me how I plan to raise funds for this mammoth task. My answer is that the funds will come from the people of Gujarat – every *paisa* of the tax-payer's money will be used for the welfare of the state, especially the

poor people. I am here to guard the coffers of the state; I will not let this money be misused. It will only be spent on the welfare of the people. The probability of making the housing dream come true is made high because of this money.

Another mission that we have is to provide dignity to the poorest of the poor. Even after so many years of freedom we have not been able to provide the crucial necessity of toilets. I am determined that in the next five years, the poor will have their own houses with attached toilets. We are committed to protect the dignity and the health of the poor by providing them with toilets. My mantra is, "Toilets first, temples later." If a poor person has a toilet in his house, it will be as clean as a temple. I am also committed to building public toilets. Some may find this insistence on building toilets as strange, but I feel that the importance of clean, hygienic places for relieving oneself is underestimated. Our government has undertaken to build more than 5000 modern pay-and-use public toilets across 161 municipalities and seven municipal corporations.

This scheme is for the benefit of the common man. The President of the Himmatnagar Municipality belongs to the Valmiki community. This is the first municipality in India which is ISO: 9000 certified. This is a living example of how even a person from the lowest strata of society can make a mark.

The Hope of Every Youngster

We are also committed to developing infrastructure facilities including 24-hour electricity and water supply. Additionally, people should have proper transportation to commute from home to work, even if it is by bicycle. Infrastructure is developing at a rapid pace all over the world and we want to be a part of this development. God has given innate talent to everyone. A poor person may not get an opportunity to study in the best college, but he has the capacity to learn. He only needs the opportunity. We have taken the initiative of providing opportunities and fulfilling their dreams. This scheme, aptly called "Ummeed," will aim to fulfil the hopes and aspirations of every young boy and girl by providing them

with skills and competencies. Under “Ummeed” our plan is to train one lakh youngsters in different areas, providing them certificates after the completion of their training. Such training will enable them to get jobs in the numerous malls, sales counters, airports and other businesses that are cropping up as a result of the rapid development of the state. These training programmes which are typically two-three months in duration will solve their problem of lack of skills and competencies and give them the scope to obtain employment. “Ummeed,” aims to provide employment to one lakh poor boys and girls within one year. You can imagine the huge difference this would make to the economy of the state.

Concern for the Children of the Poor

While on the topic of the welfare of the poor, we are equally concerned about the problem of malnutrition of poor children in cities which leads to their improper physical development. Especially during the constant heavy rains in monsoons, when epidemics break out, the children of the poor are the first to fall ill. This is a heart-wrenching situation. Who will worry about the health of these children? We will. Under the, “Garib Samridhi Yojna”, we have planned a network of Aanganwadis (child-care centres) for poor children. At these centres, children will be well taken care of so that they grow up healthy, with a strong foundation of good health. We have a tradition of offering *prasad* to God. A rich man will spend thousands of rupees to offer *rajbhog* (rich food) in hopes of pleasing God. A poor man might only be able to offer some peanuts or a flower, but everyone wishes to offer something to God. However, I believe that every child in the Aanganwadi is a *Bal-kanaiya*, a manifestation of God. So, instead of *rajbhog*, we have planned to offer *balbhog*. Under this plan, children at Aanganwadis will be given nutritious chocolates and biscuits so that their bodies are well-equipped to fight diseases and be healthy. When a child falls down a tube-well, there is media frenzy and people all over the country pray for his safety in front of their TV sets. If the child is saved, the entire nation heaves a collective sigh of

relief, but if perchance he perishes, no eye is free of tears. So many poor mothers die in childbirth, which goes unnoticed. Even newly-born infants do not survive for lack of proper medical facilities. This is a pitiable situation which gives me great grief. The Gujarati word for delivery is 'suvavad', which literally translates into 'good news'. How ironic then, that this good news situation turns into bad news of the death of mother and child. I am determined to save the lives of mothers in childbirth and avoid tragic deaths at young age. We have floated a scheme called, "Chiranjivi Yojna," under which women who live below the poverty line will be provided money for transporting them to the hospital for routine check-ups and the actual delivery. Also, since a woman cannot work during this time, she will be given ₹ 200 per day as maintenance. Additionally, the entire financial burden of hospitalization and treatment would be borne by the government. For the first time, a government has taken steps to save the lives of new-born babies and their mothers. I want to see prosperity for the poor by 2010 through the "Garib, Samriddhi Yojna," which will spend ₹ 13000 crores for the welfare of poor. In 2010, when Gujarat celebrates its golden jubilee, I wish to see happiness in the home of each poor person too.

Government to the Aid of the Suffering

It is only rarely that God gives the chance to serve the underprivileged. The Government of Gujarat has been given this opportunity and has taken it up with whim and vigour. I have a burning desire to make the poor happy. This work should not get stalled for lack of funds. If we are able to work for the welfare of even two-three poor persons every day, it will allow us to sleep peacefully at night. I invite everyone to be a part of this process of transformation. Those who are working in public life should be all the more committed to serving the poor. Let us take up this opportunity to serve and join hands with the, "Garib Samriddhi Yojna". Let us create new landmarks in the landscape of our state.

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What a Brother Desires from His Sister

(*Sadhana*, August 4, 1990)

Rakshabandhan.....Stalls with rows of *rakhis* symbolizing love for a brother are seen everywhere. Soon the stalls will be empty and the *rakhis* will adorn the wrists of brothers.

Every sister will become complete today, but how many men will be complete brothers today?

A woman's tensions and feelings of insecurity are temporarily alleviated on *Rakshabandhan*, but how long will this consolation last?

How strange is destiny – the same newspapers that carry pages of brotherly love on *Rakshabandhan* are also full of gory stories of death and destruction in the face of intolerance and lack of brotherhood.

Not a single day goes by when there are no news of unnatural deaths of women.

It is universally accepted that the worth of a nation's value system is seen in the level of respect accorded to its womenfolk. If this is true, how would we be known to the world considering the way we treat our women? We, who used to say, "Nari tu Narayani" (Woman, you are God), who used to visualize God himself as Ardh Narishwar and who used to proclaim that God lives where women are respected, where are we today?

Where unborn fetuses are brutally destroyed and where society takes pride in abortions are not the hideous stories of an imaginary world – they are the realities faced by so-called independent women in the modern twentieth century.

There is no need of a divine light to understand this truth. Does the heart of brothers and sisters not bleed on beholding this state of affairs? Are we already accustomed to the short-lived brotherly feelings? Are we habituated to this situation or are we ready to sacrifice ourselves in order to challenge it?

In this thoughtless world that is swinging between transformation, revolution and perestroika, are we determined to take it to the threshold of the twenty-first century with a burning desire of rejuvenating our world and making it healthy and carefree once again?

Rakshabandhan is not a festival for entreaty, nor for expression of personal emotions or simply carrying out rituals of reciprocation. It is a festival of quiet determination, of innocent and unselfish love that flows like a sparkling brook.

It is a time when every woman at the threshold of the twenty-first century should be able to recreate the immortal love of Mother Kunti in her *rakhi*, when every woman's *rakhi* should carry the strength of Indrani's *rakhi* which will awaken Indra like greatness in the heart of every man and protect society from its enemies. One string of Karnavati's *rakhi* had the power to transform the aggressor Humayun into a protector; why then is today's Indian woman so weak?

When reality is not actually far from her, has the Indian woman unknowingly become entrapped in the shallow feminist movements of the West and become reduced to an ordinary woman who merely gives birth to a man?

Is the present situation not challenging for the mother within every woman? Why is it that a man who is born from a woman's womb fails to become an ideal brother, son, husband or even an ideal human being who can conduct his life according to the expectations of civilized society?

It is not possible to bring about a change by merely criticizing external forces. Today, on the occasion of *Rakshabandhan*, it is the need of the hour to free ourselves of the tempest of Western culture, to rid ourselves of its brazen wantonness and to relive and repeat our own glorious past. It is imperative for every woman to reawaken the dormant

motherhood in her heart with a collective determination that will radically transform men and convert them into true human beings.

Therefore, mothers and sisters, this is an invocation to the motherhood that resides within you. It is a request and a challenge from a brother for the welfare of the entire humankind. Please accept this challenge and carry out this pious task. Please know your own strengths. As the scriptures have said:

Vidyā Samastāstava Dēvi Bhēdā: Striya: Samastā: Sakala Jagatsu:.
Tvayaikayā Pūritamambamētat Kā Tē Stuti: Stavyaparā Parōkita:..

(All women are different manifestations of the Goddess. Yes, all of you have the same strength).

Sister, today is not the time to get carried away by the influences of Western culture and become reactionary; rather, it is a time for self-introspection. It is a time for comparing our past with our present and predicting our future. The total transformation of mankind is dependent on you and you alone. Unfortunately, you have a resigned acceptance of yourself as weak. Recall the call of women in ancient times:

Yō Mē Jayati Saṅgrāmē Yō Mē Darpa Vyapōhati.
Yō Mē Atibalō Lōkē Sa Mē Bhartā Bhaviṣyati..

(Only the one who wins against me in war, who eliminates my vanity and who is stronger than me in the entire world, will be worthy of being my husband.)

Why do you forget Mother Madalsa whose lullabies injected a new life?

Śuddhōsi Rē Tāta Na Tēsti Nāma Kṛtaṃ Hi Tē
Kalpanayādhunaiva.
Pañcātmakaṃ Dēhamidaṃ Nē Tēsti Naivāsya Tvaṃ Rōdiṣi Kasya
Hētō:..

(O! Son! Why are you crying! You are the purest. You have no name. This name is fake. Neither this body belongs to you which has been made by five worldly elements nor you belong to this body.)

Even today, the stories of Mother Vidula are inspirations in themselves.

Muhurt jwalitam shreyah n cha dhumachitam chiram.

(One opportunity to ignite like a flame is better than a lifetime of throwing smoke).

Before you get influenced by the stories of women's liberation in Western countries, take a moment to hear about our own ancient times.

A description of Surya Savitri in the Rigveda goes like this:

The illuminating morning sun welcomes her. She carries a Ved Mantra in her hand and her eyes sparkle with the adornment of knowledge. The most learned scholars are her priests. The sun and its sunshine share a bed of freedom.

This was the perfect interpretation of equal freedom for men and women that had been conceptualized in India, to a level where no modern-day laws have been able to reach.

In such a context, can you not take up the mantle of responsibility to improve our current social situation? On the occasion of *Rakshabandhan*, I would like to remind you that the *Bhagvad Gita* talks about the fearlessness of women (*abhayam*). It is the need of the time that the Indian woman adopts this fearlessness as the true teaching of the *Gita*. We have always respected woman for her innate power, in her various forms, be it Goddess Durga, Sati Sita or Draupadi. It is this power that has supported society right from Vedic times to the era of Vivekananda, to our independence struggle. I am sure you are aware of the self-abandonment of the wife of Panini, the creator of grammar. I am sure you recall the sacrifice of Urmila, who bore the pain of separation from her husband Lakshman. You belong to the same tradition of power, where Vakpushta's prayers resulted in a rain of food and saved the people and king of Kashmir from certain death.

If you will but listen, you can hear the tenor of the sword of Ranibai, Queen of King Dahir of Sindh, who defended her land from Muslim attacks with a small army of women. Recollect the struggles of Rani Lakshmibai, Queen of Jhansi or Queen Durgavati of Gadhmandala, and you will realize that each of these women are forms of yourself. Every woman is a mother, who has within her the capability of Mata Jijabai, who inspired

Shivaji and the moral strength of the mothers of great martyrs such as the Chapekar brothers, Ramprasad Bismil and Bhagat Singh. What is needed is only to invoke this feeling of motherhood within you. The greatness of this land has given birth not only to bright Indian women like Pratilata Vaddar, Durgabhabhi and Sushiladidi, who worked shoulder-to-shoulder with men for the independence movement; but also women such as Sister Nivedita, Mrs. Annie Besant and Shri Maa of Pondicherry, who were born abroad, but who made India their own. My sister, you are a progeny of the same land, you can also work like Sister Nivedita. Do not hesitate, whether you are educated or not, you can contribute. Recall with pride the sacrifice of the uneducated tribal woman Kalibai, who gave up her life to save two patriot teachers in the forests of Dungarpur. This was the inspiration to willingly sacrifice oneself in the struggle for independence of the country.

The tortured screams of the atrocities perpetrated during Partition still ring in our ears, but we are reminded of Ghaulagujari, who saved many women from the cruelty of the Muslims. The sacrifice of the Chopra siblings to save their honour is still fresh in our memory. The sacrifice of Niraja, an air hostess with Panam Airways, who battled terrorists to save lives of Indians on September 5, 1986, was supreme. Recently, on April 2 at Palej, near Bharuch, a Gujarati woman from Mumbai, Savitri, fought attackers during the, 'Save Kashmir' rally and showed the power of women.

The power of women has been manifested in so many forms, at so many occasions. Why then, are you weak today? Wake up, before it is too late. Wake up to improve the structure of our society. Awaken your inner motherhood which will gift not men, but the best human beings to society. Pile up mountains of your love, from which streams of motherly emotions can flow constantly. Cast your weakness into the fire, and determine to bravely destroy the evil powers. Before we enter the twenty-first century, you have to create a world where women are respected. Only you can carry out this pious task to bring a new life, and only then will *Rakshabandhan* be celebrated as a festival of true pious love.

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12

Mother, Let Me Enter This World

(Matruvandana Yatra, Stop Girl Child Abortions, Save the Girl Child. Mandvi Road, Rajkot Taluka, December 12, 2006)

Sometimes the race towards progress can blind man to the dangers of the future. We can save ourselves from these dangers only if we are aware of them. In the twenty-first century known as the century of knowledge, the educational and financial situation has improved in Gujarat, but another misery plagues us.

You will be shocked to know that against a thousand baby boys, only 840 baby girls are born in Gujarat, which means 160 girls fewer. If this scenario continues, society will be scattered. For every thousand people, there will be 150 who will remain unmarried. How can the cycle of society remain healthy in the face of such imbalance? We have accepted man and woman as the two wheels of the family and have advocated equal partnership of both in our society for centuries. The sin of destroying unborn fetuses is not limited only to Gujarat, but has spread to each corner of India. I do not know how much the other states are worried about this problem. However, as far as Gujarat is concerned, I am disturbed by this situation.

The situation is much better among the tribals from Umargam to Ambaji, who are not educated and lack worldly knowledge. They believe in equal status for sons and daughters. Our primitive brothers living in forests do not fall prey to this sin, but we, who are educated, are ready to kill daughters in the

mother's womb itself. There cannot be a worse situation for any society.

There should not be Any Abortions

I want Gujarat to be at a stage where there are no abortions, and even if there is an abortion in any family, there should be a feeling of repentance for it. Female infanticide was rampant in the 18th century, but we are now in the 21st century. Are we progressing or regressing? We are behaving worse than in the 18th century. What is done in the 21st century is even crueller than what used to happen in the 18th century. In those days, family members themselves would drown infant daughters in a vessel of milk. It was a terrible sin, but at least they allowed her to take birth and see the face of the mother who carried her for nine months. However, we in the 21st century are meaner. We kill daughters in the mother's womb itself and don't even feel guilty after such a sinful act. On the contrary, we feel relieved. How can our hearts not tremble after killing a daughter who is a gift from God?

Till how long will we differentiate between a son and a daughter? Till how long will we perpetrate injustices upon daughters? Is it not our responsibility to empathize with our mothers and sisters?

Sons and Daughters are Equal

Women are equally guilty in this shameful act. Nothing can be more painful than this. Some may argue that women are pressurized by her husband and in-laws into this. I refuse to accept that any woman would be ready to kill her own child. Even if a woman comes to know that her unborn child is physically deformed, she would accept it as part of her destiny and still have it. This is the basic nature and values of an Indian mother. I hereby proclaim to all the women of Gujarat – if your husband or in-laws are forcing you to abort your unborn daughter, just send me a postcard. I will mobilize the entire government machinery to save the life of one unborn daughter.

Doctors are equally responsible for this sinful act. They do not hesitate carrying out such mean acts to satisfy their greed. I warn such murderers to stop this business. There should be no abortions in this state. Sons and daughters are equal for us.

A daughter helps with household chores and takes care of her younger siblings. If her mother is not around, she cooks and serves guests. She is always there to help, even more than a son. People argue that daughters will get married and leave the family and only a son will take care of his parents. This is a baseless argument. There are innumerable examples of families where parents having four sons have to languish in old-age homes. And there also equal number of cases of daughters who have sacrificed their own happiness for their parents' sake. Why, then, should there be a difference between a son and a daughter? Girls are excelling in every field. Even the results of tenth and twelfth standard board exams show that girls are leading.

The Foundation of Progress

Girls in Gujarat have won equal number of medals in sports as the boys. Daughters participate in every field of life. If India wants to progress in the world, it will not be able to do so by ignoring 50 per cent of the population. It is inevitable to merge the strength of our mothers and sisters in the progress of the nation. Girls hold the power in every field of society and they will determine our future. Daughters will be the foundation of our progress. Any society that discriminates between sons and daughters will never be considered as a civilized one.

European countries have faced the problem of an imbalanced society. A huge social imbalance occurred in European countries after World War II. The male population dropped so drastically after the two world wars that women became easily available. This was a living example of moral deterioration in an imbalanced society. These days, there is problem of a fatherless society. There are many families without a father, as couples marry and divorce in quick succession. In the absence of a father, the mother has to single-handedly raise the children. This issue is at the centre of attention in American

Social Life. It is the subject of many books and studies in America at present.

A well-arranged social life is a gift from God. Whenever this arrangement is disturbed, society loses all its power. That is why it is important to create social awareness against destroying the unborn girl child. There should be a loud and clear social objection against such abortions and everybody should participate in the movement to save girls.

Imbalances in society can lead to moral deterioration. Unjha district, which has one of the lowest female birth ratios, now faces the problem of finding brides for its sons. People have to go to tribal areas to find brides, which has awakened them to the gravity of the situation. If nothing is done, this situation will be replicated everywhere.

Let Us Resolve

If we are true in our heart and devoted to society, God himself inspires us. I am able to carry out good work only through the blessings of the Almighty. I have begun this difficult mission to give mothers and sisters their due rights, to protect them, to give them a chance to develop and use their powers for the welfare of the nation. I want to go to each village of the state with this message. I invite all social organizations and the media to help out in this pious mission of creating an environment of unacceptance for abortions of the female foetus. I request political parties to set aside political differences and unitedly work for society. I enlist the support of mothers in order to remove this blemish from the society. No mother should allow abortion of her unborn child. I urge mothers to fight against the pressures of their families. I am always with them. I want to create a situation where no woman will be helpless. Removing this imbalance will take some time. The sins of the past many years have piled up, I need everybody's help to remove this blot.

Let us decide and step ahead to serve society with determination. At last I read out a letter from a baby girl who is yet unborn, but has learnt of her mother's intention to abort her:

*Mother, let me walk holding your finger.
 Mother, let me enter this world.
 Let the seed of your lineage grow.
 Let me nurture the green gorma basket as a young girl.
 Why do you wish to check the sex of your unborn child?
 Let your image be recreated.
 Mother, I am going to take birth and I will be like you, let your
 image be recreated.
 Let me light the lamp of childhood with dolls, chaniya-cholis,
 mehdi and all the trappings of a girl's childhood.
 Mother, I promise that if I am born through your womb, I will
 swing as the creeper of love at your door.
 Let the emotions emit their fragrance.
 My presence will build the bridge of emotion, so let the emotions
 emit their fragrance.
 I am not a burden mother, I am not a burden.
 I am your image only, I am your image.
 If you are a mother, even I have a semblance of motherhood within
 me.
 Let the bond of our feelings be developed, Mother, let me come to
 this world. Let me come to this place, Mother. Let me come to
 this world.*

This campaign to save the girl child should receive an enthusiastic response and the entire society should join in. Many doctors have taken the initiative and pledged not to indulge in such sinful acts. The movement to save daughters should be a public one. I request political parties to set aside their differences and work for the society. I need the support of mothers to remove this blemish. A daughter should be the pride of the family. Mark my words – a son may bring disrepute, but a daughter never will. Why such gross injustice to daughter who assure you of all that is good? This is not only the campaign of a government, it is the reflection of the entire society. Your pain and problems are ours. Our future will shine only with daughters. Daughters will illuminate the family, let us determine to let it be so.

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13

Woman Power Leads to the Survival of Social Life

*(On the occasion of Women's Day, Helipad,
Gandhinagar. March 8, 2003)*

Recently, the efforts towards women empowerment through self-help groups received a great impetus. There is no provision for spices in any government plan, but the women of Sabarkantha district in Gujarat thought that if they can prepare spices for their own families, then why not for the whole village? And if they can make spices for the village then why not for the entire district? We have been watching advertisements of *Lijjat papad* on television and reading about its availability in the menu cards of the best hotels in India. Do you know who makes these *Lijjat papads*? This unconventional business activity was started in the form of a cooperative union by women in South Gujarat, most of whom were tribals. The *papads* made by these women has reached all over the world. This shows that women are capable of building up great organizations, only if they have the determination for it. All of us know about the success story of Amul. The path-breaking success of Amul is attributable to the women in villages of Gujarat. These women breed cattle and supply milk to the cooperative dairy, as well as participate in the management of the dairy. The precision of the village women in Gujarat has led to Amul becoming renowned all over India. Whether women start up a large or small venture, definite and quality results are always seen if they work together with determination. This is the reason why we emphasize on village

women becoming part of self-help groups. This is an honest effort to change individual power into the strength of the society.

There is a myth that women are much more liberated in Western countries. Even many people in India who have no idea about our strengths and culture believe that women in Western countries are empowered and they are considered inferior in India. No woman has ever been elected President of the United States of America; women did not even have voting rights until recently. However, in India, women can be the president (Sarpanch) of her village, sub-district or district. Women can participate in and work for the village, sub-district or district panchayat to the extent of 33% of its total strength. India is the only country all over the world with 33 per cent reservation for women. Some people feel that this is recent development, but since time immemorial, the economic development of our country has depended on women power. Some may feel that women do not contribute to the financial progress of the nation as they do not occupy key positions in industry – this is a Western concept. Even today, the highest contribution to animal husbandry comes from women. Isn't this participation an important part of the nation's progress? Have you ever seen a man taking care of his cattle? Only very rare. On the other hand, women in the villages nurture their animals as lovingly as their own children. This enormous contribution of women has not happened only after independence – it has been going on for thousands of years. The entire system of agriculture in our country is based on partnership between men and women. On an average, women put in two-three hours of extra work in addition to their farming duties. They cook and clean for the family and then work as much as their husbands in the fields. Even today, women sustain the entire family.

We may not have fiery speeches of women's equality, nor may we have any place for feminism, but we have long acknowledged women power. Even our mythology has a concept of *Ardhnarishwar* (God, with a body half-man and half-woman). We do not accept either man or woman alone as complete. Only when both come together, do we take them to

be complete, and celebrate this dual form as God. Such a unique thought is possible in India only.

Maintaining the family structure is a great challenge all over the world. Surprisingly, during every presidential election in USA, candidates promise to revive the family tradition if they are elected. Our country has a strong family structure since thousands of years. The credit for this goes not to the men, but to women who have upheld the family tradition and bonded families together. In absence of the bonding provided by women, numerous families would have been ruined. The high level of tolerance, generosity, ability to withstand difficulties and the approach of keeping the entire family together exhibited by women in India, have saved the family tradition. This has ensured that our society is relatively free of evils and vices. Our children do not become wayward only because of the strong family system. This is a huge service rendered to society by women; it proves the power of motherhood, a power so great that the entire world should learn from it.

The contribution of women is not limited to agriculture. A potter's wife not only cooks for her family, but also helps her husband by mixing clay and lighting the kiln fire. A fisherman's wife may not go out to sea, but she takes up the responsibility of selling the fish caught by her husband.

Woman power is the underlying strength of our social life. We aim to convert this strength into the strength of our entire society in the days to come. It is desirable that women are empowered, but this empowerment should not be limited to the family unit alone; it is essential to harness their power for the benefit of society at large. For this to happen, it is imperative to involve women in decision-making. The State Government wished to start the self-help movement in every village. This movement has the potential to grow into a force that can nurture society. We appeal to the women who belong to self-help groups to attend every meeting of their village panchayat, note down the problems of their village and confront officers with them. They should not rest till they get the solution to their problems. We want a change from the grass root level. Awareness about

the power of women would awaken people to the possibility of using this great positive force. For instance, the women of Maghraj village presented their issues to me and did not hesitate in demanding a solution to their water problem. I believe that this is a big strength, which needs to be cultivated further. If society walks ahead to fulfil the dreams and hopes of women, the State Government will also be ready to take more steps for their progress.



14

Women Empowerment: Empowering the Family

(Conference on Women Empowerment, Town Hall, Sector 17, Gandhinagar. December 25, 2003)

Women empowerment is a topic of much debate these days. This leads us to the question – is woman not empowered? I believe that women have a lot of innate power but for years, she has been conditioned to think that she is weak. She has not realized her own strength only because she has been surrounded by the word “weak”. Hence, our effort is to remind her of her strength. Once this realization comes, most problems will be solved.

There is no injection available for empowering a woman which can be given to women to make them strong. Several studies show the strength of women, as reflected in their ability to withstand difficulties and support her family even after the death of her husband. On the other hand, a man who loses his wife loses the will to live and does not survive for long. However, this ability of women is not acknowledged by society. It is essential to appreciate this strength, which has enlightened innumerable families.

The autobiography of any great person will invariably attribute his/her success to his/her mother and teacher. The contribution of a mother is invaluable in the development of any person. Nobody can reach the heights of success without the inputs of mother and teacher.

The need of the hour is to convert the strength of a woman into the strength of the family and then use it for the

development of society? This sequence of development is very important, which is what we are trying for. Hence, my mantra is, "Empowered woman, empowered family". It is sad but true, that the rapid changes in the world around us are causing us to gradually move away from our ancient heritage. There is a danger to the very existence of the family system too. India has been able to withstand negative pressures on the family system only because of the strength of its women. Men will never be able to carry out this mammoth task. It is not that I am against men, but this is a reality that has to be accepted. The success of the family is rooted in the sacrificing nature of women. We now need to use this strength for the benefit of society.

Many would question the need for an Aanganwadi (preschool for children of lower income groups). It is needed because we need to think about the future. Education might improve one generation, but an Aanganwadi will improve an entire century. It is not only a place that looks after children for two hours a day. Research has proven that the initial three-four years of a child's life are crucial for the foundation of his development. All of us attribute our progress to our school, college or particular teacher, but this is only partially true. A large part of his future personality depends on the exposure received in the first few years. His likes, dislikes and even his future career prospects are determined in this age. The learning that he will receive in his entire life, even his IQ are a function of the inputs received in this age. What is IQ? Let me explain it with a simple example. If you hang a toy over an infant's cradle, he will try to reach out for it with his hands and legs. The sooner he can catch hold of it, the higher his IQ can be said to be. The Aanganwadi and its teacher enter the life of a child in this crucial phase. If she makes a mistake, its effects will be seen on the entire life of the child and the coming century. The commitment of the Aanganwadi teacher to her work is essential to provide these children with a healthy growing environment. It is her job to ensure that they get the opportunity to see a new world every day and enhance their grasping power. The approach of the Aanganwadi teacher can transform lives. However, the

actual scenario is drastically different – most Aanganwadi teachers are busy carrying out household chores like peeling vegetables even in the two hours of their duty, instead of devoting time to children. It is unfair that the life of children is spoiled just because the Aanganwadi teacher is more concerned about her household. This is a matter of great concern.

Teachers are delighted on being appointed, even if on probation, but their main goal is to complete the sweater they are knitting before Diwali. They have to understand that building the future of a child is more important than knitting a sweater. Making teachers aware of their responsibility is a great task. If an Aanganwadi teacher who has been working for fifteen years, has never received a box of sweets from her former student on getting good marks in the Board exams as a token of appreciation, something is missing. If a driver saves our lives during a road accident, we feel indebted to him for life. But we forget our Aanganwadi teacher with whom we have spent three to four years of our lives. I would like to tell Aanganwadi teachers that if even one child remembers you, consider yourself successful and if nobody remembers you, consider yourself useless. Teachers should aim for job satisfaction, not just a monthly salary. If you can boost up the life of even a single child, it will be a source of great satisfaction. You can proudly claim your association with your renowned former student. For example, when General Pervez Musharraf came to New Delhi, two old ladies claimed that they took care of him as a child. General Musharraf thanked both of them and gifted those *shawls* saying that he was too young to remember, but he would always be indebted for their contribution to his life and success.

The Aanganwadi is a temple of values and every child who enters it is a manifestation of God. We have to worship every child-God by making his life happy. I believe that if we put in dedicated efforts for this, we can empower entire families. This empowerment has to lead to the empowerment of the family; otherwise our age-old traditions would come to naught and leave an unimaginable blot on our culture. If this happens, only women will be able to salvage the society.

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15

Touching the Chords of the Heart

(On the occasion of the Foundation Laying Ceremony of the Anuben Thakkar Education Medical and Research Foundation at the Nursing School, Muni Sewa Ashram, Goraj. March 5, 2005)

Most institutions deteriorate after the death of the head of the institution. There are only a few who are able to leave behind a dominant attitude, sacrifice their entire lives and merge their own identities with that of the organization. Such people are able to create a lasting system that endures even after their death. A strong inclination of the mind will always transform into a concrete activity which will be extensive and supportive. This cycle is always propelled ahead by people.

Anuben was the inspiring force behind the Muni Sewa Ashram. She founded the Ashram and spent a lifetime in the service of the suffering. Her departure was untimely, but she lives on through her beliefs and makes her presence felt to everyone who comes to this Ashram. This phenomenon is possible only when service is rendered with absolute selflessness. Her work, which began with education, gradually spread towards healthcare. The service that is provided here is not only in name – it is high-quality healthcare in the true sense of the word. Anuben has left behind a legacy of discipline which has ensured that the Ashram is able to provide friendly, sensitive and humane service in a meticulously organized fashion. Everything done at this Ashram carries the unmistakable stamp of Anuben in the form of her humane touch.

We do not have a habit of proclaiming our social work to the world; we carry it out in a very informal manner, which sometimes leads to it going unnoticed. Christian missionaries are renowned for their social work, to the extent that it is assumed that only they can carry out systematic social work. We have never paid attention to the services rendered by our own saints and people like Anuben. We often criticize our saints and monks, without bothering to find out if our criticism is true or not. Innumerable people in our country have attained spiritual bliss by rendering services to the needy; there are thousands of such saints, but we don't have their names or pictures. The work that Anuben has carried out in her lifetime is not something that can be easily overlooked.

I have stayed at the Santram Temple for quite some time. There cannot be a centre of social work bigger than this. If there is a marriage in town and food falls short, the Santram Temple will come to the rescue. Poor families just need to reach there with their sons and daughters-in-law and all other arrangements are taken care of. People suffering from any form of illness are welcomed and all their needs are provided for with a simple "Jay Maharaj". However, nobody notices this, why? There is an inherent mentality among us in India to degrade and downplay the services rendered by our own people. It is only people like Anuben who can help change this outlook of people and inspire all of us.

The Nobel Prize is highly discussed. But I believe that even noble causes should be discussed. Anuben may not have received the Nobel Prize but she was noble, which is more important. I have seen twenty-five thousand people queuing up to donate blood in Surat, which was unprecedented. Even laboratories were not equipped to store these huge quantities of donated blood. This landmark event shows that the intent to serve others is part of our basic nature. "Seva Parmo Dharma" (service is the ultimate religion) is inherent in our mindset. It is the deeds of a man that turn him into a God. There is no demarcation between man and God – God is the divine form of man himself. No other religion has such a philosophy. Many

religions proclaim, “O sinners come to my shelter”. But we believe that God is within each one of us, in our own souls. Such a superior philosophy has been cultivated on this land only, and it has not been copyrighted in any way. This philosophy is open to all humanity, to every human being irrespective of colour, race or age.

Medical services are undergoing a paradigm shift all over the world. The United States of America alone needs approximately one million nurses. In Western countries, there is a huge dearth of caretakers for the elderly. In India, our strong family tradition ensures that the elders receive proper care. This inherent inclination towards service creates a good scope for medical tourism in Gujarat. A number of foreign nationals are undergoing treatment in our hospitals at present. The reason behind this is that for a fraction of the cost that they would have to pay in their home countries, they receive high quality treatment and can even enjoy a good vacation here. This development of medical tourism has created a demand for healthcare services and development of human resources in this sector. Developing human resources in this sector is not limited to training nurses in assisting doctors during operations or teaching them to check temperature and blood pressure of the patients. A nurse’s training has to include the emotional aspects also – she should be able to touch the soul of her patients and be sensitive to their needs. The nurses who are trained at Muni Sewa Ashram, have the benefit of this very important service which is a part of the culture here. In a way, all the nurses who are trained here will have the essence of Anuben within them.

All of us have heard about Parasmani (divine stone) that can turn iron into gold. But it has one limitation – it cannot turn iron into another Parasmani. But Anuben has created so many other Anubens by touching their hearts. By working for people and teaching them to be self-reliant, she has touched their hearts and taught them to live respectfully.

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16

Woman: The Source of Energy for Our Social System

*(On the occasion of birth centenary of Lakshmibai
Kelkar, Town Hall, Ahmedabad. December 5, 2004)*

The assessment of various societies across the world has left sociologists in no doubt that our robust social structure is our greatest strength. It has the power to survive the ups and downs of changing times. It has the ability to leave behind the old and accept the new, without compromising on its roots or its origins. These sociologists have arrived at the conclusion that the tradition of family is the cornerstone of the entire social arrangement and valuable history of India. It is only due to this unbroken chain that the potential of our society has remained preserved. This tradition of family is one of India's most precious assets.

It is the tradition of the family which has given life to the entire social system. This truth is accepted all over, but only we know the real force behind this. An in-depth examination will reveal that the family system is alive only because our women are at the root of it. This is a cultural training given to our daughters. No matter how lavishly she has been brought up in her parental home, she learns to adjust and live her life according to the circumstances of her husband's family, making great sacrifices in the process. This will to sacrifice has kept the family system alive since thousands of years. You will be surprised to know that dedicated efforts are being made to save the family system in America; broken families are one of the major problems that they are struggling with.

Recently, a book, *Fatherless American Society*, has created a huge controversy in America. American society is seeing a massive rise in the number of divorces, leading to a society where children have either a mother or a father, but not both. Raising children properly is a huge problem when a child does not have both his parents. Therefore, the prosperous American society is now actively trying to resurrect the tradition of family. However, we have got this as part of our heritage. A very painful subject for us is the increasing number of old-age homes. Is this the sign of a healthy society? Psychologists and sociologists should think about it. Are these the events that will attack our tradition of family? If children are being raised by nannies and babysitters, will this strengthen or break our family system? We have to find a way out in these changing times. It is our duty to save our society by finding new solutions even to the worst of situations. We would fall down from our high ideals if we do not ponder over this now. Respected Mausiji, Lakshmibai Kelkar, the pioneer of the *Rashtra Sevika Samiti* has initiated this movement which will rescue our basic ideals of humanity for the generations to come.

Somehow our women have been going through a strong desire to be equal to men. On the contrary, men should start to women to reach up to the level of women. Women would be taking a step backward if they want to be like men. That is why society has to think meaningfully. Woman power has its own height.



17

The Land of Virtues

*(Yugandhara Pratishthan Rakt Shakti, Jamnagar.
January 25, 2004)*

Many times, it happens that friends are sitting together till late at night and one doesn't feel like letting anyone get up and go home. Invariably, the married ones will ask to let them go home for fear of the wives, 'sucking their blood'. In reality, however, the women whom we accuse of sucking blood are the ones who give their blood for good causes. Women have donated blood on a large scale and people from all walks of life have joined them in this noble cause. Our society has long acknowledged the concept of *Gupt Dan* (secret donation). However, in recent times, we are losing grip of this concept. If you go to Girnar, every step leading to the top of the hill carries the name of the donor: "This step has been made with the money donated by Mr. X." Only after you read this, can you put your foot onto the step. Gradually, this desire of proclaiming our donation to the world has set in. Blood donation is the only area which by its very nature remains secret, because there is no scope of putting a nameplate on donated blood. A person can donate blood irrespective of his station in life. Blood donation drives also help to develop values. It is not that a onetime donation by a family in need of blood will transform the entire society – however, it does contribute towards creating inspiration for society.

Most of us believe that we are healthy and can donate blood. However, most women are not able to do so for one or the other

reason – they might be underweight, haemoglobin may be low, there may be symptoms of diabetes. The number of women who undergo a check-up prior to donating blood is far larger than the number of women who actually donate blood. Many women come to know about their deficiencies or disease only after such a check-up and are able to take remedial steps. These problems may not be due to a shortage of food at home, rather they occur because of a lack of knowledge about food that is nutritious and food that is harmful. Thus, not only does a blood donation yield benefit to the society as a whole, but it also helps individuals.

Men feel that women cannot do certain things. But in these changing times, the power of women has been acknowledged in every field. We see a majority of girls winning accolades at every level, including the tenth and twelfth board examinations. Girls are forging ahead in sports too. Cricket has words like bowler, fielder and batsman since the origin of the game. But now that girls have started playing cricket, the term 'batsman' has been modified to 'bat-holder'.

The immeasurable strength of women is manifested in the way we visualize our Goddesses – one on a lion and one on a tiger, the two most powerful animals. This imagery itself speaks volumes of the reservoir of strength that is woman. This power is what gives society its strength.

It is our endeavour to make women equal partners in society. How can she be an associate in decision-making? How can she be at the forefront of handling the family, society and the nation? It has been a long-standing tradition to write the father's name with that of the child at the time of school admissions. Why is this privilege given only to the father? Why not to the mother too? Hence, we have initiated the practice of mentioning both the mother's and the father's name at the time of school admission of a child. This is a small change, but it reflects our attitude towards women. When the government planned to provide new houses for those who were rendered homeless by the killer earthquake of 2001, we decided to add the name of the lady of the house in the property ownership

documents. This type of basic equality in society will help realize the hidden potential of women, which can then be used in the creation of a new, ideal society.

Two important services – primary education and primary healthcare – are almost entirely handled by women in India. There is a myth propagated all over the world that women in India are ill-treated and they spend their entire lives confined within the house, serving their husbands. This is untrue. The contribution of women to the progress of India is incomparable. In the agricultural sector, women put in more work than men. Our tribal women are the bread-earners of their families through productive activities such as weaving and cattle-grazing. Women manage agriculture and animal husbandry to a large extent. It is only due to women that our much-acclaimed White Revolution has been possible.

We do not give much thought to our own energies and our own social system and hence, we are unable to view women in a non-traditional manner and unable to take pride in them. We had a lady Prime Minister for 16 years. Not only India, even Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka have had lady Prime Ministers. This has been possible only because of the unique approach towards women in Asia. No religion or cult in the world propagates a female God – for them, God can only be male. India is the only country where woman has been visualized as Goddess, be it Goddess Durga, Goddess Saraswati, Goddess Amba or Goddess Bahuchar. And still we complain that women are marginalized. We need to abandon such thinking and approach the rest of the world with confidence and competence; we have the potential to change the world.

There is no yardstick to measure the power of women. If a woman is cooking and she scalds her finger, she might wait eagerly for her husband to come home so that she can show it to him and gain some loving sympathy. But the husband might curtly brush aside her injury and ask her to serve him dinner instead, leaving her hurt and disappointed. However, the same woman will not think twice before leaping into a flaming house if her child is trapped inside. No man would dare do so, but the

mother will not emerge unless she has her child – dead or alive. A woman is always ready to sacrifice herself for her child. This is her strength and we bow down to it. This strength has the capacity to cultivate virtues in society and ensure the survival of morals and values. Our nation has been enriched by this strength since centuries and we pray that it continues to be so in the times to come.



18

Education for Both: Sons and Daughters

(On the occasion of various Shala Praveshotsavs during June 2008)

There are some events in Gandhinagar that cause me great grief. I hope that you can do something to alleviate my pain. Even after sixty years of independence and fifty years of the existence of Gujarat state, even after constructing thousands of school-rooms, appointing thousands of teachers and in spite of no shortage of funds, only 80 girls out of 100 go to school and 55 out of every 100 boys have not even seen the gate of school. This is a miserable situation. I am not sure whether the previous ministers, government or administration were concerned about this scenario or not; I only know that I am really worried. To eradicate this worry, I need the help of the people. I travel to numerous villages at the time of school admissions and try to create awareness about the fact that there is nothing more callous than leaving a child uneducated in this age. Many parents misguide their children by telling them that since they have happily spent their entire lives without education, there is no need for the children to study too. I want to tell these parents that if they have ruined their own lives, there is no need to ruin their children's lives too. Since you have not learnt how to differentiate between the good and the bad, you feel that your life has passed smoothly and your children will also be able to live a smooth life even without education. However, times have changed – it will be impossible for your children to survive

without education. That is why I go to villages to try and increase the level of education in villages. I would like to ask parents if they would be happy on seeing their children getting educated, standing first in the examination. Even I would be very happy to see such a scenario in the future. If in this gathering, I ask all the illiterate persons to raise their hands, I am sure they will feel humiliated. Just imagine what your children will go through if they are asked this question 25 years from now. Hence, I insist that you provide them with an education.

The Entire Life will be Improved

Let us educate our sons and daughters. We were not lucky enough, but let us do something to make them fortunate. Parents often make the mistake of pampering the child. A child may cry initially because he doesn't want to go to school and then keeps on crying because he knows, he can stay home by doing so. At such a time, if the mother does not take a strong stand, the child will be left crying for a lifetime. If the mother firmly sends her child to school, he will adapt in a few days, make friends and start enjoying himself so much that he will not want to stay home even on a Sunday. If you pamper him once because he is crying, he will cry for his entire life. If you firmly send him to school, he will surely be happy for his whole life.

One nasty character in a village can harass the entire village, making people unhappy and feeling sorry for him. On the contrary, a village should feel sorry if there is even one uneducated child in the village. Some countries believe in the adage – "Opening one school can shut down a prison". We have not encountered this because we believe that the family is the seat of education. What this adage says is true; if a person goes to school, he can be moulded into a good citizen and will avoid the path of crime, never having to go to prison in his lifetime.

The Miraculous Herb called Education

Our life and times are undergoing a drastic transformation. If we want to fight against poverty and calamities like droughts, education is the only weapon available. Without it, a person is

helpless. When a doctor cures an ill member of your family, you consider him akin to God. Why don't you dream that your son grows up to be a doctor and people consider him akin to God? Police inspectors are highly respected in your village; why don't you dream that your son receives a good education and grows up to be a police inspector. The entire State Government, including the Chief Minister, is concerned about your child's education.

I can understand that many parents have not been able to study, but don't you feel like even visiting the school building in the evening? If you can get time to visit a temple, why don't you have time to visit the village school? Why can't we be as enthusiastic about the school as we are about our temples and festivals? Why can't the temple of Goddess Saraswati, where our children study, be kept clean and green? If a window is broken, why can't all the villagers fix it with the help of the village carpenter? If each of us resolves to take up this responsibility, we can ensure that our future is beautiful.

I ask all the people of village to keep a watch on their village school. Just as all the villagers are involved in taking care of the temple, they should be involved with the school. Are the teachers coming regularly? Are children studying with interest? If you find any teacher not working properly, write me a letter and I will personally look into the matter. If we do not pay attention to education, our future generations will be left behind. The TVs in our homes show us how the world has progressed. If we have remained stagnant, we need to come up. Only by paying attention to education will we be able to get our desired results.

Educate a Daughter before Her Marriage

When we insist on educating daughters, mothers usually oppose it by arguing that daughters have to go to their marital homes and do as her in-laws want her to. We raise our daughters with so much of love and care. If a daughter falls ill, the mother is unable to sleep at night. If you love your daughter so much, you cannot say that there is no need to educate her as she will

go to another house someday. Whether she stays with us or goes to another house, she is an apple of our eye and we cannot leave her unsupported. Our tradition talks about *Kanyadan* (donating a daughter) at the time of her marriage, which is believed to bring great virtue to the parents. God is all-knowing and wise; now even He will not accept *Kanyadan* without *Vidyadan* (donating education). An educated daughter is well equipped to face any challenge that life may throw at her. She will be eternally grateful to her parents for providing her a good education before her marriage.

Fault-finders claim that there are a large number of uneducated people in Modi's state. My counter-argument is that if some elderly people, some of whom are even older than me, are uneducated, it is not my fault. However, leaving this criticism aside, I am interested in educating the future generation. In the blistering heat of summer, the Chief Minister, other ministers and government officials of Gujarat are roaming the villages only because we are interested in making the younger generation educated, prosperous and capable. The government has chalked out an entire campaign for this. We have waived the bus fare of all girls who wish to pursue further studies. We have ensured that a girl child can obtain education without any expense to her family. Even after so many efforts, if children do not study, who is to blame? The situation can improve only if parents take up the responsibility for their children's education. If our bullock falls ill, we go to great lengths to locate the best vet and spend money on its treatment. We are so concerned about our bullocks, but not for our own children. What can be worse than this?

Caring for the Health of Children

The State Government has made numerous plans targeted at children's education. We arrange medical check-ups for children, which reveal astounding results. Every year, almost 30 per cent children are found to have weak eyes. We provide them with spectacles. If we had not checked their eyes at such a young age, their parents would not have come to know about

their problem till they grew up. Around seven hundred children are found to be suffering from heart or kidney diseases, which require expensive treatment costing around 5-7 lakh rupees. The Chief Minister's Relief Fund bears the expenses of more than seven or eight hundred such operations. We send these kids to the best doctors and save their lives. The government also provides life insurance to these children. On the first day of school, every child gets a life insurance of ₹ 50,000, which is payable to his parents in case of any eventuality to the child. College students are given life insurance of ₹ 1,00,000. The Gujarat Government is the only one in the country to take such intensive care of its children. Under the Vidyalakshmi Scheme, every child gets a bond worth ₹ 1000 on the first day of school. Thus, the child begins earning from the first day of school. If he continues till the seventh standard, he is paid the money with interest to enable him to go on to the eighth standard.

This is being done for the first time in the entire country. In the past, governments used to pay ₹ 1,00,000 to the kin of those who have died from alcohol consumption. They used to spend money on such unimportant tasks and left the important tasks for me. I put an end to this practice. I have declared that we will pay money to little children only, so that the future of Gujarat can be prosperous. We will give money to farmers so that he can increase output of his fields and improve his life. The Gujarat Government has decided to celebrate this year as the, "Healthy Child Year." We want the children of Gujarat to be healthy and strong. We cannot afford having weak and ill children. Gujarat should be strong and stout and to achieve that, the children should be so. Children should be so healthy and charming that they are irresistible. We provide children at Aanganwadis with specially made nutritious chocolates, for which we spend crores of rupees. Simply by having one chocolate a day for two hundred days in a year, the child can be protected from many diseases. The government has taken steps to show its concern for children. Now it is the duty of the parents to send their children to the Aanganwadi. The government sends a lot of aid from Gandhinagar, but you can benefit from it only if you are

aware. Children are young and helpless; the parents and the entire village will have to become aware so that children can benefit.

I bless all the little children who are entering the school today. For the first time it has happened that a Chief Minister is holding the hand of children and taking them to school. Most of you might not remember your first day of school, but I am sure that these children will remember their first day of school for a lifetime. This process has given me even more pleasure than my own Swearing-in-Ceremony because education is the most pious task that one can undertake.

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Healthy Child and Happy Gujarat

(Healthy Child Initiative, Trimandir, Adalaj. April 2, 2008)

If each and every citizen of Gujarat acts as a mother and nurtures feelings of motherly care in his heart, I do not think that any additional efforts will need to be expended to keep our children healthy. In this, “Healthy Child Year”, let us create a bridge of inspiration which can bring love and affection to all children.

If looking at a child can raise tender emotions in our heart, it will create a bond between us and the child. The power of such emotions is unimaginable. Once a man was travelling in a bus along with a young child, suddenly the child began crying. The man tried various things to make him stop – cradling him, murmuring to him, giving him water – but nothing worked. An old lady, whose motherly emotions were awakened by the child’s incessant crying, went up to him and told him to sit away from the window to calm the child. She could understand the cause of the child’s discomfort when even his own father could not. This is the power of motherhood. I am sure there is no one who does not want to see his child playful and happy. If we make an honest effort, we can ensure that every child in Gujarat is healthy and happy.

Caring for an Expectant Mother

The health of the pregnant mother determines the health of the child. Thus, the future of the entire nation directly depends on the pregnant mother. Around twelve lakh women deliver

babies every year in our state, which means that twelve lakh mothers have to be taken care of annually. Out of these, three four lakh mothers are such that they don't need to be taken care of by the government, leaving eight-nine lakh mothers who need government aid. This has led the State Government to plan the "Healthy Child Year". Studies have revealed that pregnant women need a well-balanced diet. An understanding family will take care of a pregnant woman, even if they are poor. They will ensure that their pregnant daughter-in-law is given sufficient quantities of ghee (clarified butter) and green vegetables. Even the poorest of mother-in-law wants a healthy child in her family.

We need to ponder over how to provide sufficient nutritious food to pregnant women. Villages have many food supply centres. We can decide to include pregnant women in these arrangements. If every villager contributes 100 grams of "sukhdi" to the panchayat every week to be distributed among pregnant women, it would greatly contribute to their good health. A healthy mother will give birth to a healthy child. I believe that the "Healthy Child Year" a people's movement, and hence I want the entire society to join in this mission. If only one family in the village has cattle, they would never think about selling the milk. In the past, villagers believed that butter-milk can never be sold; it is meant to be distributed among neighbours and friends because no matter what the quantity, it is a source of protein that they are providing. Gradually, this mindset and this arrangement have broken down. Can this form of collective responsibility be revived? The entire village together should decide that no pregnant woman shall suffer for want of nourishment. Helping a pregnant woman means helping two lives. Even today, many people believe that good childcare is limited to proper vaccination. For a long time I have been asking doctors to treat patients free of charge for one day in a month. One day a month, twelve days in twelve months, 120 patients is not a big loss to any doctor. It is our duty to inspire doctors for this noble task. Why is it that not a single doctor has yet become a part of this Matruvandana Program?

Young children face the same situation. We wrongly believe that only if we study hard, we can become intelligent and make

our future bright. In fact, intelligence is developed up to the age of five and it can be inherited. A child's intelligence is visible from early childhood. When a child is put in a cradle with a toy hanging overhead, it tries to catch hold of the toy. It develops its own method for getting out of its cradle. Thus, God has bestowed everything upon a child. I wish that no child is put into a situation where we have to bring him back from illness. I want to create an arrangement, where a child can develop without any hurdles.

Progress of Children is My Dream

Many wrongly propagate that this government is synonymous only with festivals, Vibrant Gujarat and Global Investment Summits. However, the truth is far from this. I spend three days in two years for Global Investment Summit, but work throughout the year for Nirmal Gujarat. I work twelve months a year for education of the girl child. We have been able to sign (MoUs) worth rupees six lakh crores, which is a matter of pride for the state. But what is the fact of my life? I signed (MoUs) worth rupees six lakh crores for the development of my state and the next morning. On 14 January I was flying kites with differently abled children at Gandhinagar. The development of differently abled children is my dream, which is a part of the efforts towards development of a healthy child. I want to take my state towards its full capability and create an environment by which it can realize its power in front of the entire world. I want to take the benefits of development to the homes of the poorest. It has always been my endeavour to make the government active, sensitive and working for people. Every organization and every person can contribute towards making children healthy. I remember a trust from my days of working with tribals, around thirty years ago. They would provide seeds to the tribals and teach them to sow the seeds outside their homes, watering them with waste water and nourishing them with waste food which is a natural fertilizer. The vegetables grown in this manner were sold and provided several important nutrients. This activity did not need much funds or space, yet it

helped in generating income. Such small experiments can enable people to start a movement.

Let Us Participate

Iron is a very essential nutrient for a pregnant woman and her unborn child. We can provide iron to them through green vegetables grown in this manner. Cooperative institutes and nationalized banks have separate budgets for social responsibility, which should be used for making children healthy. The State Government has built small gardens in every village. We should at least put up some playing instruments for children in one corner of such gardens. These small things are essential for the development of the bodies and minds of children. If we care about the future of Gujarat, our children should be healthy and fit.

Gujarat has taken the initiative to establish the world's first Children University. Recently, I had invited educationists from all over the country to take their opinion about this concept and their suggestions for how to proceed with it. Around sixteen renowned educationists unanimously appreciated the concept and felt that this was a wonderful way to serve humankind. They requested me not to make the Children's University only for Gujarat, but a global one. In the age of joint families, children would absorb thoughts and ideas from their grandparents and the family would act as a university. Each family had its own social values and the entire family worked together for the child's progress. There were no contradictions between social values and family values. In this age of nuclear families with only one child and both parents working, questions arise about the child's development. There is massive confusion in society about where a child wants to go and in whose care he should be kept. I feel that visionaries should be worried about the children of Gujarat in the coming days. The idea of Children's University has come from this non-stop striving. Today, if you take a child to any toyshop and ask him to choose a toy, chances are that more than 80 per cent children would chose a toy gun. What kind of children are we raising? What should be the child's

daily routine? How should be the toys of children? Which songs should children listen to? What colour of clothes should they wear? All these aspects require thought. Only if we start such a mission in a country like India, can we save our country and lay the foundation of progress. It is with this thought that my government has initiated the Children's University, and based on my experiences, I wish to start it as soon as possible.

The future of the state which is in the form of young children is in the hands of lady teachers. Unfortunately, these teachers are not well-trained so they are clueless about how to spend three hours with children. Healthcare experts should design different programs for the needs of children right from the first standard. These days, if you ask any woman under the age of fifty about lullabies, most of them would not know anything. The tradition of lullabies has been lost. Poets say that there is a need to make a structure of writing lullabies in modern science. We have not researched children's toys or food which can be extremely helpful in their development. The aim of Children's University is to change this situation, provide training and to have scientific approach. I request to all who are into education field to understand this concept. I will welcome anyone who is willing to devote time to this initiative. There is no greater good fortune than ensuring the well-being of five thousand children. We usually observe that the entire family devotes its energy in keeping an ill or mentally challenged child happy. If we adopt the same attitude towards every child who is ill in society, we will be able to achieve the expected results. Our slogan and mission should be, "Healthy child means a happy society".

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Duty, Not Pity for the Handicapped

Many people feel like helping the handicapped. I have observed that the handicapped resent pity because of their innate handicaps don't like the pitiable help from anybody because of their disposition and God-given willpower. They refuse to take help from others, and believe in not burdening others and still living life in the best possible manner. I think that such willpower is missing in normal people like us.

Most people in society think that they should pity the handicapped. I think there cannot be a greater insult than this. Pity is not the correct mindset for a healthy mind and a healthy society; instead we should feel a sense of duty towards them. The responsibility of any handicapped person in any family should be shared by the entire society, state and nation, not just the immediate family. Such a healthy environment existed in our society in olden times, but we must now work actively to recreate it. If this does not happen, society as a whole becomes handicapped. An ideal society is one which considers the handicapped as their assets.

We have carried out the first such experiment across India, which should be noticed and discussed if there is any sensitivity left in society. It is unfortunate that there is an extreme lack of sensitivity to the extent that no one notices even the most inspiring events. Our state has a dedicated commission working for the handicapped. Earlier, being placed at this commission was considered akin to a punishment; only the good-for-nothing persons were sent there. Even someone working there willingly

was seen with suspicion about his abilities. For the first time, we appointed a blind person as the Director of the Commission. I requested him to leave his position of a professor at a college in order to take up this post. This has led to the entire approach changing. A person who has undergone pain is bound to understand the pain of others.

There is another major decision taken by our government. Earlier, even a handicapped child needed thirty-five marks to pass an examination. We need to understand that a normal child can lift a book faster than a handicapped child. Therefore, for the first time in India, this State Government has ruled that a handicapped child can pass an examination with twenty marks. This change is not large in itself; but if we can empathize with the problems of the common man, God will inspire us to take good decisions.

I have several private sector industrialists who insist on employing handicapped persons for special tasks. They earn a special sense of fulfilment by enabling such persons to earn their living. Most of them do not even apply for any award to the government. Such tasks cannot be carried out by the government alone. The State Government tries to felicitate those who serve the handicapped through awards. We are not declaring the tasks done by us; only asking society to notice the good things which have been done.

In the Service of Leprosy Patients

In order to realize the government's goal of a healthy society and to take proper care of the health of every citizen of the state, the State Government has created specialized health plans and has been successful in completely eradicating diseases such as polio and leprosy from the state.

Along with the unparalleled services provided by social organizations that believe in the humane approach advocated by Mahatma Gandhi for the treatment and care of leprosy patients, the health department of the state has adopted a holistic approach that has yielded dramatic results. The occurrence of leprosy which was 21.1 per 10,000 in 1985 has now reduced to

7.86 per 10,000 at the end of January 2007. Timely and regular treatment has resulted into 5639 patients being completely cured. In order to encourage patients to come forward unhesitatingly for such treatment, which in itself is extremely expensive, the State Government has adopted the approach of free and multi-pronged treatment for all leprosy patients. The government also provides reconstructive surgery and MRC shoes free of cost to patients who have lost their limbs.

During the May 2005 annual meeting of the Hindu Leprosy Eradication Union, then President Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam praised the steps taken by the Gujarat Government's health department in the treatment and eradication of leprosy and appealed to other states to follow its exemplar model. This proves that Gujarat has been at the forefront of leprosy eradication. These efforts of the state have also been appreciated at the international level. The Gujarat Government was felicitated by the Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation, Japan and the International Leprosy Union, Pune at a function on January 30, 2007.

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21

Empathy, Not Sympathy

*(On the occasion of the silver jubilee celebrations of the
Shram Mandir Trust, Singhrot district, Vadodara.
January 17, 2004)*

The greatest problem with leprosy is that it is highly misunderstood. Unfortunately, in spite of the spate of advertising through media, we have not achieved any satisfactory success. Even if we cannot do anything else, any attempt to remove the misunderstanding surrounding leprosy as a part of society would be a service to the affected people, who have to undergo great trauma. It is not that family members stop loving an affected family member, but the media can play a positive role if it wishes to.

Noble activities are society-driven rather than state-driven. The government may support noble causes but it should not be dependent on the government. Organizations can function better in absence of interference from the State Government. Our forefathers had established a system which was created by the capability of society and awarded by the government. Maintaining this tradition can develop our potential.

Any unit which works with the support of the entire society will always be stable and capable. These values flow naturally and create a long-lasting approach towards society. Our scriptures describe the responsibilities of a king as under:

Natvahaṃ Kāmayē Rājyaṃ Na Svargaṃ Na Punarbhavam.
Kāmayē Du:Khataptānāṃ Ārtanāsanam..

“Neither do I desire to rule the state, nor do I heaven or rebirth. My only desire is to wipe the tears of unhappy people.”

This is the role of a king as defined in our country. Swami Vivekanand has described the role of a saint –

“Put your God aside for some time, whether the Lord Shiva, Goddess Parvati, Lord Krishna or Lord Ganpati. We should have only one God – Daridra Narayan (a poor person). Once you serve him, God Himself will come to you. Serving the poor is the best form of religion. A society deeply embedded with values and morals will come forward to help the suffering and care for them, which is its greatest strength. This strength needs to be acknowledged from time-to-time.”

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22

To Serve is the Grace of God

(On the occasion of distribution of tricycles to the handicapped at the behest of the Bankim Pathak Association, Ahmedabad. October 12, 2003)

Governments all over the country allot budgetary funds for the welfare of the handicapped and make plans for them. Gujarat leads in these activities, and yet, we have many more things to do.

We do not believe that those who have been less blessed are pitiable. It may be that this feeling has risen in our hearts so that we can understand the sensibilities of others. All these physical difficulties should be accepted as God's grace. Only when we see this with a sense of devotion, can we ascertain its true value.

The desire of doing something for the society is very important. Our country has been plagued by two words since freedom. These words have made us irresponsible and have taken over our lives, transforming themselves into an epidemic. We have accepted them so casually in our lives that we do not even realize their severity. These words are "Mare shu" (How am I concerned) and "Maru shu" (What is in it for me). If I see a rock on the road, how am I concerned? If someone is handicapped, the show will go on without him, it is none of my business. Coming out of the trap of these words will require a huge battle with yourself, family, friends, your status and position. It is almost similar to the Chakravyuh that Abhimanyu found himself in and you must come out of it confidently.

When I was working in Morbi, a devastating flood in the Machhu River caused huge destruction and killed numerous people. It was a heart-wrenching tragedy. We, the volunteers of RSS, went there in groups and worked for five-seven days cleaning the debris, removing dead bodies, organizing cremations and providing food for the flood-stricken people. Some perverted people would allege that RSS workers were only there to lay their hands on the jewellery and other valuables found on the dead bodies. Our country is full of such perverts – I come across almost a dozen of them daily. I often wonder where they concoct such allegations from – maybe we should make a dictionary of such allegations.

I will not take names, but a very well-known person once stopped our volunteers who were carrying the dead body of a child and asked them why they were doing this job when the military, police, members of Lok Rakshak Dal, villagers or even his family members were not doing it. The young RSS volunteers stared at him and asked him that if they did not do it, who would? Whether we are from Amreli, Surat or Valsad, this calamity has stricken our society. If we don't help our suffering brethren, who will? Such a feeling of unity inspires human beings to serve others.

Most people serve with an underlying sense of pity. All of us may have written essays on, "I helped a blind person to cross the road," when we are asked to write about some service rendered. Is everybody in the village blind that 300 children need to help them cross the road? But we write because we have to write. Empathy cannot be created by mere writing, one must feel the pain. We must visualize ourselves in their situation and feel that they are our own, instead of feeling pity for them. The feeling of pity only satisfies our ego. We have to realize that they are a part of our society and develop a feeling of belonging instead of pity. This is a collective social responsibility. If one house is burning in a village, the whole village will rush to extinguish the fire, even if they do not have good relations with the victims, because there is a feeling of social responsibility. Likewise, everybody is a part of the society and

helping them overcome their troubles is our social responsibility. The suffering should not feel dissatisfied, they should not have to wait for the obligation of the society, but they should look upon society as an extension of themselves. This would greatly boost their confidence and they would be able to participate in the progress of our nation.



23

Experiencing the Emotions

(At the inauguration of Dr. P.V. Doshi School for the Deaf and Dumb, Rajkot)

What should be the approach towards the handicapped in our society? If some person is handicapped in one family, his responsibility should be taken up by the entire society instead of that family alone. If the entire society helps that family, the burden will be removed. Such an exercise should be carried out with a feeling of responsibility rather than pity or mercy, without which it will not be service in the true sense. When God inspires us to do such noble work, we must empathize and feel the same pain that he feels. If we are unable to experience this, we are emotionally handicapped. All of us should do a self-introspection to make sure that we are not emotionally handicapped. If one feels kindness for society, one sees every person as a brother. Only the immediate family of a handicapped person can imagine the trauma and stress associated with taking care of him. Any institute working for this objective is accomplishing a great achievement. I don't think there can be a greater benevolence than this.

One such rare combination of duty and kindness was seen in the life of Pappaji (Late Shri Pranlal Vrajlal Doshi, RSS Coordinator, Gujarat). The school for the deaf and dumb at Rajkot is noteworthy. Pappaji's own daughter was handicapped. He merged his family's defect with the entire society and resolved to provide to every handicapped child everything that he would give his own daughter. The school for the deaf and

dumb at Rajkot is a living monument of kindness. To Pappaji's highly enlightened mind, this school was more important than a temple. The impact of his personality reflects in his school.

Pappaji's genuine feelings and love for this school and its activities were immense. It would even seem that his attachment for the school was even more than that for his family. His approach towards the handicapped was enshrined in the practical form of the RSS values. If the entire society takes the responsibility of a handicapped person, it would be a great relief to his family. There should be feeling of empathy rather than sympathy for the handicapped and society should feel their pain.

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24

A Feeling of Belongingness

(At a function to handover aid to the victims of the terrorist attack on Akshardham, Town Hall, Gandhinagar. August 3, 2003)

Ideally, calamities should not occur; but if at all they occur, the victim should not feel that he is all alone in his suffering and that God has singled him out to test him. The mark of an enlivened society is that it feels the pain of every single person in society. Every member of the society believes in coming together to solve each problem confronted. God might have imposed the problem onto you, but the problem is not yours alone – we are with you. This is not an argument to condone the death and destruction caused by a calamity, but it is a communication of the feeling of brotherhood. And this feeling has a great power in any society. Whenever a crisis occurs, it should inspire us to do some good. One good act inspires another and the society progresses with the hope of this strength.

Only those who work in the field of psychology or who care for the handicapped can truly appreciate the extent of the troubles faced by them. Just now you saw a lady bringing the cheque on a tray and the young boy who tried to take the cheque along with the tray. Everybody laughed. We did not know that the boy is deaf and mute. He is on a battlefield without certain essential capabilities. His minor mistake became a source of entertainment for everyone, because we do not feel his pain. However, I am sure that after understanding his situation, you

would be feeling remorse. Only because you are sensitive, you can have this realization. The teachers at schools for the deaf and dumb are specially trained due to which they are able to create an environment where handicapped children never feel inferior. They enable these children to realize their hidden potential and aid their progress.

Let Us Change Our Approach

We are a developing, not a developed nation. This means that we have certain flaws such as a handicapped, deaf and mute or mentally challenged child might have. We do not have all the strengths that are needed in the twenty-first century. We are used to berating our flaws and creating a nationwide depression. Admittedly, we have flaws, but are we willing to use our powers to make our country stronger? We need to change our approach. We need to put all our positives to use and endeavour to change the situation. This can be done only if all of us work in the same direction. Recall the time of the earthquake when the entire country rushed to the aid of our stricken state. With a nation that has such enormous powers, we can bring about a great change simply by highlighting our positive qualities.



25

Creating a Healthy Society

*(Aarogyaraksha Havan Arpanvidhi, Anti-tobacco Day,
Balwant Rai Mehta Hall, Kankaria, Ahmedabad.
May 31, 2003)*

We are facing so many problems only because we are looking for answers away from the original philosophies of our country. We have forgotten Lord Rama as a symbol of reverence, we do not follow his example and thus we invite AIDS. We then have to plan campaigns to avoid AIDS. Our ancient philosophy says that God is present in everything, in the entire world and in every living being. Because we have wandered from this philosophy and stopped seeing life in trees, we chop down trees mercilessly. For thousands of years, we had no environment-related problems. Now, by leaving the natural life behind us, we have spoiled the delicate balance.

Once upon a time, our ancestors used to eat at home and go out for nature's call. Today we go out to eat and use the house only for answering nature's call. We have turned our life upside down – Ganesh Bidi, Vivekanand Maternity Home – could this be imagined earlier? The main underlying reason is that we have forgotten the true objective of life. When the objective is lost, delusions appear. By welcoming delusions, we are welcoming destruction. Forgetting our values is at the root of all our problems.

The news media is very effective in this day and age. One of my friends works for a TV channel in Delhi. I always find him chewing tobacco. I often tell him that in spite of working as

a journalist and an anchor on TV, he has missed the messages shown on it. We see ads on TV telling us that tobacco is injurious to health, we read in newspapers that cigarette smoking is injurious to health, but we are not affected. Even when celebrities preach this, people do not pay heed to it. We now need to undertake a self-analysis.

Cancer is a terrible way to lose a family member. Alcohol, drugs and tobacco are terrorists that destroy our youth. The enemies of our country push our youth towards such intoxicants.

When the bread-winner of a family gets addicted to smoking or alcohol, it destroys the whole family. Therefore, awareness and commitment to change is essential. I do not have the right to preach, but this is an effort to save our coming generation. Let us awaken the hidden potential in society, which will lead to good morals and create a healthy society which will benefit the future generations.

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26

On the Path of Mahatma Gandhi's Teachings

*(Cleanliness Torch Marathon, Gandhi Ashram,
Sabarmati, Ahmedabad. October 2, 2004)*

Even in today's competitive world, those who are familiar with the soul of India and those who have grown up on the soil of India, will be drawn to Gandhian philosophy. The faith in Mahatma Gandhi and his ideals has become even stronger than what it was in his lifetime. Mahatma Gandhi's ideas about the organization of the village economies, his efforts to change the narrow attitudes and create a harmonious society, his thoughts on self-reliance, all these are relevant even today. Therefore, Gujarat has given priority to the development of villages in the progress of the economy and started the program of Jyotigram.

If a resident of Ahmedabad or Gandhinagar can read a book at any time by flicking on an electric light, why does a villager have to beg for it? Even after so many years of independence, can we not fulfil Gandhiji's desire of reducing the gap between the different classes of society; between cities and villages. The Gujarat State Government has initiated a mission to supply 24 hour three-phase electricity to 18,000 villages through the Jyotigram Yojna. This will improve the standard of living, strengthen village economies, increase agricultural production and income and develop agri-businesses. Children in villages should get the same advantage of studying computers those in cities. If a person living in Ahmedabad can talk to his friend in

Chicago through the Internet, why can't a villager talk to his friend in Washington using it? He should also get the benefit of electricity. This is an attempt to fulfil Gandhiji's dream.

I do not wish to talk about corruption. So much has been said about it that words have lost their strength. My only question is – Can we not eradicate corruption? I feel that the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi have the potential to eradicate corruption. A case in point is Gandhiji's principle of trusteeship. If we had followed the path of Gandhiji since independence, this principle of trusteeship would have been the backbone of society. We would have been able to save society from the corruption, which ruins society like termites. The State Government has tried to apply this principle and got miraculous results, which I want to draw your attention to. At the time of post-earthquake rehabilitation work, our education department entrusted the job of constructing school rooms to committees of local villagers. They were provided with plans and funds according to estimates and given the total responsibility of making the rooms such that children could begin studying again and leave the impact of the earthquake behind. These committees were given funds on the principle of trusteeship. You will be happy to know that the rooms built were stronger and bigger than originally intended. Where needed, villagers donated parts of their own land, some even carried out physical labour and got the rooms ready much earlier than the schedule time. Not only had this but the villagers returned crores of rupees to the government, which is a first in independent India. This was possible only due to Mahatma Gandhi's principle of trusteeship and is a wonderful example of what can be achieved by applying this principle.

The very thought that life has capability is powerful. Few follow this, but if we try to convey this to the public without any hypocrisy, it has the potential to bring about change. Faith is very important – faith brings success.

We have been raised quite differently from people in other countries of the world. Our ancestors grew up amidst nature in the age of Rishis and Munis. We spent our formative years

around river banks. Civilization has always entirely developed on river banks. Our ancestors were fastidious about cleanliness and health in their own way, and we have been taught the basics of health and hygiene as part of our tradition. We have a culture of personal hygiene. We have been taught to wash our hands and feet after using the toilet, bathe regularly, and remove shoes, etc. Hygiene is observed all over the world, but in India it is a tradition. Other countries emphasize public health and civic sense. When civic sense is ignored, it creates a disgusting environment. In foreign countries, people will put a scrap of paper in their pockets till they find a dustbin. I do not criticize their personal hygiene, but we have a lot to learn about public health and civic sense from the other countries of the world. Our neighbouring country Singapore has set new standards of cleanliness through proper laws and has created recognition for itself in terms of economic development.

Medical tourism is developing in a big way in Gujarat. Our medical capabilities can attract the world, but before that we will have to cultivate civic sense and cleanliness. We should accept this responsibility as a society. Instead of relying on others to clean our garbage and throwing our garbage on the streets, we should resolve to keep our surroundings clean. We chant slogans like, "Bharatmata ki Jay" and, "Vande Mataram" and then spit on the same earth. This is an insult to the country. That is why it is very important to develop a sense of social cleanliness.

Our next target is harmony. Mahatma Gandhi worked very hard to remove untouchability. No society can improve without removing narrow attitudes and disharmony. The strength of society lies in its unity. If we want society to come out of ills such as inequality and the lure of cushy jobs we must work towards harmony. We want to organize a string of folk performances that will talk about the principle of harmony. Unfortunately, the Gandhian philosophy is not fully understood; therefore, we have accepted equality but not harmony. We erroneously believed that harmony would be cultivated along with equality; children of upper and lower classes would be

working together as officers in the same office, earning the same salary, and thus there would be equality. However, this does not guarantee harmony. Financial equality can be developed, but to bring about equality in lifestyle, one must develop high thinking. Harmony can be cultivated by high thinking only. Mahatma Gandhi had tried to inculcate this. Our State Government is trying to develop high thinking by the principle of harmony. People who, on one hand, talk about, "Aham bhrahmasmi" cannot utter sentences like "You cannot enter my home" or, "You should sit there only". Our State Government has started a multi-pronged campaign to complete the task started by Mahatma Gandhi. I have complete faith that this mission of cleanliness and harmony will be a great supplement to knowledge. I do not claim that State Government does everything; it is our humble effort to work together. That is why I often say development needs participation. All your complaints would get resolved from time-to-time. The situation will not change by preaching from a corner, all of us must do something together.

The State Government is working with the slogan, "Clean and Harmonious Gujarat". We have decided to participate in the pain of the sweepers and cleaners who are working hard to keep Gujarat clean. You will be surprised to know that even with increasing life expectancy, the average age of a sanitation worker is only fifty. All of us have to take responsibility for the health of sanitation workers of municipalities. As a part of this responsibility and as a tribute to Mahatma Gandhi, the State Government has decided to provide life insurance of ₹ 1,00,000 to fifty thousand sanitation workers so that in case of their death or physical defect, their families will not be rendered helpless.

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27

Our Elders: Our Social Strength

*(Inauguration of special ambulance by Sargam Club,
Rajkot. October 7, 2003)*

Volunteer groups have been active in our country for a long time, mostly in the form of Mahajans, which served society in various ways such as helping build schools, cow-sheds, rest houses or even ponds. This system led to some very good activities. Unfortunately, recent times have seen the rise of a group of hypocrites, for whom the term, "Five star activists," is appropriate.

Five star activists are supposedly engaged in social service, but they are more interested in their own enjoyment. They loiter around wearing long *kurtas* at day and go to five star hotels at night. With their limited knowledge of computers and English, they put up the security of the nation for auction. These perverted people are part of a large organization, and we are trying hard to save our country from their grip.

The thought that this is my society and its problems are my own will spur us to use our God-given gifts for the betterment of people and give us great satisfaction.

The elderly have the wealth of experience. All over the world, especially in Western countries, they are feted as the strength of society. In our country, they are the heads of families and our social strength. Earlier, grandparents used to mould the new generation with their values and morals and five brothers would live together in one house. Today five brothers are living in five separate bungalows but cannot accommodate

their father. Hence, we must make some arrangements for the aged. Old-age homes are not in line with our culture. Old people wish to be helpful to society till their last breath. We should engage them in the journey of progress to reap the benefits of their skills and experience.

All over the world you will find senior citizens working for three to five hours, ready to serve and handle the various activities of society. We should also take their services where needed. We can take help of fifteen senior citizens for managing parking arrangement. If 2000 senior citizens work for two hours each, we can get 4000 man-hours. What can't you do with the help of 4000 man-hours? No school or temple would be dirty. The mere presence of our seniors would be sufficient for this. There should be social programs handled by senior citizens and the members of these programs should be increased gradually. I am very sure that it would set an example for the entire state. I am ready to convey the message all over Gujarat that the senior citizens have changed the face of society. Monthly tours should be organized for them. Even the Railways has arranged for their comforts.

Families build morals and lullabies are an important component. But unfortunately lullabies are disappearing. We should work on this. We should organize competitions for lullabies where only ladies should be allowed to participate. Lullabies are not only songs used by mothers to make their children fall asleep – they represent the journey of moulding children. They are a great asset to awaken the strength of motherhood in Gujarat.

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Service: A Process of Our Culture

*(Inauguration of the Annapurna Annkshetra Manav
Sewa Mandir, Lions Club of Digvijaynagar,
Digvijaynagar Lions Foundation, Opposite Civil
Hospital, Ahmedabad. October 17, 2004)*

We have the concept of “Vanprasth-ashram,” in our country. This name is given to the age between fifty and seventy-five when a person has completed most worldly commitments and has the time and willingness to serve the society. Our ancestors had created this system in a natural manner, which ensured that people experienced the desire of doing something for society after a lifetime of efforts behind earning money and taking care of their own family. This system which once flowed naturally now needs to be brought in with a lot of efforts.

The number of old-age homes is increasing in our society. As a matter of policy, I refuse to inaugurate any old-age home because it is not the sign of a healthy society. The insensitivities in Western countries led to establishment of old-age homes because children were not willing to take care of their parents. It is an irony that a son having five bungalows is not willing to have his father under the same roof. The father of a poor man may be found living in his hut for his entire life and sharing the best of what the family has to offer. This is the basic nature of our society, which is what can save our society.

Sometimes we study our economy according to the American economy. But at present American economists are worried about the impending loss to the American economy.

Huge funds are currently needed for the care of senior citizens of America. However, in India, elders are very much a part of the family, so the society does not have to bear the burden of their responsibility. We have to apply thought to make this structure more powerful and respectable.

Serving others is part of our basic nature. Have you ever seen a dedicated place for giving grains and water to birds, except in our civilization? We have this facility in every village and street. We have always believed that man has to take care of the smallest living being also. Leaving wheat flour for feeding ants at ant-holes reflects our kindness to all living beings as well as our inherent nature, which is a result of our cultural heritage. There is a vast difference in the lives of dogs. Some privileged dogs have access to air-conditioned rooms and cars whereas some are kicked when they are hungry. Our country has always had arrangements for a food corner for dogs. After every family meal, dogs are given food. Serving others is part of our nature and we should think about conveying this even to the last person of the society.

Myths have been spread that nothing is good in our country. The blot of slavery has been attached to us because we have been slaves for a long time. Our age-old suppressed mentality does not give us the courage to believe in our own positive qualities. We have several superlative things to present to the world, but we are afraid of doing so. For example, we believe that we did not serve needy people till the missionaries entered our country. On the contrary, you will not be able to travel twenty kilometres without coming across a food centre which distributes food to the poor. This shows our tradition of service.

There is a food centre near a hospital in Chennai or Coimbatore, which has been started by a South Indian saint currently living in Malaysia. His restaurant, which is better than a five star hotel, serves food at nominal rates to patients and their relatives. Respected citizens like judges and doctors provide service here – they serve food and even pick up the dirty plates, working till the end of the lunch or dinner session. There is usually a long waiting period to get the honour of this

service, and usually a person gets his turn for an hour, once in every two years. This is a fabulous social partnership. If you visit Chennai or Coimbatore, you should see this tradition and culture.

We often discuss our poor tourism infrastructure. A hotel having thirty-two hundred rooms would feature in newspapers across the world, but there are many monasteries in this country with more than this number of rooms. If you go to, Kali Kamliwala, Hardwar or Hrishikesh, you will witness the conveniences created by our ancestors for pilgrims. This signifies that creating social infrastructure was part of our social activity. Many of these noble activities vanished under the influence of our slavery. We have to start them again and plan the program of service. Gradually, it will be possible to resurrect our original nature, which is essential to serve the society.

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29

All Workers are a Family

(On the occasion of distributing employment orders to the kin of deceased employees, Town Hall, Gandhinagar, July 27, 2004)

Providing jobs to the dependants of deceased employees may be a small event for the government, but it is a very big thing for the concerned person. I have always been in a quandary in my mind on this issue. On one hand, I congratulate the deserving and wish them future success through their own efforts. They may have gained entry with the advantage of kin, and the government has helped them in their critical time, but their progress is now up to them. If they become complacent and stop working hard, fifty-eight years of their lives would pass with no use and life would be tiresome. Why should they be in such a system?

They should think about clearing various departmental examinations and learning new skills. It may be that a person's father was a peon and he got a job on the basis of pity, but they should think about upgrading themselves by learning driving, appearing for the Class 12 examinations, etc. Getting support does not mean that they should stop progressing. Your father, mother or your husband who has left for the heavenly abode at an early age and because of whom you have got this job, would find their souls at peace only if you continue your journey of progress. You might be satisfied by staying in the same position, but your ancestors won't be happy. They would be happy and satisfied only if you achieve greater heights than them. Their soul would feel that you are doing well even in their absence.

You must remember that the government can only provide support, it is your own responsibility to be independent. Obligation will never lead to progress, dreams or aims. The word "mercy," pinches me a lot. Can we not have another word for it? Are these words beneficial to Gujarat? I accept that it is the responsibility of the state to think about everyone. I can understand the pain of a girl who has been widowed at a young age. But I have seen strong young men roaming around with favour applications for as long as three years in the hope of getting a job out of mercy. Is this the way to live life? You might get the advantage of government schemes, but until you do, you should strive for progress. However, I have seen that most people have closed all such doors in their lives. I want to request all the employees of Gujarat that let us pray to God to keep us away from eventualities, but let us also prepare our family members so that they can face any unforeseen event with strength so that they do not have to roam around with favour papers. It is very important to change the whole mentality. Over the last two years, I have met several people waiting for such jobs on grounds of mercy. I tell them that the government will endeavour to provide a solution as soon as possible, but please do something till the solution materializes. Yet they keep coming every week. If any scheme destroys the basic inclination of working, it is not a good sign for the scheme.

I see one more defect in this scheme. Dependents of a deceased employee need immediate help. They have great problems passing even one day, leave alone the entire life. Just imagine the situation of a woman with school-going children whose husband has passed away at the age of thirty-five or forty. How can such a family survive for five, six or nine years while it waits for mercy? There might be family disputes and the entire family might be stuck because of one person. All these problems occur. There should be a system which can immediately give something to the victims. There are some cases which are pending since 1995 or 1996. This much time is actually sufficient for a person to become so strong that he can oblige others, instead of waiting for the obligation of the government. How

can these defects be removed? Sometimes I feel that family members of deceased employees should get a large amount at the time of the death, so that its interest will be substantial, even larger than what they would be getting as a government aid after five or six years. The interest so earned can help the family to feed its children, give them a good education and empower them. All the members of employee unions should think about innovative ideas to improve this scheme. A scheme which provides relief after five-seven years of the father's or husband's death hurts me. There should be immediate aid that can enable the family to recover quickly. I hope that God will give us the strength to take proper decisions. Members of employee unions should also ponder over this important scheme which we cannot afford to delay any longer.

All of us are a family and hence we have to share our joys and sorrows. Emotions such as pity, respect and honour are mutual. We are a five lakh strong family. If we can start seeing others' problems as our own and find joy in their happiness, we can definitely achieve progress.

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30

Shining Villages

(At the inauguration of 400 KV substation organized by Gujarat Energy Transmission Corporation Ltd., Vadavi, Ranchhodpura, Kadi, Mehsana. July 26, 2007)

The problem of shortage of electricity is discussed all over the country. The television would also be informing you about the news of any place in the world. One of the major problems faced by the common man is the lack of electricity. Some places experience blackout most of the times. The irregular supply of electricity has caused industrial units to shift from the once highly industrialized state of Maharashtra to other states. People living in Delhi have to keep generators at home as commonly as others keep TV sets. This situation is seen all over the country.

One of our Prime Ministers had emphasized the negative impact that lack of electricity would have on our country during his speech on Independence Day at the Red Fort. He mentioned that the development of India would come to a standstill if the problem of electricity would not be solved. Even after this concern of the Prime Minister, none of the states except Gujarat has taken this matter seriously. Gujarat is the only state in the entire country, which has brought about a revolution in energy.

I took the oath as Chief Minister in 2001. I had barely finished my oath when reporters, executive officers, elected leaders, farmers, and businessmen started coming to see me. All of them requested me to solve the problem of electricity, so that at least they could have their dinner in light. The situation

was so bad that children could not study at night during exams and people could not have their dinner in peace due to uncertainty of electric supply. People remember the days when they could not milk their cattle in early morning because there was no electricity. Many a time, villagers had to make do with 'khichdi,' because without electricity, the village grinding mill could not grind the wheat. All these problems were very common.

These problems have been solved due to the Jyotigram Yojna, which provides uninterrupted twenty-four hour three phase power. Gujarat is the only state in the country to receive electricity for twenty-four hours. We have been able to take Gujarat on the path of complete development through a revolution. Jyotigram Yojna is a major achievement. We have brought about a revolution in energy for a prosperous society and prosperous Gujarat. We have illuminated villages by supplying twenty-four hour three-phase power. We have spread light in lives of many villagers. Many revolutionary social and economic advantages have been achieved because of this plan. Even the person on the last rung of society is getting twenty-four hours electricity at his farm and his home. The standard of education of students in villages will definitely improve due to uninterrupted supply of electricity. Not only will the standard of living of villagers improve, but also the migration of people from villages to cities will reduce. Twenty-four hour electricity supply has reduced the difference between a village and a city. A youngster living in a village can also use computers; a village student has started getting facilities equivalent to that in a city. Since the farmers are getting twenty-four hours single-phase electric supply, the life of their pumps has increased. His financial situation has improved because of the increased crop production. People of cities no longer hesitate in getting their daughters married to boys living in villages. We have been able to supply electricity to everyone, whether he is rich or poor.

This has not come easily. Everyone would surely remember the days when it took endless petitions only to shift an electric pillar that was in the way. We have come a long way from those

days. The Gujarat Government has put up 23 lakh new pillars in one thousand days. Farmers are aware of the fact that the burning of one transformer can destroy standing crops and play havoc with the farmer's entire year. He might have to postpone his daughter's marriage or even mortgage his farm. Farmers in Gujarat, who have seen such days would be happy to learn that the government has installed 56,000 transformers in 1,000 days under the Jyotigram Yojna. You can see that it has been at the rate of 56 transformers a day. Where once even one transformer was not available in 45 days, we have now been able to provide 56 transformers a day. This has happened only because of our determination. It was our sincere wish to ensure the welfare of the farmers. We knew that if the farmer's crop is saved, his home would be illuminated, his daughter would get married and his son would get a proper education. It was my wish that a poor and ill mother should get relief with the cool breeze of a fan, a family can sit together and relax in each other's company with the lights and fans running. To fulfil this wish, we have installed 23 lakh pillars and 56,000 transformers. In the past, electric wires would get burnt during heavy rains and they would not be changed till two years. We installed 75,000 km-long wires within a thousand days. Jyotigram has taken shape after mammoth efforts and outlay of thousands or crores of rupees. Our friends in the energy department have worked very hard. They were doing so even before my Chief Ministership also. Each of my workers has worked very hard, not taking a leave even for their own mother's illness to complete my desire of the welfare of Gujarat. Only then has it been possible to put up 23 lakh pillars. This plan is not a work done just to celebrate inaugurations and claim progress – it has been a mission carried out with extreme hard work to make the dream of an illuminated Gujarat a reality.

For many years in Gujarat government of Congress was in power. The Congress has not produced a single unit of new electricity in any state of India under its rule. The Gujarat Government has produced 800 crores units of new electricity in a short period of three years. The Narmada Yojna has definitely produced new electric power, but the major benefit

of electricity generated by the Narmada Yojna has been made available to Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, and only a very small portion to Gujarat. We are not going to rest after this project. The demand for electricity in the state for industrial, agricultural and domestic use is constantly rising. The consumption of electricity is increasing even in homes of the poor. The calculation of electric supply in Gujarat since 1960, when Gujarat separated from Maharashtra is interesting. There have been 12 governments in 45 years, an equal number of Chief Ministers and budget to the tune of thousands of crores to generate electricity. We have decided to generate electricity that is equal to the quantum generated in the last 45 years by the time Gujarat celebrates its fiftieth anniversary in 2010. This will be possible only if there is the will to complete the work of 45 years in 1000 days. We want to take Gujarat on the path of progress. The quality of electricity will improve the quality of household, industrial and agricultural work. If an electric bulb gets spoilt twice in a year, a poor man will find it difficult to afford 15 or 20 rupees required for that. We have spent around a 150 crores per sub-station to install 400 KV sub-stations so that the quality of electricity is good and a poor person can save 15 or 20 rupees. And that is very important. We have also decided to supply water in farms.

I have started mission for the progress of Gujarat, for changing the scenario of villages in Gujarat. I am working hard to change the lifestyle of Gujarat. The development of Gujarat will be helpful in changing the impression of India. We are working with this dream in sight. All the members of our energy department deserve congratulations for winning 24 energy-related awards in one year and winning accolades all over India. The determination and will of the employees of Gujarat's energy department will ensure that darkness will never fall over Gujarat.

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Happy Villages can Make the Nation Prosperous

(The government is committed to the development of villages – the progress of villages is the progress of the state. Banaskantha. April 26, 2002)

In these times of development, farmers should get proper returns for their hard work. In the past, farmers were exploited by middlemen and often forced to sell off their crops at rock-bottom prices, which were not even sufficient to cover their own labour. We can imagine how difficult this would have made their lives.

The State Government is making a lot of efforts to save farmers from exploitation. Farmers were facing numerous problems in spite of being the owner of their own land. We have finally won the fight for farmers' rights against the Central Government. Farmers have finally received the money for crop insurance, which they were not getting since 1985. Previous governments used to make up tall stories about the 'Government for poor,' giving many promises but not delivering on them. It was indeed strange that family members of those who died after consuming hooch or during riots were paid compensation by the government, but the family of a farmer who died while digging in his fields or of snakebite while tending to his crops, did not get a single penny. Isn't this a gross injustice to farmers? There is nobody to support the farmer who works day and night to fill the state's granaries. What could be worse than this? I thought that when farmers meet with big or small accidents

and face loss of limb or life, the family's tears dry up after some time, but we must find a way out of such situations. That is why the State Government has provided insurance for all the farmers at its own expense.

The State Government has provided every farmer with a 'Khedut Pothi' (farmer book) and a Farmer's Credit Card. We had arranged a farmers' welfare fair at Banaskantha and embarked on the mission of reaching our targets for Farmer's Credit Card, so that no farmer will have to mortgage his wife, daughter or sister's jewellery to raise money and also to rescue farmers from the exploitative clutches of local moneylenders. Exploitation will also stop because the government has arranged for farmers to get money directly from banks. When farmers do not have space to store their crops, they are compelled to sell at low prices. At such times, a floor price is essential to ensure that they do not make a loss. For the first time, the Gujarat Government has bought corn, millets and groundnut crops from farmers at a pre-determined floor price so that they are saved from debt and suicidal situations.

The entire nation will be happy only if villages are happy, not otherwise. In order to bring happiness to villages, our efforts have been directed towards developing infrastructure through the Gokulgram Yojna and maintaining unity through the Samragram Yojna so that villagers can live peacefully and solve their problems on their own. It is our vision that in the days to come, every village would still be a village, but it would have fresh air, water and milk, its population would be under control and people would be living with feelings of brotherhood. This would empower them to face the world. If the son of a farmer in Banaskantha is studying or working in America, he should be able to check the 7-12 statement of his village land on his computer, while sitting in America. We want this level of development for our villages – we want a revolution. Villages should have the best of what the world has to offer – this will lead to development and stop the fragmentation of villages. Therefore, the State Government has drawn up phasewise plans to create modern infrastructure and lifestyle and an

environment of scientific advancement and harmony in every village. Farmer will be able to generate income from innovative projects such as *Gobar Gas*, which will create electricity and gas from dung. We want to create a system that will empower villages and make the villagers happy.



E-gram: The World Village

*(Timba Village, Umrala Taluka, Bhavnagar District.
January 18, 2004)*

Once the American President Bill Clinton visited a village near Jaipur during his trip to India. He was amazed seeing veiled women using computers to manage their dairies. He was surprised with the level of development.

Though I roam across Gujarat and visit numerous villages, I was as surprised as Clinton was, when I saw a signboard for a beauty parlour in a village called Timbi. It was an example of modern lifestyle. The State Government is also trying to spread modernism to every village, albeit not of the powder-lipstickhair dye variety, but the modernism of scientific advancements. We want villagers to live their lives in the same way that the rest of world does.

The word '*e-governance*,' is not new to Kathiyawad. In western Gujarat, *e* is a pronoun used instead of him, her or it. We say that *e* had come, *e* had gone, *e* was eating and *e* was sitting. At every step we use this '*e*'. Now, there is a new connotation to this '*e*'. What was previously an endearing pronoun is now being used by science. E-gram has come from *e-governance*. Our slogan is: 'E-gram Vishwa-gram'. We want to create facilities wherein you can talk to your son in Mumbai from the panchayat office computer. Any facility which is available in the world should be available in Timbi village, and gradually to every village in Gujarat. The computer is not a toy; it has the potential to become your life-partner in the coming

years. Many villagers tell me they will not mind a bad Chief Minister, but they need a good talati (chief village officer). A talati is effectively the Chief Minister of the village. But who will be the talati's Boss? So far that post was vacant, but now the small box called computer has taken that place. The computer is so powerful that it can help me to monitor the activities of your talati even if I am sitting in my office. You will be surprised to know that initially all the talatis opposed this move. But I am thankful to them for reconsidering and accepting this proposal. I thank them for understanding the need to make Gujarat modern. Real progress is possible only when we understand the requirements of changing times. Let me tell you how many improvements can be brought about by this small change. Recently, I saw your entire program in the panchayat office and even gave a few suggestions. For example, we can add a new folder that will maintain records of Timbi residents who have shifted elsewhere, their addresses, whether they are alive or not? If you want a groom for your daughter from your community, you can request the panchayat office to provide you with details of suitable boys from a particular community or group of villages. The computer will also greatly benefit teachers who are generally overburdened. They need not go from house to house every time someone asks for details of handicapped persons in the village – this information would already be present in the panchayat office. Teachers will not need to do a count of voters every three months. The computer will maintain records of births and deaths in the village so that it is easy to find out the list of eligible voters.

Children who have turned eighteen will automatically be transferred to the voters list. Such systems can be established to collect all types of required information. We can find out which boy secured highest per cent marks in the 2003 examination, which girl scored the highest marks. We can collect information spanning a hundred years too. Some people understand that it is not too difficult to operate a computer; on the contrary, it is more tedious to collect data by hand. You only need to learn to press a few buttons and you can easily manage

many things with the help of a computer. If an enthusiastic lady wants to make *dosa*, she can look at the website of *dosa* and learn how to make it. If your child is preparing for his exams and wants to obtain information on the Taj Mahal, he can use the panchayat office computer and know everything about it. The sheer convenience will lead to a revolution. Three and a half crores people of this state are living in villages. Many governments have ruled in the past and left the villages to their fate. Is this situation acceptable to you? It is definitely not acceptable to me.

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Public Partnership: The Secret of Success

(On the occasion of completion of Kanya Kelavani Jyot Padyatra, Palitana, Bhavnagar district. January 18, 2004)

Everybody knows that the government is running a program of public partnership. A mid-day meal programme is also in place, but we are aware of the conditions under which it operates. Can we not bring about a change in it? A school works only for 150 days out of 365. Is it so difficult to find 150 families in every village which can take up the responsibility of providing lunch to the school children on the occasion of birthdays, marriage anniversaries or death anniversaries in the family? We have started such a program under which 811 villages of Ahmedabad district have accepted the responsibility of providing mid-day meals. Now the entire village has joined hands with the school and made the school a temple. All the villagers feel that they should go to school with their family to take care of children at least once a year. One family needs to go only once a year. This program could bring a good feeling of understanding.

Any task undertaken by public partnership can bring tremendous success. People are now taking the initiative to donate funds for providing computers in village schools. The funds needed are not huge; hence it is not about the money but about the necessity of public partnership, which brings strength

to the partnership. Previous governments were distant, but we are making efforts to reduce the distance between government and public. Public should run the government, government should be run through the inputs of the public and the government should work for the public. We are constantly trying to bring this situation and we are seeing results because of it.

A huge revolution for irrigation has taken place in Saurashtra. Most villages had large or small rivers flowing through them, but the water would flow away during monsoons. Through public partnerships, we have created awareness that has resulted in 1,22,660 check-dams and 1,71,400 ponds have been constructed upto February 2007. This has been possible only due to public partnership. In the past, 100 kgs of groundnuts would yield around 28-32 kgs of oil. The construction of check-dams has led to a bumper crop of groundnuts which has yielded 52 kilos oil from 100 kilos of groundnuts. This record breaking production can be attributed to the new irrigation methods such as check-dams. It is a living example of the miracles that can be achieved by public partnership.

We would also like to harness this power for the education of the girl child. There is no expenditure required to be incurred. Girls who have passed their seventh standard can collect used textbooks, cover them afresh and pass them on to the needy girls. This will take care of education of poor girls without any expenditure. The government is not even required to be in the picture. Only some girls need to take initiative to collect books and give them to younger ones. Those who have finished the first standard should give their used books with new covers to younger ones. This will ensure that the younger children get books and there is optimum utilization of books. Countries like ours can work only with public partnership. People can study without any expenditure. There is no issue of money, it is only that some people take a lot of time to understand this concept.

If you have arranged a dinner, and you forget to invite someone, that person feels offended. Why? Doesn't he have money to eat? No. Does he remain hungry on that day? No. Is he going to save some money by eating at your place? No. He feels happy to receive your invitation. The pleasure of that food has nothing to do with money, it is the joy of partnership. This public partnership cannot be compared with money.

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34

Glimpse of the Strength of People and State

*(At the inauguration of Narayan Nagar, Jivapara and
Nakhatrana Talukas, Kutch. May 25, 2002)*

The day when the earthquake shattered the state, nobody had imagined that they would face such times. There was nothing around except death. Even the strongest of people had lost hopes. And yet, Gujarat has surprised the world by overcoming this shock within a very short period of one year. The consistent and vigorous efforts of Gujarati people are seen everywhere, as if they've resolved to squirm the shock. This is the strength of this land; this is the strength of her people. The inner strength shown by the people of Gujarat has been bestowed upon them by the society.

Many a time, the youth, out of sheer frustration of unemployment, thoughtlessly blame the society for their unemployment. They feel that despite their good education, if they can't earn money, it is pointless to live in such a society. We raise uproar if someone picks our pocket while travelling, and we grumble about the custom officer who asks for a kickback when we return from a foreign trip and we jump to the conclusion that whole of India is corrupt. But the real strength of a society can be tested only by the behaviour of its people during a crisis. Humanitarians across the world have been shown the strength of Gujarati people in their hour of crisis.

The fundamental essential character in every human being is virtuous. A good background further develops this character

and leads the person to good deeds. And when good character is combined with good deeds, one naturally gets blessed by God. This fundamental character is inherent in all of us. Many saints are trying to mould to this fundamental character just like sculptors. Under their guidance, the task of awakening the essential character of people is being carried out. This will enable mankind to pulsate with goodness. I am sure that this might be the result of good deeds of previous births. The good deeds didn't bring the earthquake, but they led us to such saints who helped us to surpass the thorniest phase of our lives by holding our hands. We all wish that they stand by us. They are giving a new shape to the lives of people; they are giving a new strength to society. How wonderful it is, to do something for the poor and needy irrespective of the distinctions of caste and class. These saints have assimilated all the ancient knowledge as well as accepted modern views and that is why they have the potential to bring about this change in the society.



35

Shrines of Hard Work

*(At the Dedication Ceremony of Sokhada Village rebuilt
with the support of GNFC. Rajkot, April 20, 2002)*

The earthquake on 26th January 2001 had ruined the whole state. The whole world was worried about our state. Those who had lost everything were completely at sea about how to get out of this mess. However, it is a miracle the way Gujarat has come out of the whole disaster within a year. The world will never fathom this miracle until they understand the inner strength of Gujarat. There is a unique strength in the people of this state, and one needs to have a remarkable thinking to understand it.

On the morning of the 26th, when the earthquake occurred, I was in Delhi. I reached Ahmedabad by special plane in the afternoon, and I was in Kutch the very next day. There were many rescue teams that had flown in from across the world to serve and help the earthquake victims. During my tour of inspection, I asked the foreign volunteers if they had any difficulty, or if they needed any other help. We started chatting and they told me that they had been to help victims at many disaster sites but they had never seen such spirit and extraordinary strength among the affected people before. They shared an experience. A high-rise building had collapsed. They had come to know with the help of dog squads that there were some people alive under the debris. While they were struggling to get the survivors out, a youth of around 27-28 years, who appeared to be a volunteer himself, requested them to

accompany him. He took them to a place where the dead bodies of a woman and a small girl in the debris, and informed the rescuers that those bodies were of his wife and only daughter. The very next moment, he looked at them and asked, "You look exhausted. Would you have some tea?" The foreign team member said, "It is hard for me to imagine a young man of 28 years whose wife and loving daughter are killed, asking us for tea and thinking of our comfort. The society that has such strength will never take much time to overcome any disaster that befalls it." There are innumerable such experiences about our spirit and it is only due to this spirit and the power it gives us that we can move ahead.

When Gujarat was shattered by the earthquake, people blamed nature for this disastrous calamity. Of course, it is impossible to fill the gap for those who have lost their beloved family members. But now when one sees the newly constructed cities, one feels that God destroys only to create something better. It is, after all, possible to find a way towards development even in the midst of horrific destruction and Gujarat has set the best example of it. These new buildings are the symbol of the spirit, strength and hard work of the people of Gujarat. They are the monuments that tell the saga of strength and duty. They tell the tales of the courage that lights up lamps in the darkness. This is the power of our society. The buildings are certainly made by the engineers, masons and carpenters with cement, bricks and wood, but a mere building cannot be called home. It is only the warmth of love and unity among family members who will inhabit the house that makes it a home.

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36

The Spirit of Family in Business

*(Mahatma Gandhi Shram Sahyog Award, IIM,
Ahmedabad. April 4, 2005)*

There is a common misconception in business field that an industrialist is someone who invests in business. We have tried to change this fundamental belief. We have tried to add something to the meaning. We believe that financial investment is not the only investment. The one who gives knowledge and the one who works hard in business is also an investor, and in turn, an owner. We consider hard work an investment. The amalgamation of all the three enlightens the spirit of family in a business. This is the fundamental idea of business. The financial investor knows that his company is doing well only because of the manager of his company because knowledge is also an investment.

He knows that as a businessman, his only investment is money. If this feeling is cultivated, and every work is accepted as an individual strength, the feeling of family and partnership in business will arise automatically. This makes every employee belong to the company. And once every single worker starts having family feelings for the company, the company is surely on its way to progress. Therefore, to cut a long story short, we should work with the feeling of family and belongingness in business. I firmly believe that this idea will lead us to superior results.

It is only by the gift of God that it is possible to skilfully manage industries in a land where there is scarcity of natural

resources and where people are constantly struggling in their day-to-day life. Gujarat is deprived of natural resources. Those who have travelled across India must be aware of the fact that many Indian states thrive with natural resources. But God has His own way of giving strength. If any society uses these strengths appropriately, they would pass through God's tests and would be able to live a prosperous life. The same thing has happened to Gujarat. As we lacked in natural resources, our ancestors had developed the skills and the habit of hard work. And we have inherited those skills. It is hard to imagine that despite sayings such as, *Daalbhat khau shu sha paisa char* (money that gets us food is enough), even 400 years ago, our ancestors had reached to the remotest places in the world in their tiny boats.

Recently, I had been to Russia to enter into an agreement with the country of Astrakhan. There is a building of Indian origin in Astrakhan. If we test their DNA, we would realize that most of them living there are Gujaratis. The people of Astrakhan did business with traders in Okha. They are all aware about their ties with Okha. They have a rich heritage of historical tales, according to which, our ancestors were brave, skilful and hardworking and we are enjoying the fruits of it.

The competitive age of today demands more than just hard work. Until you make optimum use of your inherent skills, your hard work doesn't pay. Moreover, you have to seek opportunities to expose your skills and that is where the test of human beings starts. You might have everything that you need to start up a business, i.e. a firm determination, raw material and enough time, and the will to work hard, and yet, you need to overcome many a barrier until the actual venture materializes. It is most difficult to clear this very first stage.

The Sindhi community is a living example of the perfect social set up that we had for starting up a business. The Sindhi community has a unique custom. On the inaugural day of any Sindhi's business, his community people gift a blank sealed envelope of money. They do not write their names on it, but the envelope usually has a large amount of cash in it. Thus, the

person who has just started a new business gets enough money that can help him to manage his expenses. This is a social custom, which everyone follows. They may have to go to such inaugurations quite often, but everyone gets support from their own community. This shows how much people care for each other. This strength, that is an outcome of the social sensitivity, is the foundation of our social system. However, today we have forgotten this old custom and that has proved to be a major loss for the society. In Indian culture, the villages were the best because the entire economic system was based on the finest that you can gain in life. The southern part of India is known for the production of betelnuts. I have never come across any research on betelnuts. I had gone to an All India Seminar once, and I offered betelnuts to someone only to face a question: "Why do you eat a piece of wood?" Imagine, if there is so much ignorance about betelnuts, what would happen to the community that survives on the selling of betelnuts? But the far-reaching vision of our ancestors gave betelnuts a religious significance. They started using it in religious ceremony. There cannot be any religious ceremony without betelnuts, and this religious importance created a huge market for betelnuts, and in this way, they gave a huge boost to the entire economy.

There are various types of workers in villages, but the social system cared for the welfare of each of them. A potter would make earthen pots and *diyas*, but in a village of 500, would he have a sufficient market for his products? How would he survive? The society created customs that people should change their pots and use new earthen lamps during each festival, thus creating a huge market for pots and *diyas*. Thus, the society gave a definite place to earthen vessels. This is entrepreneurship. This is a natural way of making the social life strong. Gradually, due to a lack of understanding, we broke our old customs and started new ones. This gap between the old and the new keeps on widening, and now we have to work harder to fill in this gap. We have to organize seminars, workshops and create a new structure to fill the gap. We have destroyed the social system and now we'll have to reconstruct the whole structure. We have

failed to value our roots and the main cause of this failure is certainly the slavery we suffered from for more than 800 years. During this period, when we were under foreign rule, our ancestors fought for independence and wore out all their energy in battle. As a result, there was a major vacuum in the time between the acceptance of new systems with creative thoughts and the abandoning of old systems which they were used to. Moreover, independent India somehow started believing that the government will bring all the necessary changes, and our downfall began from the moment this belief was implanted in our minds. This situation remained in India till 1992, at which point, we realized that we should get rid of this thought.

Just imagine that, in villages cobblers would make shoes, and thus his customers' needs for footwear were satisfied. Similarly, the blacksmith of the village made knives, sickles, scissors, etc. Thus, he was also running a small-scale household business according to people's needs. And the village economy worked very well like this. There were many professions in villages. The villages were harmonious. But today, this system has broken down. The multinational companies have invaded the markets. Big companies make fancy shoes and an ordinary cobbler or a blacksmith cannot survive in the competition with such big companies. The new economic structure needs to restore these cobblers and blacksmiths. But again, we have failed to create such a structure. Our entrepreneurship was not only for individual prosperity but it had incorporated social responsibilities as well. Therefore, it is the demand of the time to create new things. It is about time we expanded our skills of entrepreneurship. Let us create new milestones that bring happiness to the entire humankind. There should be an arrangement that brings about a change in a common man's life. If we cannot manage to do so, no matter how many tall towers we build, we will only feel loneliness within as we have not contributed to the welfare of humankind. The happiness that social service in any form brings cannot be compared with any materialistic achievement.

Let me illustrate this through an example. You wear a new, expensive branded shirt and see yourself fifty times in the

mirror, roam around everywhere showing off your new shirt. But you will not be satisfied until your own people see and praise your shirt. This is because you wish that your own family and friends should notice your progress. This is human nature. Real satisfaction cannot be gained in the absence of society, and social network turns into a very useful skill in business. We want to introduce a system that contributes optimally to social welfare. It is my firm belief that such a system will bring great satisfaction to everyone.

Let us have a look at the journey of development in Gujarat. There are many opportunities and possibilities here. We have intelligence, courage, and diligence. Let us take advantage of all of it. Most businessmen expand their business for their own selfish reasons: "My business is going well, let me buy another shop. I will divide the business between both my sons." This kind of mental set-up does not really make any difference to society. Of course, it did matter 20-25 years ago, but now this thinking is not enough. We have to accept the challenges of globalization. The textile mills in Ahmedabad were not pointless. The industrialists worked hard to set them up. They had everything, and the mill-owners were also philanthropists. There was no discrimination between the mill-owner, the employer and the workers, the employees. There was a feeling of family. The mill workers have played a significant role in the development of Ahmedabad. There are very few cities in India that are developed by mill workers, and Ahmedabad is one of them. However, all that prosperity has now vanished. The reason behind this is that we have ceased to respond to change. If we do not change with the changing times, and keep on living stubbornly depending on our prosperity, that would bring an end to our progress. As a result, we will have nothing left to do but regret our past mistakes. Therefore, I want to convey this to all entrepreneurs that if we delay accepting challenges, we will lose. In that case, how can we use our practice of hard work while we are focusing on the global market? It is about time we thought over it. There was a time when people were not ready to spend money on research. Usually, people as well as

governments would scorn at the Research and Development departments and were not ready to spend money for research. I personally believe that in coming times, well-equipped laboratories in the factories would be as impressive as our businesses themselves. That would be the real wealth of own field. The research done in these laboratories would impress the world. There should be a common laboratory where researches for entrepreneurs are done because in the coming era the main contribution for the entrepreneurship will be information, knowledge, research and recreation. We would get definitive results only if there are incentives for research. Therefore, it is essential to give it priority.

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Kite Flying: An Attempt Towards Social Bonding

*(Workshop for the Gujarat Kite Industry, Gandhi Labour
Institute, Ahmedabad. December 16, 2003)*

We have a social economy in our country, but unfortunately, we have forgotten a tradition of this social economy. All our festivals have an arrangement to provide the lower classes with a chance to earn their living. For example, *Rakshabandhan*. It is a festival dedicated to brothers and sisters, but a large number of poor people earn their living for the whole year by making *rakhis* for *Rakshabandhan*.

The Kite Festival is organized with the same objective. The people connected with the kite industry believe that the government will snatch profits of 10 to 20 crores rupees in the Kite Festival. They also worry that perhaps the government would impose sales tax on their profit. The kite industry is worth 100 crores in Gujarat. More than one lakh families below the poverty line have joined this business. I feel that when I keep talking about the prosperity of five crores people of Gujarat, their food, education and health; why should I marginalize a certain class? Since the lower class has joined the kite industry, we are planning to take it to an even larger scale. Like Shivakasi is a hub for fire-crackers, I want to make Gujarat a hub for kites. Kites are made by paper and therefore they tear, and yet, the kite business has sustained for more than two thousand years. But no one has tried to modernise this business so far. Innovation has entered almost all the fields, then why not the kite industry?

There are different types of kites made and flown in different parts of world. It may be possible to make kites without wasting paper. In order to make this happen, the workers should be explained how to make use of technology so that they can make five kites instead of one from one meter of raw paper. The State Government wants to help the kite industry by sales management and other subjects. The government wants to increase the kite business from 200 crores to 500 to 700 crores. Though the festival is very popular in Gujarat, it is not celebrated in many parts of Gujarat. We have to make efforts to ensure that all of Gujarat starts celebrating it and gets used to it. We have to send our kites where they have not yet reached.

The first step in the whole process is to create a market for kites in Gujarat and other states of India. We have to cultivate this interest of kite-flying among people. Gujarat does produce bamboos, but the kind of bamboo needed to make kites is sourced from Assam. Therefore, the making of kites is delayed. This is a major problem. There should be an arrangement where large industrial houses purchase bamboo from Assam and sell it in Gujarat. We can even modernize the process of making the gum used in kite making. The whole pre-production system needs to be changed. It is not even necessary to source bamboo from Assam. We can produce similar bamboos even in Gujarat. If we do so, we would save the expenses of transportation and make kites cheaper. The whole kite-making business could be developed in Gujarat from scratch. But kites are made in the old style and by the time they reach the shopkeepers, 10 to 15 per cent kites are spoiled and the total profit goes down. Despite all these problems, the kite-making business has been able to sustain itself. The State Government had written a letter to a packaging institute to open a branch in Gujarat. The system of parcelling the kites should be changed. We can modernize the whole process and think about ways of storing kites in rainy season also. The third important thing is the paper that is used to make kites. Today, people want variety and uniqueness. Sometimes we store kites for the next year and hence we should also think about the durability of kites. We still have an old

approach for kite-making. They stick the patches of printed papers on the kite to make it colourful. Instead of that, if we get multi-coloured paper to make the kites, it would save a lot of time and energy. The kite paper could be made with different colours and designs. Secondly, publicity is vital. We live in the age of advertisement and promotions. Kites can be a very good medium for advertising. The kite-maker would get the advantage of the advertising and it can also be a medium of education. Earlier, we did the polio vaccination advertisements on kites. Moreover, group education can also be done by kites. I appeal to the professionals to carry out concrete research in this area, so that income can be increased in the kite industry.

We badly need changes in two other fields. We find that even today, the *firkis* are made in the same old style. Why can we not modernize the *firkis*? They should be made so attractive that people would want to take a picture of it. Modern art experts should think over this. There are so many things in this country that need changes. We can always create the best from waste. Similarly, we have workers from Uttar Pradesh who dye the threads of the *firki*. We can make it well-managed. They currently use glass powder in order to make the thread sharp. We can use some chemicals instead of glass powder. We can try new methods to dye the thread. A good market has to be created for kite thread too. I remember, earlier, only 'Kelico' was popular; 'Saankal' brand was equally good. We can create and develop the market for kite threads. The most fascinating part of kite flying is to beat the other flyers by cutting their threads and in turn making them lose their kites. This is all in good spirit. This spirit of sportsmanship is seen only in Gujarat.

If we use modern and scientific techniques in the kite business, it could solve the issue of the livelihood of one lakh families. Some of the families could even rise above the poverty line through smooth business management. The State Government has started labour wages plan. It is a supplementary effort to bring up people living below poverty line. The kite industry can prove to be essential for it. We want to develop the kite business so that the people in this business

can get quick exposure. Different institutes have done researches on this issue. We have planned to increase the income of the poor. If during this two-day fest, people eat *undhiyu-jalebi*, buy things like paper caps, cheap plastic goggles. The festival could provide an opportunity to develop several businesses worth crores of rupees. In this way, we can be united by kites. We want to have a modern approach towards the kite business. We can compile some kite songs to encourage their exports. We can increase sales by composing new songs every year. We want to introduce the kite business to the world market. There are around 70% women in this business. We should think about how we can help these women in other ways. We can organize some events for their health and education. The State Government has decided to ponder over this issue. This is perhaps the only festival that is beyond the discrimination of religion or caste. A person of any religion makes, flies, cuts and loots the kites. There is big strength in kites. Even a multimillionaire flies it, fights for it and cuts it from his terrace, and grabs the kite passing from his terrace. That is the joy of flying kites.

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From the Market to the Heart

*(Gram Haat, Annapurna Hall, Paldi, Ahmedabad.
May 19, 2005) Haat: A Way to People's Heart*

Our President, Dr. Abdul Kalam has conceptualised an image for the development of India. He has given a golden dream, and in this plan, he has classified India into different parts. One of the parts in this plan addresses the desert areas. Such areas do not have enough agricultural activity throughout the year due to the scarcity of rains, and hence he has suggested the business of handicrafts for the poor people of such regions. The art of handicraft is inherent in the people of the arid regions of Gujarat and Rajasthan. I believe it is God's own way of making up for the lack of natural resources.

We need to make specific plans to develop these arts as a part of the journey of development. Such a plan should include the objectives of making the art scientific, to support it with modern productivity methods, to get a good market for the art items, and to help increase the price of the art products. Only by fulfilling these objectives can we lead this art to big businesses.

Usually, till now, these artists go to public places like fun-fairs with their bundles of the artsy items to do their business. They draw their customers' attention towards them by playing 'Dhol'. This needs to be changed. When we think of the 'Haat' – a village market – all we can usually think of is a small hut raised on a small piece of land where people sell their goods from. This is quite a narrow idea of the, 'Haat'. We have brought

a major revolution in this field. We have brought the village market to the city, which has made a remarkable difference. We could have made a small building in any remote corner in the name of 'Gram Haat'. But since this market is meant for the poor artists who earn their entire living from these arts, we have made the market in posh and attractive places. The basic idea is that the building in itself should be so attractive that it should draw the customers inside. Many times people of higher classes hesitate from visiting these markets that do not have air-conditioning or any security. It is not possible to change their mindset, but it is certainly possible to make the market an attractive place even for these people. It is for the first time in India that such markets are made where city-bred, aristocrat people would take pride in visiting the 'Gram Haat'. This village market would set an example for other village markets in India. This is an experiment, but we have made the first model so perfect that no one can reject it. This is our foundation.

A few days back I met someone on my visit to the village market. He told me that he has made Gujarat famous in Hong Kong and Moscow by selling goods from Gujarat there. And now he wanted to have the same kind of sales in Ahmedabad. I told him that you only have to inform people that you have been to Hong Kong and Moscow and people will rush to your shop. We wish to manage this business of the poor, keeping in mind the psyche of the people. We have merged groups of 512 artists and workers in the village markets. But I intend to increase this number to 5000. I want every worker from the remotest part of Gujarat to know that there exists a market where he can sell his products. We need to encourage them to join these markets. If there are people who have the skill and the art to create something, they should know that the government has created opportunities for them. There is a possibility that they do not know about the market; that they have never registered with the government; that the NGOs have not let them register, because there are many sadists who do not like the idea of such markets. This is a major barrier. It is like a disease. There are many NGOs that virtually rule the rural

people. They are forbidden to enter the market/business if the NGOs don't get anything out of it. But it would be a matter of immense pleasure if we manage to convey this message to every single worker in the remotest areas. We want to support them to grow their businesses. It is our mission to develop the deprived and the lower class of the society. Let us give these artists something constructive. This is a direct program, entirely without middlemen. We want to provide a direct help to the women artists living below the poverty line.

The government bears the transport expenses to bring the workers to the Gram Haat. The government also arranges for their accommodation and food. We want to make the people below the poverty line earn their living on their own. They should not depend on others. If they have the talent, all they need is the market. Their products will certainly sell in the market. We wish to convey this to every artist in the villages. We do not want to restrict ourselves to Surat or Baroda. We want to start these Haats in every district, on petrol pumps, and on highways. We plan to start these Haats in the places of pilgrimage like Somnath, Daakor, and Ambaji. We want to start a market chain, where such products get good exposure. We can always take help of advanced technology to increase the production if they get a market. Currently, the artists do not use technology because it takes two years to sell things that take six months to make. The artists would be encouraged to work more if they sell more. They would want to use the advanced technology if there is demand for their products. The State Government is not going to stop just by launching the Haats. We are going to start the whole trade circle where the products made by these villagers are explored; they become a part of the organized business and get financial help. The artists will get access to the world market through websites. We have tried to make the business plan for the same. At present, in India even the big industrialists are not able to have their markets online. We want to make this possible for the rural businessmen. I appeal that everyone should visit this market. Even if you do not want to buy anything, you can do window shopping, talk

to workers about their work and experiences. Your approach will encourage them. At the same time, the government officers will also have to keep certain things in mind. There needs to be a human touch to this business. Moreover, there should also be a proper organized management of everything. For example, the managers and the volunteers should keep track of the festivals and should talk to the rural women fifteen days prior to the festival so that they can start making the festival items. Only then, these women would have their exclusive festive sales in the market. Apart from that one can bring innovations in the existing market also. For example, if a stall of exclusive colourful umbrellas is set up in the Tarnetar Fair, every visitor will buy at least one umbrella. Similarly, they can start making lamps, attractive candles and handmade greeting cards before *Diwali*. It would be an advantage to both the seller and the buyer if things are properly managed.

Every society has its own temperament and some inherent traditional ideas spread in it. The seller just has to get the knack of knowing the right time to sell the right thing, and his products will sell like hotcakes. The colleges in Ahmedabad get hyper about celebrating different 'days'. Now whether it is right or not, is a debatable issue, but if the managers of the Gram Haat speak to the principals of the colleges regarding the schedule of the, 'traditional day' and supply the traditional outfits prior to the 'day', students will certainly buy from the Haat.

If we can understand how to connect sales management with the demand and production, the market will certainly be able to fulfil the needs and the demands of the customers in the real sense. The workers of the Gram Haat would slowly get an idea about which market is fit for them. They should be encouraged to explore the seasonal markets. For example, in the season of pickles if they are persuaded, they would explore this market and gain many opportunities. It is my dream to lead these small-scale rural workers from huts to haats. Whenever I mention hut to haat and haat to heart, I am determined to reach the heart of the society. I want to make the 'Haat' a vibrant one and ensure that these vibrations reach the rich aristocrat hearts

of the society. The Haat will lead these aristocrat people to the huts and there would be a connection between all the classes. I want to generate a fresh energy in the society. It is a sacred act for me and a genuine help to those who want to earn their living. It is neither a favour nor an encouragement. It is recognition of the work that they have done. I wish to spread this message in all the Temples and Derasars from where it would reach most people. I urge them to start visiting these Haats so that they are not restricted to specific areas like Ellisbridge, Vasna or Karnavati but spread across Gujarat.

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Manual Workers: Assets for the Society

(At the Dedication Ceremony of the Social Security Aid and State Government Ashram and Handicapped Awards, Town Hall, Gandhinagar. June 20, 2006)

You must have noticed that it is impossible to accomplish any work without the help of the lowliest classes of the society. In India, we believe in worshipping hard work. Therefore, the lowliest of the lowly is eventually at the foundation of the society. The life stories of all the great people make one thing clear that they all had been accompanied, helped and supported by the lower classes.

We are awed by the success story of Lord Rama. We worship Him, but we have never given a single thought to how He succeeded. Yes, we all know that He accomplished His task with the help of monkeys. If it wasn't for the monkeys, it would have been very difficult for Him to get Sitaji back. The monkeys played an important role in making the bridge to Lanka. Despite being an incarnation of God Himself, Lord Rama could not find a way out without the help of the lowly monkeys. He held Shabari in highest regard, so much that His respect for her was perhaps even more than that for Kaushalya. He was as pleased to eat Shabari's tasted fruits as He was to eat Kaushalya's food. This was because His approach towards the lowly was way different than other common people. These incidents are a source of inspiration for all of us. He could have done without visiting Shabari, but He did it to teach us, to inspire us. Our history tells us the same saga. The Dalits, the Harijans and the

tribals were always at the centre of any movement that Mahatma Gandhi started. No society, no management or no power can do without the lowest sections of the society. I believe that those who genuinely belong to this country are convinced that we cannot move forward without following the same ideology. I respect all those who work hard. They represent the 'Yog' (meditation) and therefore the State Government has started the mission of recognizing and appreciating labourers with the title of 'Shramyogi'.

There is a plan called 'Shramyogi' in Gujarat. Every village has at least five families who could be called, 'Daridra Narayan'.¹ We intend to support them and enable them to rise above the poverty line. We cannot help them by just throwing food at them, but we can certainly give them opportunities to earn their own living. Our attempt is to make them self-dependent so that they can live their lives with self-respect. We should develop more such plans in our society. We helped these five families by providing them with some vegetable and fruit plants and asked them to grow these plants, sell the vegetables/fruits. We urged them to educate their children with the money that they earned so. We also explained to them the importance of family planning. We managed to make them active in the Gram Sabha. Now they have faith in life, in society. They are not marginalized untouchables. Gradually, they will gain confidence in themselves and in the society as they start mixing with other people. It is an attempt to connect the lowly, the marginalized with the mainstream society.

Gujarat is the first state that has taken responsibility for the life insurance of labourers in the non-organized sector. The state pays their insurance premium. The government has given ₹ 1,00,000 to the families of all those labourers, farm workers, and non-organized workers who have lost their only earning

1. Daridra Narayan is a term used for the poorest in the village. The term is basically a name of Lord Krishna (He being the God of the poor). By using this term for the poorest, there is an attempt to give respect to them despite their poverty.

member. We have taken this initiative because it is our duty, our responsibility. It is our true effort to help them. Gujarat is the first state that has raised the salaries of the women workers of 'Aanganwadi'. Gujarat is the only state that has provided life insurance cover to these women. It is impossible to carry out this task if it is hindered deliberately. And unfortunately, there are some people who disturb this good deed just because they are mean and devilish. It is at this point that we need to awaken the society. Our ultimate goal is to make the lower caste people strong. Gujarat is the only state where every school-going child has his own insurance. And those living below poverty line will get the most benefit of these plans, as their families will get the much-needed support during any crisis. The present Central Government doesn't belong to our party. They are always ready to throw us out of their way. And yet, even they were compelled to admit in Parliament that Gujarat has provided the highest number of employment opportunities. Moreover, it is for the first time that we have formed a board for the rural labourers. The government has taken the responsibility of the health, security and the earnings of women workers. Gujarat, at present, is enjoying industrial peace mainly because we have tried to bring about a revolution by taking ethical decisions. There are no strikes, no march to oppose any policy. We live in a healthy and intimate atmosphere. This is the greatest strength of our industrial world. If this strength is known to industrialists across the world, they all would be tempted to come to Gujarat, because the peace that you experience in Gujarat is not seen anywhere else. Other states are facing the problems of strikes, production is halted for months and eventually the companies collapse. But we have none of it in Gujarat. There is a favourable atmosphere for business in Gujarat which increases productivity. This atmosphere is mainly created by the policies of workers rather than that of the government. We must introduce this asset to the world.

Gujarat is the only state where there is least wastage of working days. We have been able to sustain this for the last five years. Not only that, but there is also a wide difference between

the first and the second number. This has been possible only because of the peaceful industrial atmosphere. We can achieve something only when every class of the society cares for and respects each other.



Equal Opportunity for Everyone

(At the inauguration of Shri Gujarat Dashnam Goswami Charitable Trust Ambaji Bhavan and the 35th Conference of the Shri Maha Gujarat Dashnam Goswami Mahamandal, Ambaji. February 22, 2004)

The Goswami community has taken up an excellent task. They live among the deprived and teach them the values and morals from the *Ramayana*. They have tried to save our culture, and have gained people's respect for centuries due to their good deeds.

Usually, a 'sadhu' has to renounce the family and the society, give up his identity, and go through many obstacles on this path. But the Goswami community is the only community where you get 'sadhutva'¹ by birth. This community has been teaching values to the society for centuries. Apart from the 'sant' (saint) tradition, they have also developed devotional music like *bhajans*, *kirtan* and *katha* of our own cultural heritage.

There was a time when it was a matter of pride to belong to a higher class. People announced with pride, 'We are equivalent to Brahmins and we are from a high class'. They would not put up with anyone who calls them anything lower than Brahmins. But the time has changed especially after independence. In pre-independent India, people struggled to show that they were from a high class family. Now, people struggle to obtain documents certifying that they are from the lower classes! Now,

1. Identity as *Sadhu*.

people wish to belong to the SC/ST section. Our progress and growth do not depend on our caste and community. Eklavya did not belong to the Pandava family; there was no chance that he could be king. And yet, his consistent efforts gave him a position equivalent to Arjuna.

On the other hand, though Ravan was an exalted king, born a Brahmin, people hate him so much that they burn his effigies even today. Ravan was neither Muslim nor Christian. But the Hindu community has always appreciated good, constructive deeds and criticized bad ones. For us what matters is our culture and values. Our society would be ruined if we were unable to save our culture.

From the time of our birth, it should be our mission to save our culture. It is an opportunity given to us by God. We need to accumulate this power within us by making our society free of bad habits, wrong trends and inferiority complexes. It is our responsibility to take our society on the right path. Everyone should get an equal opportunity to grow. It is time to move ahead, and that is possible only with the help of education. It is a matter of shame if even in the 21st century, we do not educate our daughters. We can afford to skip a meal a day, but we should educate our daughters. Our coming generation will lead happy and healthy lives only if our daughters are educated. Our words may show the presence of Goddess Saraswati, but we need to bring Her presence in our lives.

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The Foundation of Social Progress

*(On the occasion of the 2nd Group Wedding of the Samast
Bharwad Samaj, Jamnagar District. August 5, 2002)*

If society doesn't change with the time, it gets outdated and its progress stagnates. It should welcome and accept the changes. A few years ago people were against mass weddings. In spite of knowing that this is a very good option for those who cannot afford individual marriages, even the non-affording people were not ready to accept this change. The women would insist that they want to have their daughters married at their own place, and not anywhere else. Therefore, our social leaders could not put this idea into practice. But gradually the society started accepting the idea.

Then, in the next phase, people started accepting group weddings but they would still have an individual feast for their own friends and relatives. They believe that they have to pay back for all the weddings they have attended. Thus, the group wedding turned out to be completely pointless. People would sell their cattle and lands to meet the expenses of these unnecessary feasts. They need to understand that the whole purpose of group weddings was to do away with the expenses of the wedding feast. If that was not enough, they also had to spend on gifting cash and clothes to relatives. However, now they have stopped those expenses. According to me, if any of us, however affording, wants to spend more money on a wedding, should donate that money for social welfare. At least that way you would serve the society. I strongly believe that the culture that refuses to change with time remains backward.

The shepherd community is a very hard working one. They fight against all sorts of natural calamities. They are truly blessed by Lord Krishna, and we all know how capable He was! The people of this community have inherited His strength as they were his companions when He lifted the Govardhan Mountain on his little finger. This community possesses marvellous skills and abilities. They live alone in the forest, but never complain that they have to take their cattle for grazing all alone. This loneliness perhaps makes them communicate even better with their animals. These people are very sensitive and one can find a strong bonding of relationships among them. We need to understand and utilize the strengths of this community for the progress of our society.

The elderly people sitting here must remember the ancient history. Remember how people mocked the Patel community around 20-25 years ago! They called them names and made fun of them. Gradually, the society became aware of their importance. The Patel community is a perfect example to study the development of any society. They started educating their children; they discovered their own weaknesses and worked on them, and consequently they made rapid progress in a very short period of time. Today, it is quite evident that they are leading in almost every field – be it education, business or modernization of agriculture. The leaders of this community made a conscious decision to come out of their weak situation. They took the help of education and within a short time they achieved an enviable progress. It is the best example of determination and fast progress of any community in society.

By the grace of God, you have been bestowed with good culture and beautiful land. You also have enough compassion to understand the animals and the land that we live on. You have an ability to work in group, and possess the traits service and hospitality. It is important for any community to get education if they want to progress. The government wants to make sure that everyone is educated. The State Government has also taken some creative steps to encourage group weddings. We have decided to give ₹ 1000 per couple to the organizers of

the group weddings. So, in a group wedding where 105 marriages take place, the organizers are paid ₹ 1.05 lakh. We have also started another programme to eradicate the evil of dowry system. It is called, "Mata Ramabai Saat Phera Saamuhik Vivah Yojna". According to this programme, the organizers of group weddings get financial help of ₹ 10,000 per couple that participates. Apart from this, the couples also get ₹ 5,000 in the form of, "Shri Nidhi Bond". This programme was started in 2001 and by the end of 2005, ₹ 145.01 lakhs were given away for 2913 weddings. ₹ 161.85 lakhs were given away for 3617 weddings of the girls belonging to the Bakshi Panch and ₹ 59.27 lakhs were paid for 1110 weddings of young people from the scheduled tribes. If we carry on like this, we can save a lot of money which can then be utilized for the progress of our society.

Indian mothers do not believe in giving education to their daughters. They take it for granted that the girl has to take care of her husband and her in-laws anyway, so what's the point in educating her? It is my humble request to all the mothers that you must educate your daughters. The time when women were only housewives has passed. Now is the time when women work efficiently in offices. Moreover, education is vital even if they have to stay back and take care of the house. It is essential for progress, and it is the right of girls to make progress. If you don't educate your children, how will they educate their own children? Therefore, you need to educate your daughter. I will be the happiest person when I will learn about the education of the children of the shepherd community and I am sure this community can change its future in just five to ten years.

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A Stick in One Hand and a Pen in Another

*(At the occasion of Shri Valinath Zazavdadev Pran
Pratistha Ceremony, Thara. February 12, 2005)*

Religion holds an incomparable significance in our country. It inspires us to do many a noble deed but unfortunately in the last fifty years the opponents of our culture as well as religious pretenders and hypocrites have developed such a negative atmosphere that people now believe that they should avoid this path. They have started believing that saints are frauds and it is pointless to go to temples. As a result, we have neglected the power that our society has, the power that should have been used in social welfare and development after the independence. This ignorance has caused a major loss to our society.

The government spends millions to spread awareness regarding any kind of addiction. We keep on advertising that addictions ruin people's lives, cause cancer and so on. However, we do not get the desirable results. However, if the same message is given by a great saint, it has a different impact altogether. Unfortunately, our saints have lost their charm on the masses. They cannot appeal to them. We have not utilized the power of knowledge to the fullest. We ignored it because of the hypocrite secularism. Had we used this power for social welfare instead of for dirty politics, we would have got the desired result. However, it is said: Better late than never. Not only our society, but the whole country can benefit from their power. It is high time we thought about this.

The *Kumbh Mela* is organized every 12 years and the *Laghu Kumbh Mela* is organised every four years. A *Mela* (fair) is a cultural affair. And the 'Kumbh Mela' is an event where there is an opportunity to discuss social issues. It is more about self-introspection. It is union of hearts. Earlier, the fair lasted for a month during which the social, cultural and religious leaders gathered at one place, discussed the social issues and brought about solutions. I once attended a fair of the shepherd community which I would like to compare to a *Kumbh Mela*. I was gifted a stick in the fair by an elderly gentleman as a symbol of their community. I told him that if he really wanted to gift me something, I would accept the stick; but in return he would have to accept my gift of a pen. I explained to them that times are changing. It is vital to take up the pen and start education seriously. You can change the lives of your children by gifting them a pen. You can change the future of the new generation.

Education demands sagacity, which shepherds naturally have. It is very important that they make genuine use of their wisdom and educate themselves and their children. Therefore, I told him that they will have to accept the pen if they want to gift a stick. Those who do not want to abandon their old profession (stick), can do so. They can have their stick in one hand and the pen in another. It is extremely important to make progress in the society in the twenty-first century. Society needs to change for the better. And for that, we need to rise above the trivial comparisons with others and avoid unnecessary expenses.



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Education will Lead to a Social Revolution

(Get-together for the Choudhary community, Rajpur, Vadnagar. January 2, 2005)

Though I haven't read much about this, I presume that the Choudhary community would definitely have been blessed with strong leadership which directed this community towards cattle-rearing. But then this also brings one's attention towards the scarcity of water in north Gujarat where most of the cattle-bearers are from the Choudhary community.

The leaders of Choudhary community had perhaps foreseen the requirement of cattle-rearing in their region and culture. Even though a family has land for their own use, can it produce enough grain for the family? Cattle-rearing might have become part of their social obligation during the middle-ages in order to help fulfil family needs and income. The double income in the family would thus enable the community not only to live with dignity, but also to prove their prowess in cattle-rearing. As a result, cattle-rearing emerged as a huge business, bigger even than agriculture. The two large dairies that have come up in Banaskantha and Mehsana are evidence of this.

Bringing Consensus to Villages

Those who do not know the strength of Gujarat attempt to bring disgrace to it. Gujarat had a program called 'Tirthgram',

under which villages which did not have any quarrels, disputes, or police involvement in solving such cases would be given rupees one lakh by the State Government for its development. One cannot change society by merely complaining that existing systems are useless. Instead, why don't we try to bring about change and implement it to make a difference? This scheme of the Gujarat Government has proved successful and today we have thousands of such villages where no dispute has been unresolved since the last five-ten years. In my opinion, this is remarkable. Imagine the level of sophistication of a society where even a small dispute has not been left unresolved! Gujarat has the strength to show its calibre thus to the world. This is the strength of the five crores people of the state! This is the power of our unity!

Literacy Plans

Crores of rupees have been (mis)allocated towards adult education in the past few years. I deliberately use this word because officers have been hired and NGOs have been set up for the sake of adult education in the past. But there is no documentary evidence to show exactly how many adults actually received education. Hence, we have initiated the, 'Sakshardeep Programme', for education in Gujarat. I suggest that just as doctors offer their honorary services to hospitals after they complete their graduation, in the same way teachers who have passed their P.T.C. or B.Ed. can also serve the society. As an experiment, we took two villages – Radhanpur and Santalpur – where the Choudhary community is predominant. We sent our P.T.C. and B.Ed. students to teach the local villagers at these places for fifteen days. The Sarpanch arranged for their food and stay. This 15-day programme, inclusive of two days of travelling turned out to be immensely successful. We saw several women above the age of forty as well as elderly people joining this programme.

Today, these women (and men) read boards of the state transport buses, newspaper headlines, and their own names. The illiterate could now write their own addresses, and the names of their families; the religious ones have started writing names of God. This has generated an atmosphere of enthusiasm. I have recently got a survey done and found that the success rate of such programmes is 57%. This is how we can say even through the contribution of B.Sc., P.T.C. and B.Ed. students alone, we can bring about a huge revolution.

Obviously, educated individuals achieve more progress and respect in society, whereas the illiterate face many problems. Their dependence on others is acute, and when such help is unavailable, it becomes a problem for them.

It is shameful that people of our state are illiterate. Illiteracy brings disgrace to our society. Many efforts are being made to educate our people and remove this mark of disgrace. Our government has started the 'Sakshartadeep' programme since the last three years. Children between six and fourteen years will get free and mandatory education. Not only this, but people between 15 and 35 years of age will also get adult education under this programme. Till date we have been able to educate 26.75 lakh illiterate people in the state, out of which 16.25 lakh are women. This is a huge achievement of the 'Sakshartadeep' programme.

Tirth Gram and Pavan Gram

Majority of the Indian population lives in villages. In other words, the real India is found in villages only. The love and social warmth found in villages is rarely found in the cities. In order to preserve village traditions and strengthen unity and mutual cooperation among citizens of generations to come, the State Government has introduced the plan of Tirth Gram and Pavan Gram. Under this plan, villages that are free from social evils and addictions and have a zero crime rate in the last five years will be declared as Tirth Gram and villages that achieve

this for three years will be declared as Pavan Gram. These villages are also required to have high levels of cleanliness, girls' education and low school dropout rate. There should not be any use, sale or production of intoxicants in these villages and there should be a system of solving social problems through mutual discussions. Villages selected as Tirth Gam will be paid cash incentive of rupees one lakh and those selected as Pavan Gram would get rupees fifty thousand. From 2004-05 to January 2007, a total of 408 villages have been declared as Tirth Gram.

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A Tradition of Bravery

(Gathering of the Rajput Community, Jamnagar)

All of us Indians uphold a tradition of sacrifice and generosity. We are never overtly possessive about the things we have. When we first created the Atom Bomb, we had to repeatedly explain to the world that it was solely for self-defence and not to attack anyone; yet they were not able to trust our expertise. We have a thousand year old tradition of sacrifice – for saving others and saving our values. I doubt if any other nation in the world has such a rich heritage, and we are proud of it.

Let me give you a pertinent example: When our country attained freedom and was attempting to become an integrated democracy, numerous kings gave everything they had for sake of the unity and integrity of our country. This says it all.

I believe that the heritage of different traditions is present in every society, and it comes only by God's grace. Each society however gets at least one chance to prove its heritage. The heritage of royalty is evident when people from royal families must pass through different kinds of training in order to develop their qualities. As they grow, they are tested to see if the training has been properly cultivated.

I know how difficult it is to leave a position of power. We are supposed to govern the state for five years but it is tough to leave the position after two years if we are made to do so. Though our forefathers have not claimed this position nor have we inherited it, it still becomes difficult for us to give up power.

I salute those royal kings and emperors who honoured their traditions and sacrificed their kingdoms as well as all of their belongings for the sake of our nation. What a magnanimous sacrifice this has been!

We often talk about Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and the Kshatriyas. It is wonderful that the son of a Patel family sought something and the Rajput kings offered him everything they had. Of course, this is not a matter of caste discrimination. But have you ever realized that the Rajput royalty might show their readiness to sacrifice their kingdoms to other Rajputs or to someone from another Royal family, but not to a 'Patel'? The point is that after all we all are Indians. So we need not discriminate. But what is wrong if a region is sacrificed for the sake of the nation? In fact, we should be proud that we have always learnt lessons from our history, we get inspiration and ability from our past. No culture can ever progress by forgetting or ignoring its history. Why do we still remember "Ram Rajya"? What makes us wish to have an administration like, "Ram Rajya"? It is because we have always had a tradition of prosperity and goodness. Hence, we would like to continue this tradition forever.

Did you notice the specialty of our nation? Many invaders attacked our country; apart from ruling it, more importantly, they also tried to influence our culture. It was alright if they merely ruled our country but when they began to influence our culture, the soul of the nation awoke. There was a rising. Consequently, those who had conquered the whole world were defeated so badly in India that they could not even return to their homelands. The only reason behind this is our amazing culture and tradition. With a *Quran*, in one hand and a sword in another, those who had dreamt of painting India green, were not successful.

Here is something I would like to share with you that will make you feel proud to be an Indian: there is a certain tradition in the 'Jam,' community. Generally, a 'Brahmin' puts a 'Tilak' on the forehead of a king. But in this community, this duty is performed by the son of a Dalit woman. It is a remarkable

tradition! I think every Indian should be aware of such rare traditional customs. Our society can learn much from such examples. Unfortunately, I don't know the people who set this tradition. Had I known this I would propagate the story to each and every nook and cranny of our nation.



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The Devipujak Community – Worshipping the Goddess

*(Gathering of the Devipujak Community, Bedipara,
Rajkot. February 8, 2004)*

I have worked in different regions of Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab and Chandigarh before coming to Gandhinagar. I have learnt through my work and interaction with people that we all have a very strong tendency to succumb to temptation, no matter how much we talk about sacrifice. I used to often crave for Gujarati food when I lived there. Unfortunately, all I got was Punjabi food. There was only one place where I would get Gujarati food, and that was at the homes of members of the Devipujak community settled there.

I visit Ludhiana whenever I travel to Punjab. There are quite a few Gujaratis in Ludhiana. One of our workers who lived there used to insist on my having lunch at his place. I explained to them that since I hardly get Gujarati food here, I truly relish it at the residences of my fellow Devipujak brothers. These are the people who worship the Mother Goddess. I have seen two communities which I would like to discuss here. One is the Sindhi community and the other is the Devipujak community which worships the Goddess. After the partition of India, the Sindhis had no place to settle down. They had left their native land, were left homeless, and yet I am sure you have never seen a Sindhi begging. You will find them selling peppermints or roasted *papads*, if worse comes to them, but never begging.

Nature of Society

Another admirable community is the Devipujak community, which is primarily a business community. You can find women from this community selling dry fruits or handicrafts anywhere in Chandni Chowk or at Connaught Place in Delhi. They have English-speaking customers too, and though they do not know English, they have the ability to sell their wares to the English-speaking buyers and even saying ‘thank you’ to them.

This is their potential. Business runs in their blood. Whenever these people get a chance to progress they have always grabbed the opportunity. It is as if they have a divine grace to fight against odds. Small religious disputes in Shahpur are part of their day-to-day lives, but I have never found them complaining. They are strong enough to tolerate all these problems. They never ask for anything from others.

But I want to demand something from them. This community has never begged from anyone but today the Chief Minister of Gujarat wants to beg for something from them. I will demand only if these people assure me that they will give me what I ask for. My demand is that, no matter how tough it is, no matter how difficult it is, please do educate the girls of your community. I should not find any girl in this society uneducated. We often request people to educate the girls in their community, but the reason for not doing so is that they don’t want their women to take up jobs. They want their women to work in farms and look after cattle or sell vegetables. “Why should we educate them?”, they ask. But the fact is that education is not only for taking up a job. Times have changed. If we want a strong foundation for the entire Devipujak community, we need educated daughters.

The Status of Women

The position a woman holds in the Devipujak community is remarkable. This community never takes their disputes to court even today. They form a group of judges who stand in a circle drinking their cups of tea, holding their sticks in their

hands, and listen to the problem in order to come to a verdict. I often used to observe them as a novice in my younger days. The way they talk and argue, the way they cite the rules of their society are truly interesting. There is a village near Manali in Himachal Pradesh, which is the only village where women are judges. People from across the world have written about this. When I visited Himachal Pradesh I found people talking about this. I told my friends from Himachal that they have failed to publicize this practice. I told them about our Devipujak community where even today, justice is administered by women, not men. In the absence of a single lady member of the *Panch*, the decisions taken by the other eleven are considered null and void. Till the lady member of the *Panch* approves any decision taken by the remaining members, it is not considered valid.

The ultimate judgment of the court is in the hands of women. This shows the path of progress of this community. Women have such fame and power! Women play such a significant role in the development of society! I would think that women can be the source of power not only within their own community, but for our whole society if they are educated. They can serve the country better.

Thus, this Devipujak community, with an acute business acumen, courage and thrift, can develop by leaps and bounds if they are given the opportunity of education.

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Change in Social Constructs

*(All Gujarat Tailors' Gathering, Ahmedabad.
December 16, 2001)*

Society is changing rapidly. There was a time when people did not feel embarrassed to say that they are backward. But time has changed now. Competition has set in and is now demolishing backwardness from society. A pertinent question we need to ask is if there is anybody at all who will remain to claim benefits meant for the non-backward classes of society. It is true that if people who are meant to receive benefits fail to do so, then the government needs to step in.

There are very few people in society who help to unite others. How wholesome and good is a society that unites its people! What would we do if there was no system within society? Those who put in their efforts to unite others are doing an exemplary task.

The Basic Problem of Society

How can a society make its progress? A long time ago, I had a guest from Rajkot who visited me early in the morning. He was dressed quite shabbily. If you had to see him dressed the way he was, you might prevent him from entering your premises! On the other hand, if somebody is dressed well and enters someone's premises nobody dares to even question him. Such is human nature. Hard work is not respected. If we have a guest who is well dressed inquiring about somebody or something, not only do we welcome him, but we would also

offer to help him. But if there is a *rickshaw puller* at our doorstep inquiring about somebody, we simply ignore him. Or we may tell him to come again later. Both, the well-dressed person and the rickshaw puller are strangers to us, but we welcome the well-dressed person and reject the person who is not. The underlying reason is that our reactions are dictated by the occupations of the people.

We don't hesitate to shake hands with a well-dressed person, even though he may be completely idle. We respect a well-dressed idle person but we hesitate to shake hands with a hardworking, honest man. We cannot unite society and solve the problem of discrimination till we learn to take this seriously. It is impossible to create a homogeneous society until we inculcate a feeling of fellowship.

We are living in a society where it is easy to earn bread and butter, but difficult to gain respect and education. However, education is the biggest tool for further development. Why do we take so much pain to educate our sons and ignore our daughters? Mahatma Gandhi said that if we educate a boy, we are educating only one person, but if a girl gets educated, the entire family becomes literate. We appreciate and honour those who educate girls, those who have put their efforts behind women's education. Our primary motive should be to prepare the new generation so as to bring our society forward.

We need to prepare our youth to take charge of social upliftment. Society is surely going to benefit from such a collective effort. We should take stock of the progress achieved in the field of education, because, after all, the development of society depends on education.

In the past in our society, caste and community might have been the central forces. In the past, there used to be the consideration of economics behind sticking to marriages within the same caste. Suppose the daughter of a potter marries a potter, she doesn't need to learn how to knead the clay. She can become part of the economical arrangement of her family. Similarly, if the daughter of a tailor gets married to a tailor, there is no need to teach her stitching and attaching buttons on clothes. She

already knows, and can therefore easily join her new family in their work. Things have changed now. We need to make changes in our society as time is changing. Besides, we also need to accept the changes taking place in our society. It was fine to think about marriages only within the community about 15-20 years ago. But the situation is different today and we have to accept this change wholesomely, wholeheartedly.



Group Weddings: A Novel Revolution

*(Group Marriage organized by the Visnagar Taluka
Thakor Community. May 11, 2003)*

I have been brought up in close contact with the 'Thakor' community. I have seen and experienced poverty. I know the meaning of sorrow. Our new generation feels that we can uplift our society by merely supporting it. The more we support it, the more it will be uplifted. But is support the only thing that is needed? Don't we need to grow as well? It is heartening that we are all determined to uplift the entire society, and not only some selected people. This shows that we are on the right path, the path of strength. No society anywhere in the world has ever made progress with the help of politicians. Progress is only achieved through social unity, the pro-active willingness of society, and making a positive change in society.

Group weddings are a strong step in the right direction to keep the society healthy. A newly-wed couple might be getting around 15 thousand rupees worth of gifts in cash and kind from different relatives. Let us assume that there are a hundred and one weddings in different families. We can see how their relatives rush around in hectic activity for six to eight days. If we count the bus and train fares of the relatives and the amount of money which the father of a bride has to spend on a wedding, it might add up to lakhs of rupees. We can save so much of money by arranging group weddings. We can save many hectares of land which is mortgaged for the sake of the wedding, and we can stop the vicious cycle of paying interest. I am sure we are all aware of how debt can make the debtor sleepless.

There is power in a group decision. If you want to see this power, take the example of the Thakor community who arrange such marriages. Often elders create hindrances when we plan group marriages. They tend to think that they know best, and that the modern methods are not really the way of life that they have seen. They believe that if they have been invited by people in society for a marriage or a meal, it becomes imperative for them to invite those people as well. Thus, they plan for feast. In case people cannot afford such unnecessary expenses, they feel low about themselves and avoid joining the celebrations. Actually, it is not that those who join group weddings are poor, but rather they emerge as superior. Merely sitting at a high position in society doesn't make person superior. Money is not the only criterion to judge supremacy! If a person is happy with the prosperity of society, if he is filled with grief at the problems of society, then such a person is indeed superior.

A New Trend which Deserves to be Congratulated

It is difficult to leave supremacy. People who have left their supremacy and tried to match their steps with society should be congratulated, especially if they have set a trend while being with the society. Many times, it happens that after attending such group marriages our friends and relatives expect to get treat from us as they have treated us in the past. Our society can't afford this. We cannot afford to arrange such parties twice. I request those 101 couples who are getting married at this group wedding to convince their parents from abstaining to do so. If you have a strong desire to arrange other feasts, there will be many good occasions in the future when it can be done. Our State Government is encouraging the efforts made to stop such unnecessary expenses so that a resolution can be brought to our society. This is an effort of the government to support the downtrodden who would otherwise incur huge debts and ruin their lives forever.

Our society has started accepting inter-caste and group marriages. This change is not for bringing about a revolution in society. This is to bring a rejuvenation to expand society and

also to grow mentally which is a natural process. More than financial, there is social consciousness through group weddings. Inter-caste marriages widen the horizons of the society. Union of different societies can be a strong pillar of social homogeneity. Our State Government encourages both these activities by providing financial support. Modern generation has been instrumental in making our society strong and homogeneous. Newly married couples become determined and responsible due to such efforts of society. People become more receptive to society, become selfless and gradually start thinking for the welfare of society.

Those are two reasons why our society is backward. The first one is a lack of education and another is our traditional rituals imposed by society itself. We have a natural tendency to surrender them. This leads to a situation of perpetual debt. In fact, we are digging our own graves. The upper strata of society will develop brotherly feelings for the lower strata of the society if there is social homogeneity. In this way, the lower strata of society will put their efforts to develop themselves and liberate themselves from obsolete customs. They will create an elite society. If the leaders of backward communities take initiatives they can produce better results than the government itself.



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If a Snake can be Tamed, Why can't a Son?

*(Kanyakelaoni Rathyatra, Village Nandanvan,
Madarivas, Meghraj Taluka, Sabarkantha. June 16, 2004)*

Imagine an ordinary man – Mohanbhai. He is very poor and has not fed his children for the past three days. Wouldn't we feel pity for them? Wouldn't we sigh and say 'Alas! Mohanbhai's children haven't eaten anything since three days'? Would we not wonder at their poverty? It is exactly this intensity of pain that we ought to feel when we hear of a child who has not received education. Illiteracy is such a pitiable situation. How can somebody not have education? We cannot make a difference in society unless we feel such intense pain on hearing about lack of education.

We are making all efforts to see that education is given top priority and children begin learning. I think that once girls begin learning, boys will be motivated on their own, without further persuasion. If girls are being educated, the boys might think, why should we be left out?

Without education, in spite of having everything, we will lose it all. Tribal women have been living a backward life since ages; they have probably spent most part of their lives amidst snakes and mongooses. And yet, don't even these women feel that they should be educated. Wouldn't all women wish to be educated? If one asks them, I am sure they would reply in the affirmative, that it would be better to be educated. They would certainly feel that had their parents educated them, they would

have a much better quality of life, rather than carry the heavy burden of being uneducated.

Would you want to be blamed by your children for not educating them? No parents wish that their children blame them for not giving education. Education is the demand of our times.

On the first day at school, children cry and scream when they leave the arms of their parents. They yell and wail, and refuse to go to school. The same thing happens when you try to give children medicines when they are ill. And yet, does any mother say that it is okay if her child does not take medicines? A mother is, after all, a mother. She somehow persuades her child to take medicines in some or the other way. She knows that her child will not get well if he/she does not take his/her medicines.

In the same way, if a child cries while going to school, the mother must be strong and somehow persuade the child to go to school. Perhaps, one of the parents might have to wait outside the school for a whole week. But this one week is a small price to pay for a lifelong education. And a week or ten days later, parents will be surprised to see how children crave to go to school. They will find themselves trying to convince the child on a Sunday that the school is closed and the teacher will not be there!

This task is not very difficult for our tribal brothers. If they can train snakes and mongooses, then I am sure they can well train their own children too. It is my humble request to you all that we should educate our daughters, because this will benefit the entire family.

Tribal people have lived a backward life for years. They used to cover the ceilings of their huts with plastic, for instance. But nowadays they have nice houses provided by the State Government. Along with feeling of satisfaction that this change brings, we also have an expectation from them. It is their responsibility to grow trees around the house. They should do something to make their houses more beautiful. Isn't this a small favour to ask from them?

One fine day they will say that the Chief Minister, has given us houses but no trees around it. It has become fashionable to blame others these days. If we provide utensils, people ask us for food to fill those utensils. Let us change this scenario. Let us make our house beautiful with a feeling of ownership.

Our entire area should be filled with so much greenery that everyone would want to see it and enjoy it. If we are determined, we can get these things done. Try to bring about a change in your life by starting with your locality, and you will certainly find changes in your life. For example, if there is a nice school that has been set up in your locality, you should determine to grow a tree in the campus of the school. In fact, let every household take an oath to grow one tree in the school campus nearby. Why should we not have trees? After all, it is our own children who are going to benefit from its shade! How beautiful the school will look with a green campus! We can't uplift our nation without accepting our social responsibility. This is our effort to bring awareness. Society should find its own way by its own strength and use this strength to find new directions.

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Poor Welfare Fair: Service to Humanity

The commencement of the poor welfare fairs is looked forward to not only by the poor but also other people. A section of the society is about to think how to start good governance in the country after independence. We have attained *Swaraj* (independence), we must get *Suraj* (good governance) too; some people have been thinking on these lines. Much has been thought and contemplated by a large section of the society, not only in Gujarat, but in the whole country. Brothers, the government schemes are always good, but at times, the desirable outcomes are not realized so far as they are related to benefit the last man in the queue, because the scheme is not implemented properly. No such way could be found in over sixty years of independence despite a great thought involved in it. How far these poor welfare fairs can assist in good governance, these fairs can become an illustration for study.

I was in Delhi just two days ago. I met the workers and officials of several states there – senior administrative officers, several chief ministers, administrative officers of Government of India. All of them wondered what these poor welfare fairs were. How did I succeed in delivering so much of money to the lowest people? All of them enquired about all this. I used to say in my speeches that I would hold 50 poor welfare fairs, would reach 25 lakh families and a great amount of 15,000 crores rupees would be disbursed. However, when in Delhi, I was being asked about this. I telephoned my office in Gandhinagar and asked them to provide me exact data because people were enquiring

about all this. When I saw those data, I too was surprised. It was because of the reason that I used to sum up all those things at 15,000 crores rupees, but now the data revealed that about 26,000 crores rupees had been disbursed in the poor welfare fairs. This simply meant that when the concept of the poor welfare fairs was propagated, different departments felt that they too could contribute in them; that was, a type of competition took root among different departments. Every department decided to do better than the other departments. Even the tehsils competed with one another. If one *tehsil* assisted 1000 people, the other vowed to assist 1200 people. The districts too competed in this. Surendranagar is a large district, if it does so much, then we would do this much. If Dang district does this much, we would do so much. Every district administration set down in the competition how it could do better in the poor people's welfare.

The poor welfare fair has created a competitive environment for service. When one district compares itself with another in order to assist a larger number of people and implements a large number of schemes, nothing could be like this fine situation. Earlier, the officials ran about six days a week, but now they have started to work seven days a week in order to make the concept of poor welfare fairs a success. Sometimes they returned home late at night; sometimes they chose to stay at the place to work. The entire administration set a great example by holding the people's programme in the form of the poor welfare fairs.

You have undergone an experience of over sixty years: has any government ever asked you about your pleasure and sorrow? Even a single individual must not have experienced this. You must be looking forward to such a situation. No one seems to have bothered about you, and you have just become habituated of it. You have come to think that nothing can be done whether someone enquires of you or not. You must have heard several family members speak in the poor welfare fairs. You must have got an opportunity to listen to the beneficiaries here. These beneficiaries say that a wonderful environment has

been created here in which the administration steps ahead to care about them. I don't think this has happened due to the poor welfare fairs. I have been thinking about this since the day you assigned me this post.

Recently, while handing over a cart to a peanut-gram-seller, I asked, "What did you do until now?" He said, "Sir, I was a daily wage-earner and thought that I would one day start selling peanut-gram when I had money." I said, "Now you have the cart, how do you plan to work?" He said that he would borrow peanut and gram from a wholesale trader and pay him up in the evening. Now I am about to tell my officers to ensure that this man gets peanut-gram from the trader. Is he pushed around when he stands outside a school? Does he sell good quality peanut and gram? I have to go after the common man in order to make him self-dependent. You visit a doctor for medicine, and he asks if you have benefited by the medicine he gave you, doesn't he? He will ask if you take medicine on time and in required quantity. I too think this way. I ask the people who have been benefited by these poor welfare fairs if they are being benefited. Are they able to run their life well? Do they need anything more? An individual who wishes to progress by his hard work, I will cooperate with him in every way, so that he does not stagnate there. If we have given a buffalo to an individual, I confirm it from the dairy-owners he supplies the milk or not. We have to help them, have a good quality buffalo, and I am doing my bit to do all these things. I have to reach the good outcomes.

You must have noticed that the people keep visiting the houses of leaders and officers for the BPL card; they need it. Even those people need it who are financially strong. The BPL card is okay when one is economically weak, as if the BPL card is not a card, but a Padma Bhushan, and to get it, people make all possible efforts, proper or improper, just or unjust. Today I am grateful. The purpose of the poor welfare fair has been realized. It so happened that I was at Pardi, a tribal belt in Valsad district. It is an area inhabited by fishermen. They are middle class people of ordinary standard. If you visit there, you will

find that they are like Radhanpur, Santalpur, Harija and other villages; with the only difference that this area is green due to availability of water. A 28-30-year-old youth ascended the stage and said, "Sir, I have something to say." The officers felt that somebody with a black flag had mounted the stage. I asked him, "What is the matter?" I stopped the officers and asked them to allow the young man to speak up. He said, "Sir, please do one thing. Get my name struck off the BPL card. Just think that there was a young man who did not want his name in the BPL card. It appeared to me that he was somewhat insane. All people, not only the poor, but also the resourceful, want the BPL card, and there is this young man, on the other hand, who was behaving just the other way round. I asked him, "Brother, why?" He came before the mike and said, "I am an ordinary young man earning my livelihood in the village. I have no land. I go to the places where there are held music programmes, I beat the drum, play the *tabla*, and then I learnt to play the band; I have learnt all that. The government aided me with one lakh rupees, and now I have a band party of my own. Now, I get a lot of work in the surrounding villages where I play the band. People send their vehicles, tractors and trolleys to fetch my team, and the income of all of us – mine and my team of 15 members' – has risen so much that we don't want to be in the BPL any more. This government gave us one lakh rupees, and now we all are above the poverty line." What a great vitality this poor welfare fair has created – it was a burning example of just that.

Dang district is the least developed in the whole of India. No one wishes to go there. If somebody is sent there, he thinks that it is like a punishment posting for him. The tribal sisters there gave me a sum of ₹ 31,000 rupees for girl education. The tribal sisters, who have no footwear on their feet, who look quite ordinary, gave us ₹ 31,000 for girl education! I asked one sister how educated she was. She said, "We are not literate, but now we want the girls to get education, so we have come to you to give this money." This is the finest example of expressing social awareness.

What type of inspiration this poor welfare fair gives the society! When a large industrial house undertakes some social

work, it colours newspapers, pages after pages, singing its eulogy. I would like to say to the officials of the industrial institutions that they should look towards the poor people who are now aware to do something for the society, that too, without a desire for making it known, without desiring anything in return. Go and look at the work they are doing and find for yourself the type of environment that prevails in the society. I have a new idea how the leaders in the industrial field should carry out their social responsibility, and how their responsibility should be determined by which some new scheme for the welfare of the poor can be chalked out. The scheme should be such by which definite outcome can be realized, by which the aspiration of the society's all-round development can be attained.

I can clearly see three important factors to fight poverty – first education, second evil habits arising out of situation and difficulties, and third indebtedness due to suffering. I feel eternal pain and pity so far as education is concerned. I am pained at the situation prevailing in the whole tribal areas, whether it is Ambaji or Santalpur, I have to take up the task of protecting this area from illiteracy, and I have put people on this work. Education is a powerful tool to fight with poverty. I asked a brother, who came to meet me recently, "The government is helping you in every way, what will you do for me?" He said, "I am a poor man, what can I do for you?" I said, "Do one thing for me, educate your children. This is my work that you should do." Tears flowed down his eyes, and he promised that he would educate his children. Therefore, I urge in this welfare fair that you must educate your offspring, we have to be concerned so that they study.

The second factor is the evil habit that destroys the entire family – drinking, smoking and addiction to opium. A girl is prevented from marrying. Just an evil turns a house into hell. An addict does not move from his place until his addiction has been quenched. I have to bring these people out of their evil habits, I have to save them. The elderly women in the family spend two-three rupees in sniff. If this money is used for the

child's milk, the people of Gujarat will be healthier tomorrow. The government is ready to do everything for you in this poor welfare fair, but I want something in return too. This Chief Minister demands that when you leave from this poor welfare fair, you must give me a promise, that is, you have given your addiction to the Chief Minister. If you do this, you will be sure that your family will rise above poverty, and I will be responsible for it. I am begging you for this so that you can become emancipated from poverty in order to lead a happy life; therefore, I have come to beg of you of an addiction.

If there is an obstacle in fighting against poverty, it is nothing but debt. In order to show the family honour to the neighbours and relatives, and to show off in the society, people borrow money on high rates of interest, sometimes they mortgage the mother's and sister's jewellery, even land, even children; and then starts the vicious cycle by which they keep paying the interest any how while the principal amount remains where it was. Many lives are destroyed in this.

I have to free these poor families from the burden of this debt. For this purpose, the State Government has started a massive campaign. The Sakhi Mandals have been set up by sisters in villages, and all sisters come together to contribute money in them – one rupee, five rupees, ten rupees, fifty rupees, hundred rupees and thus, they add upon a capital; they save money and keep accounts themselves. Their savings are added upon by the government many times over, and the bank helps them get this amount. Gradually, the Sakhi Mandals have started to undertake larger enterprises. Just now I handed over six lakh rupees to one Sakhi Mandal and 1.25 lakh rupees to another. I asked them what they would do of the money. They said that they would give this money to the people at a little interest to the needy after due verification in order to make them self-dependent economically. This is a scheme to bring them out of poverty.

This savings campaign is still on. There are over 1.25 lakh Sakhi Mandals working in the whole state, they are in each *tehsil* and district, and the government has assigned 400 crore rupees

to them. I visited Dahod recently. The Sakhi Mandal there manages a fund of one crore rupees. In four years from this golden jubilee year, this amount is estimated to rise to 1000 crore from 400 crore rupees. It is our goal to get all people of Gujarat free from debts. This welfare fair is the festival of eradication of interest-hungry people.

Normally, I am quite a useless person so far as politics is concerned. In fact, had I been a person eligible for politics, these poor welfare fairs would not have been organised. When elections are round the corner, when you need votes from the people, when you need to misguide people, and when an environment has to be created to make appear something that would beget votes, such schemes should be run; but now, when it is not the time of elections, when we need nothing from the people in return, and when the government holds this type of programmes in order to display its commitment to fight against poverty, it shows its true intentions, else we too must aim at elections. If you hold such programmes at the time of elections, it would be better, else people would forget all about these. The poor are used the most to fill the ballot-boxes. The ballot-boxes have removed many leaders. There are numerous people who fill their pockets in the name of the poor, but what have the poor people got? The ballot-boxes of the leaders have been filled to the brim, but the poor have got nothing but death and destruction. But this welfare fair of mine is a tool to free you from all this. Narendra Modi is the longest serving Chief Minister in Gujarat, a person who got an opportunity to serve you in the capacity of the Chief Minister for 3,000 days, you must have read such things. When an individual gets to serve people for 3,000 days, it is time for celebration, to beat drums, to blow into pipes, to distribute sweets, to welcome with garlands, to distribute sweets. Just think over and tell if all such things should happen or not. But we have not done all this, nor have we allowed it to happen. I said that the period of 3,000 days that I got to serve people, how did I get it? Due to whom I got it? I got this opportunity to serve people for 3,000 days with their blessings. Had the people not blessed us for this, I would

not have got an opportunity to serve you even for three days. However, when we realize the people's expectations, it begets us amazing bliss and joy. Therefore, it is an opportunity when, in place of honouring the Chief Minister, I should go to people and bow before them, to honour them, to express my gratitude and to display my indebtedness to them, and there cannot be a greater, more significant, more proud moment for me, and due to this, I have thought about something. I have an idea. Gujarat is about to be 50 years old, it is the time for silver anniversary; and on the other hand, it is the opportunity when you have taken work from this Chief Minister for 3,000 days. Therefore, I have blended the two occasions in order to chalk out a scheme. The pride of 3,000 days can be achieved only when on the occasion of Gujarat completing its 50 years of existence, there are held fifty poor welfare fairs in each district of Gujarat, and these should be instrumental in providing direct aid to the poor.

A number of schemes are made, they are kept in view. Newspapers carry their news with big photographs too. You must have seen all this. There are television shots, followed by interviews, and a lot of hailing, and then, nobody knows what happens to them all. A child takes food daily, but if this food is not giving nutrition to his body, what use is that food? The parents would automatically worry about it. I too feel such a thing. Such a large budget, so much of money is spent on all this, but why has the condition of our poor people not changed? Why is his body not growing? There is certainly some shortcoming, and this cannot be made up by speeches. We will have to locate its remedy, and when we went about it, we inferred that we ourselves should go to the poor, so that they are given the things due to them, only this would bring about a change in their condition. You listen to the speeches delivered by leaders, politicians and government representatives, and you also come across different types of orders and commands that they issue, but the moot question is: what is the truth?

The President of the state unit of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Gujarat said one thing. Ask any two editors of newspapers, any two senior journalists, the district magistrate,

the member of Parliament, member of Legislative Assembly, the leader of the panchayat, and such other 50 respectable individuals, and ask them that what should be done when a sewing machine has to be given to a poor widowed woman, and what she should do to get that machine. You write what all things should be done, and anyone who writes it properly will get ten marks upon ten. I can say in all confidence that, despite the status of the respondent, whether he be a journalist, a news editor who tends to split every strand of hair that can be found in news, an honourable member of Parliament, a Minister, a panchayat leader or an administrative officer, all of them will be given zero out of ten. None of them will know how a widowed woman can draw pension or get a sewing machine, how she can get the application, how she can fill it, where she has to submit it and where she has to sign. They don't know what all things she needs to do to get that pension or sewing machine. When such great educated people know nothing about this, how do you expect of a poor woman to know all this how to get government aid?

From this situation, the only inference that can be drawn is the fact that a government official should visit her house, and not the other way round where people have to search for the government. It will be like the raining of nectar. Sometimes, it so happens that the government scheme occurs within the confines of the government, while the poor man remains within his confine, and there are middlemen, with satchels at their sides; these are the people who approach the poor people. Often when the dead body is yet to reach the cremation ground, and the widowed woman is yet to remove her bangles, that the middleman reaches her house, and commands her to sign here and he promises to get her 500 rupees, with a promise to take 100 rupees as the commission. He will tell that if she needs a house under the Sarda Avas Yojna for which she is eligible to get 40,000 rupees, he promises to help her provided he gets a commission of 5,000 rupees. These worldly-wise middlemen have tricked people during the sixty years of independence, they have exploited them in every way. Therefore, there should

not be any middleman now. It is a government scheme, and you are eligible for it. It is a budget which has been made with the public fund. Therefore, every paise of the fund should be utilized for the poor people's welfare, this money should be delivered at the poor man's house; and this is the reason that the government itself has approached the poor man's house.

I discussed this scheme with all government officials right from a peon to a collector, and then they all went to all villages, small and big, they went house-to-house, and found out where this scheme was needed the most. They went round seven tehsils and concluded that 32,000 people should be given the benefit of this scheme, those 32,000 beneficiaries meant 32,000 families, who are eligible to get government aid. Today under this tent, in the presence of thousands of people and television cameras, a big sum of 30 crore will be disbursed among these poor people.

If a poor person has no house to live, no place to keep his feet, where can he go then? There is a government scheme by which a poor homeless person should be given a plot of land for a house, but a poor man has to suffer much to get that plot; he just keeps sending applications after applications, all to no avail. Therefore, we have decided that we should set out to search for the poor people who are homeless, and then give them the plots, and let us start a campaign for this purpose. If the government has no land, then it should specify land in the villages. If required, private land should be acquired to allot to these homeless people. I am proud to say that all the plots given to the poor people ever since the State of Gujarat came into being in 1960, fall short of the number of plots that are being allotted in this one month, and it is no trivial matter.

You are well aware of the value of land. The brothers in a family fight over half a foot of land, they may go to any extent for this, cracks may appear in the village, and we are aware that all this is due to the value of land. Land is very powerful in life. It amounts to billions of rupees, friends. If you calculate the value of land that the government has allotted to the poor people, it would come to billions of rupees. When I started to make deeds for land, my friends in the Congress filed a writ

petition in the Supreme Court that I am allotting land to the poor people in order to entrench myself in politics and that I should be checked from doing so. They have filed a case against me. The court cannot give me a higher sentence than capital punishment, let it come, what's new in it? After all, this will happen for the welfare of the poor, what can be a greater thing to do in life? The Government of Gujarat has started to allot the land to the poor tribals, and it is being done as a campaign. The idea behind all this is that the poor tribal people should become self-dependent.

The daughter in a poor family has grown young, and the father has to marry her off, but there are no means at home; what should he do? Should the poor girl remain unmarried all her life? You will be happy to know that the State Government keeps all records of the poor girls, and bears all marriage expenses. The government also allots funds for group marriages. If your daughter is married but she has no house to live, then the government makes scheme to give her a house too; if she has no source of livelihood, then the government makes provisions through the Sakhi Mandals. The government is concerned that a poor person is not forced to live a life of penury. It has given pension to a sister who gets widow, but she has not been forgotten about after giving her a pension; rather she is given training in order to cultivate some talent in her. If she can stitch clothes, she is given a sewing machine; if she knows embroidery or zari, she is given further training in it. If she knows cooking, she is trained how to supply tiffin to different households. The government has provided for training in order to make them self-dependent. We cannot accept that a widowed sister or a poor man's daughter is forced to live a troublesome life; the government feels concerned about her.

If a child is handicapped, the government has thought about him too. There are several girls who suffer from headache at school. When she complains to her mother, the parents thrash her saying that she does not wish to study so she is making an excuse. But that poor man does not realize that rather she is suffering from poor eyesight and requires a pair of specs, due

to which she feels pain while studying. The government has arranged for medical check-up of each girl, and it is surprising that about 40,000 girls have poor eyesight. They have been given specs. Hundreds of girls had serious illnesses. Some had to get a heart surgery, others needed operation for a stomach disease; some of them suffered from respiratory diseases, while others suffered from auditory illnesses. All this expenditure has been met out of the Chief Minister's Fund for the care of the poor children. It has also chalked out a programme for the aged. Besides, if a person dies in a family, and the family feels itself unable to undertake the final rites, then the government takes upon itself the responsibility of the final rites. The government has made several schemes to look after the poor people, right from birth to death. All this has been done not to make you live a life of penury, not even for this that you should keep looking for aid from the government. No. All this is being done so that the people can have a firm resolve to fight poverty, to eradicate poverty from the land of Gujarat, we have to free the state from the blot of poverty, and all this thinking has been done for just this purpose.

Rajiv Gandhi used to say that when one rupee was issued from Delhi, it reduced down to 15 paise by the time it reached the village. Does the rupee get worn up on the way? Nobody knows where it gets shrunk; but brothers, this rupee has come from Gandhinagar, and you can see all hundred paise right before you; and all this arrangement has been made so that all 100 paise are delivered to the poor. This programme, called the poor welfare fair, simply means an end to the middlemen. Its name entails an effort to cultivate self-confidence in the poor people. Its name is synonymous with a mass campaign to fight poverty. Due to this, this poor welfare fair gives you new energy, new consciousness, new capability, new trust. In this golden jubilee year, we seek this government effort to be successful in order to eradicate poverty.

We all are aware that sisters from four tehsils have come to attend this poor welfare fair. A total of 45,450 poor beneficiaries are here. The government has thought about how to benefit the

eligible people by reaching out to them in their villages and houses. We have disbursed a sum of 40 crore rupees to the eligible people. We are not here to siphon off the government funds. We are the guards, the watchmen; our work is to utilize every single penny; the work should be good, and this amount should reach the poor people, this is the total amenability of this government. And from this has risen the concept of the poor welfare fairs.

The governments in the past too had framed schemes; all governments do this, and provide for a specific amount in the budget for the same. If you go 25 km in any direction in Gujarat, you will find developmental activities undergoing there, they may be of one type or the other. You will find a pathway being constructed at one place, a *nullah* at another, a hospital at the third, a school at yet another. The elderly village people gather at the *chaupals* and discuss while smoking the *hookahs*. They talk where from the affectionate Modi is bringing all this money. They talk in these terms because people never knew where the government funds went off earlier. It is for the first time for the people of Gujarat to see that money is coming to them; this money is being produced right here, and all this is perceptible to the people of Gujarat for the first time.

The organisation of poor welfare fairs has helped to gradually cultivate the sense of self-pride in people. People are becoming self-dependent. Why did the farmer not get a tractor? Why did a poor artisan not get tools? Now you can find yourself that one artisan took tools for masonry, another for tailoring work, and yet another for radio-repairing. I am aware that the people of India are not lazy, they are not poor or helpless, they do not like to beg before others, they are ready to work hard, they do not like to live a life of penury and poverty; they only need a support by which they can become self-dependent. My effort is guided towards the situation when the poor men are given the support of this poor welfare fair, so that they become ready to fight with poverty.

Every parent wishes that his offspring should not inherit poverty. The parents wish that their children should not be poor.

To realize such dreams, the concept of poor welfare fairs has been mooted, and the whole of Gujarat Government, together with its council of ministers, is in your service. This welfare fair is a place to eradicate commission agents and middlemen. Today I beg of you that you will not give even a single paise to any middleman despite all kinds of pressures. You need not worry about anything, I stand by your side; all this is yours. I have to protect entire Gujarat from these pickpockets. I am here in the capacity of the watchman, and if we resolve that we have to bring the poor out of poverty, we can certainly succeed despite all the problems that we might face. We can certainly conquer over poverty. We will work hard if we have to. Nobody was born with this terrible fortune, it is not necessary that a man who takes birth in poverty will die in poverty too.

I have to transform the life of poor people, I have to bring about a change in it. As a system to bring about this transformation, we have to give poor people houses to live, means to earn and an opportunity to live a dignified life. Whatever a poor man produces, he should get a market for it, his goods should be advertised, his goods should be branded, and a website should be created for this. Just think that this government of Gujarat has taken up the cudgels on behalf of the poor people, and the poor welfare fair is just a form of it.

When I was coming to attend this poor welfare fair, the poor inhabitants of this place were singing a folksong. On listening to it, I felt that it was the spirit, the soul of the poor welfare fair. The part of the song that I could remember, I would like to quote: "Let us move on, let us bring about a new change; yes, new change, new transformation, just hold hands together and bring a new change. There should not be any middlemen, extend your hands, extend your hands, let us bring a new change; we don't have to remain poor any more, we have to pass the message to each house, we have not to remain poor anymore." These are parts of the song; this song is replete in exalted sentiments. These poor families have sung this song, and I now feel that my arrival among them has become meaningful.

In this fair of Banaskantha district, the poor beneficiaries have come from all tehsils and villages of the district. 1,67,000 beneficiaries have attended it, and 127 crore rupees were disbursed among them instantly. All this has come under severe criticism, you are well aware of all this. The utilisation of 125 crore rupees for the development of this district in five years, the poor people of this district were not so fortunate!

A girl gifted me a pair of leather socks. I asked her if it was to wear in the feet or to wear it to bed in cold. Then I asked her what she studied. She said that she was a student of the tenth standard. I asked her what she intended to do further. She said that she wanted to go for higher studies. A girl who made socks from the skin of a carcass, dreams of studying further! This speaks volumes of the success of these poor welfare fairs. People have now cultivated a sense of confidence in themselves.

Recently, I visited Rajua village in Amreli district, it is a completely backward village. People are fishermen. A poor girl, who is handicapped right from childhood, was given a tricycle and then I enquired about her education. She said that she wanted to study much and she wanted a favour from me. When I asked what she wanted, she said: "Sir, give me a scooty in place of this tricycle." I asked her if she knew how to ride a bicycle. She said, "No, but I want a scooty." I said, "Daughter, I thank you. You have been born in a poor family but you dream of riding a scooty." This is the thing how the poor people's dreams have been realized in Gujarat. This is just the mystery.

If you think of fighting with poverty, there is hidden infinite power in the society, you will have to just worship it. The people visiting the poor welfare fair must have certainly thought why the government has remembered them. The poor must have wanted to know why the government has called them. You all must have felt that it is not the time of elections, then why have you been called here? Generally, there is a tradition to invite the poor when elections are round the corner, and this tradition has been in existence for the past 60 years. When the poor are invited, the only thing they can think about is that the election must be near, so they have been remembered. For the sixty years,

the poor people have been considered just a vote bank. I have to stop this tradition of vote bank. A poor man is still a man, he has sentiments, he has feelings, he has dreams, he has aspirations and ambitions. We have to do something to realize his dreams. The dreams that you have been having all these sixty years, I have to achieve them in actual life, I have to infuse life in them, and this is precisely the purpose that the poor welfare fair has been organised.

The poor have to live in debt all their life. You have seen that most of the poor people find themselves incapable of coming out of poverty. One of the factors by which they cannot remove the yoke of debt is that they have taken money on a very high rate of interest. If you borrowed ten rupees, the moneylender would keep two rupees in advance, and he will give just eight and note down 10 rupees in his ledger. After that, he will get the little land written in his name. If there is a bicycle, he would keep it with him. If you have nothing, he would ask for the son to work at his place all his life, he gets written down all these things. This class of moneylenders increases the burden of interest to such extent that even two generations cannot repay this interest, leave alone the principal. On the other hand, a poor person is very genuine, honest. Once he borrows money from anyone, whatever the rate of interest, he has a pang in his heart that he does not wish to keep that money, he always thinks to repay the money even if he remains poor all his life, even if he has to sell his house and sleep on the footpath, even if he has to stay hungry, even if he has to deprive his children of education, but he wishes to repay his debt before death. This worry leads him to further sink in debt, the burden of interest keeps mounting. If the wife possessed a couple of silver ornaments, they would be sold for sure. A poor man has to live such a life of agony.

What is the way out of this trouble? What is the remedy to bring a poor family out of the shackles of interest and make it free from debt? We have found out the remedy. We visited village after village and took our sisters and mothers in confidence, we took our brothers in confidence. Men can

mismanage things, so we explained to sisters in all villages. We asked ten of them to come together and form a Mandal.

If you do something good, a poor man too would be ready to put something in sacrificial pot. I found a lively instance of this at Himmatnagar. When I handed over tools to a poor barber, he opened a shop there in order to avail the opportunity. His livelihood became easy. He came to see me at Modasa, and donated me ₹ 251, and expressed his gratitude for the poor welfare fair. He wished to be a participant in the good of the society.

In Bakaner, we allotted houses to the jugglers so that they would send their children for education. Now, their children play with computer's mouse in place of snakes and mongooses. Here in Banaskantha, animal husbandry has been started by the poor people, and today, they are happy with the milk production, and now they can look after their children well. They are sending them to school. We have adopted a number of ways to fight with poverty.

Now the middlemen are afraid, they are seeking new ways, and they say what type of bulldozer, I am that all of them have become crushed. I am aware what type of trouble they are going to face. Their shining and glorious shops are pulling down shutters. With the government is coming forward to the poor, their pockets cannot be picked, so these people are prone to devise new ways; they would blame the government in different ways; they would get all types of things published in newspapers. I have set out to do something pure and harmless, and due to this, I would confront all types of blames, troubles and calamities. If I cannot devote my life for the good of the poor, what use is running the government? This government has to be run for the poor people's welfare, it will work for eradication of poverty. It will work so that our mothers can live a life of dignity. This welfare fair has been organised just for this purpose. I and my other friends have also issued another order. We have told our officers that the number of beneficiaries of these poor welfare fairs ranges 30 in some villages and 50 in another. I told the government to put the names of the

beneficiaries on the bulletin board at the *chaupal*, so that people know that so many people have been benefited. They should also note down the things that have been given to them. A person has got a tractor and another, a sewing machine, yet another a plot of land. It would tell all people in the village what has been given to whom. For example, if there is written the name of Mohan with a certain benefit, you will be surprised to say that there is no one by the name of Mohan in the village. Where from has this Mohan come? Perhaps there is a wrong person in the village. He will be caught immediately. If a wrong person intrudes among so many people, it could be quite difficult to locate him. In villages, people are acquainted to one another over generations. Therefore, it is easier to locate such a wrong person. If the son is a doctor, if there is a car in the family and if his name appears in the BPL list, he will be shamed. We have shown the path. We have tried to remove all obstacles that impede your progress, and we have done all this because your power is with us. I get power from you.

The government alone cannot fight with poverty; you too have to step ahead. In this poor welfare fair, you will have to become committed to fight with poverty. You should take education, education will give you power. If you give up evil habits, you will become powerful. If you cultivate good traits, you will get power. And this poor welfare fair will be the threshold on the land of Gujarat in order to eradicate poverty.

Banaskantha has developed much, but much more needs to be done. When the Narmada arrives here, pomegranates and grapes will be grown in abundance. Had you ever thought that the tomatoes produced in Banaskantha would ever be exported right up to Afghanistan? The revolution is round the corner, we can perceive it, and change is just here. This is the power on the basis of which the mighty tale of Gujarat's development can be written; this power resides in the poor welfare fairs of Gujarat.

Many people tell me that I have to speak much in these poor welfare fairs which is not good for my throat. They tell me that I have been busy in this work for months together. They tell us if we get tired from holding these poor welfare fairs. I

tell them that there has been no occasion in my remembrance when I have not visited the Kumbh fair, and stayed there for many days. If you visited the Kumbh fair, you would meet your friends there, you would get an opportunity to be in the company of saints and seers, but this time, I haven't been to the Kumbh fair. The joy I get in the Kumbh fair, I get more joy here in the poor welfare fairs, I get more virtue here. This is my Ganga and this is my Kumbh *yatra*. Today, I can feel the joy of serving the poor in this poor welfare fair. When I see small children who have undergone heart surgeries, when I see them play about here, all my fatigue vanishes into thin air; I feel satisfaction and bliss on looking at them.

We have been free for 60 years. Ekva Golan village of our Songarh tehsil had no electricity. In organisation of this poor welfare fair, the officers visited every village, and this village got electricity. 666 cases of the inheritance had been pending for the past 50 years, now this government has settled all those things. We have supplied electricity to 51,000 BPL families. We have erected institutions for better education for the poor children, these institutions are government engineering colleges, nursing colleges, hostels, twenty-one new higher secondary schools, technical schools, medical institutions. We have started helicopter pilot training so that a tribal boy could learn how to fly a helicopter. We have arranged to send 34 children to Canada. We have also formulated a scheme for the people in Kotvadia. We have arranged for things so that hundreds of people can get good education in order to find good employment.

We buy wheat from the Central Government at five and a half rupees a kilo, and supply it to the poor family at just two rupees a kilo; and when we do this, the government at Delhi does not take kindly to it. It is unfortunate that the Central Government blames the State Governments for all the ills. The agricultural production growth rate is just 2.5 per cent in the whole country, while it is 10 per cent in Gujarat. Gujarat has produced wheat in order to fill storehouses in Delhi.

It is unfortunate for the country. In the past, the Central Government never blamed the states. Often it took the blame

on itself. Recently, we increased the CNG (Compressed natural gas) price; after all we have to manage things. If you increase the petrol price, you have many reasons to tell. When we increase the CNG price, you will not agree with any reason. The media is requested that they should do something positive, and if they cannot, they must not at least mislead the people. It is the responsibility of the media to raise the poor man's voice.

In this poor welfare fair, we have achieved many things. It is possible to have some weaknesses at some places. You may or may not accept them, but I have courage to say them. If you have got a thing which is weak, just write a letter and inform me. I shall set it right. If you buy half a kilo of potato, and find two of them stale, you replace them immediately. However, if you buy 500 kg of potatoes, you are sure to have a few of stale potatoes, you can know about this only when you examine them. In the same way, this poor welfare fair exchanges millions of things; if there has been a shortcoming somewhere, you must tell us and we will blacklist that company or industrial unit; you have to just tell about it.

It remains completely true that no other government could distribute the benefit of government schemes to the people in the presence of thousands of people, publicly. We have displayed courage, it is a difficult task. Perhaps it will help to augment people's confidence. It can be achieved only when confidence is cultivated with a true mind. We have taken this step in order to make an ordinary person believe that we have taken the right course for the welfare of the poor. This government has placed an amount as big as two hundred crore rupees before 90,000 beneficiaries here in Bhavnagar in a little time of just four hours. Have you ever thought how much these two hundred crore rupees can do if this amount is put into the economic system of a district. It is simply out of imagination. The poor have contributed in this race for development. This type of environment is being successfully created by this poor welfare fair.

We, on the one hand, are fighting with poverty; and on the other, rising costs are creating new stumbling blocks before the

people. The hearth is not being lighted in poor families due to terrible dearness. Sisters are restless due to this dearness. The money which was once sufficient to run the household for one complete month, is found to be insufficient even for a week. A poor child's body needs protein, which can be got from pulses, but pulses have become a thing hard to find. What will happen to these poor people? If you speak the truth, you are termed uncivilized. If you talk to the government in Delhi about rising costs, you are given certificates like irrational, illogical, uncivilized and what not.

Not only me, but all people, including the opponents, know that these poor welfare fairs are powerful, it is their faith; and I have held these poor welfare fairs to offer prayers to the soul. It is a meaningful effort to bring together truth, inherent capability, underlying dreams, in order to bring awareness in the life of poor people.

**Edited extracts of speeches delivered in different poor welfare fairs.*

Conclusion

In a total of 342 poor welfare fairs held in two blocks, an aid amounting to a total of ₹ 4,859.05 has been distributed to a total of 37,69,477 beneficiaries; including 4,73,570 people belonging to Scheduled Castes with an aid of ₹ 426.41 crore; 10,13,707 people belonging to Scheduled Tribes with an aid of ₹ 1,219.96 crore; and educationally and socially backward 10,62,001 beneficiaries getting an aid of ₹ 1,075.83 crore; while 12,20,242 beneficiaries belonging to other categories have got a total of ₹ 2,137.03 crore aid.

Outcome

Until this time, the poor welfare fairs have been organised in Gujarat in two blocks. In the first block (from 23 December 2009 to 22 February 2010), a total of fifty welfare fairs were organized, two each in 22 districts of the state, and one each in the districts of Narmada, Dang, Dahod and Porbandar, and two were held in Ahmedabad city.

In the first block, the total number of beneficiaries was 21,12,273 getting an aid of ₹ 2,741.71 crore. Of these, the people belonging to the Scheduled Castes got an aid of ₹ 326.29 crore, 6,10,149 people of Scheduled Tribes got an aid of ₹ 766.28 crore; and 5,04,895 beneficiaries belonging to socially and educationally backward class got an aid of ₹ 525.75 crore; and 6,76,978 beneficiaries belonging to other categories got an aid of ₹ 1,123 crore.

After this, between July and August in 2010, 17 fairs were organised in 224 rural tehsils and 18 municipalities of A grade, 33 municipalities of B grade and seven municipal corporations. Thus, a total of 292 poor welfare fairs were successfully organised.

In the second block, an aid of ₹ 2,117.53 crore was disbursed to 16,50,247 beneficiaries; comprising 1,53,279 beneficiaries belonging to the Scheduled Castes getting an aid of ₹ 9,982 crore; 4,03,558 beneficiaries belonging to the Scheduled Tribes getting an aid of ₹ 453.68 crore; and 5,57,146

beneficiaries belonging to socially and educationally backward category getting an aid of ₹ 555.08 crore; 5,43,264 beneficiaries of other categories got an aid of ₹ 1,013.95 crore.

Immediate Aid

<i>Name of Scheme</i>	<i>Number of Beneficiaries</i>	<i>Aid Amount (in crore rupees)</i>
Avas Yojana (residence scheme)	4,61,124	1542.94
Rojgar Yojana (employment scheme)	3,62,207	347.66
Krishi Sanlagna Yojana (agricultural attachment scheme)	3,76,823	286.66
Social Security Woman and Child	71,598	12.55
Development Scheme	3,04,187	22.89
Social Welfare Scheme	1,04,806	15.70
Other Schemes	20,88,280	2630.83
Total	37,69,025	4,859.23



Bridge for Harmony: Narendra Modi

This book titled *Samajik Samarasata* will be evaluated by different people in different ways. Some of them will feel it a stream of contemplation, and others, a social agenda. Some people will feel it a literary work, while others, a collection of diverse views. This book will produce different types of sentiments and experiences in different people; however, as far as I think, it is neither a literary work, nor a social agenda. I think that this entire work has evolved from a single idea. This book is the collection of thoughts that descended on my mind from time to time. In my inner-self flows an eternal and continuous stream of dialogues and this book is just a tiny glimpse of that.

In this country, a class of people has come to the fore that is bent upon criticizing the society. These people think that everything in the society is negative. A class is working on this idea. It is one of the causes of problems being faced by this country. Besides this class, there is a class of people that says all this is good, there cannot be any shortcoming anywhere. I am of the view that the social condition of the country is being assessed somewhere between these two extreme views. Different people have tried to evaluate the age-old social tradition and system which is 5,000 years old. Some people went for the radical path, and they decided that all that is old should be given up, should be eradicated. They said that new construction will be undertaken. Many have put all their might to retain the old system because they felt it was all essential.

Both of these classes wish to have a change, but none of them thought it proper to follow the democratic path. They wanted to adopt a path of complete renovation; they wanted to retain the spirit and change the body. Maybe the radical path fascinates us all for the time being; it also earns a name, but there is no guarantee of accomplishment in this path. There is need for renovation in order to set free the society of all evils. Our goal should be to preserve the spirit and free the society of all evils in order to proceed ahead with a new purpose, new vigour, and new energy. This is a characteristic of our society. Often we are inclined to speak ill of our society, because the truth has not reached us; however, ours is a society where great people have been born, who have invested all their life in social reform.

Dynamic Hindu Society

Few people in the world have capability to accept the change. Once I had an opportunity to visit America on their invitation. The point under discussion was Hinduism. The people who talked about me knew about me well. They knew my background. I hail to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, so they all jumped to discuss with me. It had appeared to them that we are staunch extremists, and they took us for conservationists, who believe in no change. The idea that I had at that time, I placed it before them. I said that no community in the world wishes to change the final rites on the death of a person, they feel that these should be conducted as per the peculiar tradition of the community. Whatever science might tell you, but after your father dies, you cannot think of stepping out of the social traditions. At that time, all people tend to say that the final rites should be completed first and argument should be taken up later. In the entire world, the Hindu community is the only one that supported, quite staunchly, to conduct the final rites on the pile of sandalwood on the banks of the Ganga in Kashi; it felt that the forefathers can attain salvation only through it. But it is not so today. The Hindu society has transformed its thinking over ages. Now, it considers that the final rites can be performed on the banks of any river that flows alongside the village. With the passage of time, change

can be perceived even in this. Now, final rites are performed in any cremation ground in the village, and a few drops of the Ganga water are sprinkled, and this is considered just right. There is no issue whether you can get sandalwood or not; a few pieces of sandalwood are considered enough for the purpose. The change has occurred to the extent that if wood is moist due to rainfall, even a tyre is burnt for the purpose. The people have shown the courage to undertake electric cremation. An effort has been started in Vadodara. The Hindu community is alone in the world that considers this type of change after death. If all this is accounted, you will find that a community requires great courage to accept the change.

Who can bring about change in the basic defects that mar the society? Why should we continue to accept what our forefathers told us, why should we accept them as they are? Even today, we find people having different views about untouchability; it is our ill-luck. Just imagine the condition that prevailed 400 years ago, and just think of Narsingh Mehta who fought against his own community for eradication of untouchability. What a great thing this is! How capable a man he was! How committed he was! This community, which calls *Aham Brahmasmi*, the community which accepts the meeting God, the community that feels God whenever it utters the word 'Namaste' – how long this community will continue to suffer from this thinking that you are different from us because you have been born from the womb of a Dalit woman; how long will this deformity continue in our community? A number of great people have raised their voices from time to time in order to eradicate this deformity. Two hundreds years ago in Saurashtra, a girl of a Rajput family wrote and sang a song; she recited. In one stanza of her poetry, she tries to culturise the society saying:

*Jatipanun chodi ne ajati thaure, kadhvo varan vikar re,
Jatine bhanti nahin, harikera deshama re, avi rite reu nirmal.*

(Give up your caste and become casteless, and throw out the deformity of caste from your heart, in order to become as pure as the Ganga).

A Rajput girl, who lived 200 years ago, who was brought up in a rural environment, she looks at the community and urges people to give up their castes and caste distinctions. How many efforts have been made to bring about transformation in the society?

There is a class in the society that feels that the problem can be resolved only if the socio-economic condition of the society is set right. If a son of a high-caste family and a son of a low-caste family become doctors, the things will improve. It appears to me that equality is not the final goal. Equality is just a stopover, it is an enrooted station. The final goal should be harmony. Baba Saheb Ambedkar was a well-read scholarly man; he was with Sayajirao Gaekwad. Baba Saheb was a scholar, he was a capable man. Gaekwad liked him, but his orderly used to throw files to him. He did not like this. Baba Saheb was a Dalit while the orderly was a high-caste man, so he threw the files to him. This instance reveals that equality cannot be the final goal. If harmony is made the final goal of community, then all problems can be eradicated. The guarantees for harmony comprise equal thinking, coming together, attachment, equal harmony. We need harmony as well as attachment; they are related to each other. There should not be a change in only the economic and social status. This type of thinking has given me certain traits, and they are aimed at joining the community. I always state that devotion in the society cannot be manifested if there is no sensitivity in it, if there is no empathy in it, if there is no sympathy in it. If a society is devoid of devotion, it cannot become powerful. The stream of attachment, pity and sensitivity carries the society towards devotion, and this devotion transforms into power ultimately. This form of power becomes the cause of awareness in the society, which governs the society over ages.

Efforts by Saints towards Harmony

Our Indian society is the one that follows the *Jnana Marg*. It has not acquired all this learning through books. In the south, there is an anecdote related to Ramanujacharya. He used to take

a bath in the holy river before going to the temple. An old woman of the Dalit community was cleaning the premises. She did not know that Ramanujacharya was coming. She was just absorbed in her work. Ramanujacharya had to go past her, but the old woman did not look towards him. At this, Ramanujacharya said, "O unholy old woman, I am going after getting purified, and you are standing midway. Don't you know this? What will happen to my purity?" He was in a fit of rage. The old woman thought that she had committed some sin. Ramanujacharya had to go past her and she, a Dalit, was cleaning there. What sin have I committed? What error have I committed? She was doubtful, but her inner-self gave out just one voice. The old woman politely asked Ramanujacharya, "You are right that I am impure, but where should I go? There is purity wherever I might go. Where should I go with this impure body? Tell me where I should go with this body." This small question shocked Ramanujacharya's mind. He fell in her feet and said, "It is you who has given me the true knowledge. I am not learned, you are the one. If there is purity everywhere, who am I to look at impurity? I have committed an error that I have tried to see impurity in you. Mother, you are pure, you find purity everywhere."

A Dalit, ordinary old woman, who cleaned the dirt, transformed the entire life of Ramanujacharya. This old woman displayed courage, but the courage that Ramanujacharya displayed was wonderful. In his old age, when he went for a bath, he would take the support of a Brahmin, and when he returned to temple after the bath, he would take the support of a cobbler. He followed this system all his life. An old woman had transformed the way of Ramanujacharya's life.

There is an instance related to the life of Swami Dayananda Saraswati. Once he went to a devotee's place for eating. He did not know the community to which the devotee belonged to. When he enquired, he came to know that he belonged to the *Nai* (barber) community. Somebody asked him if he had been to a *Nai's* house for meals. Dayananda Saraswati did not speak a word. A few days later, the man got his head shaved.

Dayananda asked him, "Arre, where did you get this *Mundan* (head-shave) from?" The Swamiji had taken his revenge.

There has been a tradition among the saints in our country that they have worked continuously to do away with the evils and ills from the society. If we looked at the life of Baba Saheb Ambedkar, it appeared as if he was going to destroy everything. When I look at him, it appears to me that Baba Saheb shook the society in order to take it to the right direction, and he endeavoured for this all his life. Baba Saheb used to say that he was born in Hinduism, but he would not die in it. This statement was a source of joy to the secularists; but Baba Saheb did what he had to. "I will quit Hinduism because I feel the need of shaking it, so that people rectify their mistakes." He converted to Buddhism. The Nizam of Hyderabad placed before him a pile of gems; the Christians were after him to embrace their religion and for this, they were ready to give him astounding amount of wealth, but Baba Saheb did not think it proper to go to them. He adopted Buddhism. Such was our Baba Saheb. He said that he would convert to Buddhism which was born in this very country. It inspires brotherhood. Buddhism becomes a medicine to connect faiths. It is unfortunate that Buddha or virtue links unites and connects; but Prabuddha or intelligence becomes a cause of trouble, disunity. This distinction between Buddha and Prabuddha, this divide often becomes the cause of producing problems in the society. Baba Saheb was Prabuddha, but he sought the shelter of Buddha, due to this fact, he became a medicine to remedy the problems.

Don't Limit Harmony within Caste and Faith

Social harmony should not be limited within caste and faith. It has a broad meaning. Let us take illiterate and handicapped people. We look at the physically-disabled people with a different point of view. If a mentally-retarded child is born in a family, I ask myself whether the society or the family is responsible for his care. Just imagine the case when a newly-wed couple has for their first child a mentally-retarded child, when they are just about 25-27 years of age. They must have

wedded with all the golden dreams in their eyes; they must have nurtured a lot of ambitions and aspirations; but when a mentally-retarded child takes birth in the family, the husband and wife devote all their life to the service and care of the child. It appears to me often that God believed in the wife and husband that they would take every care of the mentally-retarded child. However, I feel, that a mentally-retarded child should be the responsibility of the entire community, and not the family only. Social harmony is not limited to only untouchability; it is not limited within high and low castes; it pertains to all classes – depressed, women, illiterate, deprived – and how they all should be linked together with the common interests. We have to deeply think about this all in order to renovate and transform the society.

Social transformation is necessary in every age. We must enable ourselves with the blessings of the saints. We should be devoted to community service, and be united too. A great feature of this country is unity in diversity. We cannot look at the society in fragments, nor can we afford to see it divided. We will have to unite and integrate the entire country right from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, from Aatak to Cuttack, and the bridge of harmony alone becomes the guarantee of this unity and integration. God has specified many a task for the welfare of the country and mankind in the world. Just look at Vivekananda, Aurobindo. They all meant the same things. They were all great people, they were seers. They say that it is the responsibility of India to lead the world on the path of well-being, but this will require strengthening India, so that it is capable to carry out this duty. For the realization of this goal, the saints, seers, teachers and others have an effort to modify the country. Look at the background of freedom struggle of the country. This struggle could not have become so strong had the Bhakti movement not taken place.

The twenty-first century is going to be that of India. The Bhakti movement is taking place in every nook and corner of the country. An environment of new awareness and energy has been created. New awareness and new energy have given birth

to new hope. This book should not be related to the Chief Minister. Leave the Chief Minister alone, and just enjoy this book. Don't look at this book or the words contained in it, rather look at the fragmented society around you. Have you ever imagined what pity the Dalits are undergoing? A person cannot feel empathy with a victim of burn if he has never faced a burn himself. We cannot feel the pity that a Dalit undergoes without assimilating that pity within us. I have tried to live life, I have tried to experience that pity, that pain. Untouchability is a blot, it has to be abolished. We will have to express our commitment for a harmonious society, friendly society and prosper society. Each person, each mind should become a part of its activities; for this we have to make endeavour. I am confident that this tiny effort on my part to display empathy and sensitivity towards the society on this grand occasion of golden jubilee of Gujarat will help to link a lot of people with me. I would be able to find new companions, new affectionate people, they will become a partner, not in war, but in harmony. You will find that man is a fighter of the battle, but today we need the soldiers who profess harmony. I invite you all to become a soldier of social harmony. Let us tread the path of Buddha in order to unite the society, this effort will energise us to ultimately unite.

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*Speech of Sri Narendra Modi on 26 April, 2010 on the occasion of launching of Gujarati edition of the book *Samajik Samarasata*.