

My Life - Its Legacy and Message - part 6: Wholehearted execution of the prescribed principles – II

(Autobiography of Poojya Gurudev Pt. Shriram Sharma Acharya)

There was a primary school in the village of my birthplace. From the point of view of formal education, I studied only in that school. Sanskrit is part and parcel of our family traditions. My father and brothers were eminent scholars of Sanskrit. Giving discourses on ancient scriptures and priesthood were our ancestral profession. I thus acquired adequate knowledge of Sanskrit at home. I have taught Sanskrit to students up to the standard of Acharya, though I do not possess any formal degree.

The story of studying other languages is interesting. I started writing English words on a shallow iron pan (tasla) by using pebbles as pencil. I could lay my hands on English newspaper 'Leader' in jail and started reading English. I used to consult my colleagues and in about a year's time, when I was released from jail, I had acquired fairly good knowledge of English. Every time during my journey to jail, my vocabulary of English increased due to mutual discussions and gradually I learnt grammar also. In return, I taught my jailmates Sanskrit and idiomatic Hindustani. Magazines, journals, dictionaries etc. of other languages have always remained my basic sources of learning other languages. [Gayatri](#) has been called Goddess of wisdom. I cannot say about others, but I myself have been miraculously benefited by Her worship. Even professors of Hindi have received considerable guidance from my articles in Akhand Jyoti, in which Sanskrit words have been used profusely. I have a feeling of inner upliftment and people are amazed to find that despite my remaining extremely busy in [Sadhana](#) etc. so much knowledge could be acquired. The credit for all this goes to Mahapragya (the Supreme Divine Intelligence).

Although I participated in satyagraha, launched by the Indian National congress, in compliance with the directions from Gurudev, in the beginning I did not understand its significance. When I was given one 'sankalp' of doing [Sadhana](#) for twenty four years, why was it split into two portions of five and nineteen years? When thousands of persons were engaged in satyagraha, participation or non-participation of one more person should not have mattered much?

Gurudev had guessed my dilemma at the time of my meeting with him and his divine voice had given the guideline. "Yug Dharma has its own importance. It should be considered as the need of the times and one should rush to fulfill it leaving aside all other work, just as water has to be rushed to the site of fire. In days to come you have to undertake several works of public contact and you will not get better opportunity than this to establish [contacts](#) with different strata of the society. You will also get an opportunity for rehearsal of the experience gained in previous births and of the lessons learnt in your early age. They are not important from the viewpoint of personal gain but they answer a need of the times. In practical life you are to be taught four lessons of (1) wisdom (2) honesty (3) responsibility and (4) courage. These help in the inner growth of the soul and develop brilliance of intellect. With a view to developing the talents required

for execution of your future plans of action and also to hone up the instruments needed for the purpose, your participation in India's freedom struggle is essential."

It is not pertinent to discuss what I did for the country, how much I suffered and how I discharged duties and responsibilities which were entrusted to me. Anybody interested to know about it may read the book ' Freedom Fighters of Agra Division' published by the information department of Uttar Pradesh government. In those days I was known by the name "Shriram Matta". The important thing that needs to be understood is the purpose underlying this particular direction of Gurudev.

During those ten years of my active participation in the freedom struggle, I interacted with people of different nature in and outside of jail. In those days mass awakening was at the highest peak. I came in contact with several brave, courageous persons with firm determination and I learnt many useful lessons from them. It took me less than a couple of years to learn the art of winning over supporters, co-workers and appreciators for the stupendous task of revolutionary moral reawakening that was the primary aim and mission of my life. It would not have been possible for me to learn these lessons even by touring the country extensively on my own. Family attachments, feelings of 'mine' and 'thine' were got rid of and I lived a happy life even in adverse circumstances. This created self-confidence. The most important gain was that I developed the attitude of a volunteer, which has helped me to remain humble even at this late stage of my life. The suspense as to why I was directed to perform mahapurushcharanas in two phases was thus removed by my experience of the freedom struggle.

The Indian National Congress was established about a century back but the congress in which we worked was altogether different from what it is now and I had peculiar experiences while working in it. Effortlessly, I got an opportunity to establish contacts with several eminent persons. I always conducted myself as a disciplined volunteer. So, whenever any volunteer was needed to serve eminent leaders, I used to be pushed forward in view of my young age. From these contacts I imbibed many virtues and also got an opportunity of living with Gandhiji in his Sabarmati Asram and Vinoba Ji in Pavnar Asram. Others went to these great personages for their Darsan but to me the insights provided by these contacts proved to be celestial boons.

In 1933 the annual session of Indian National Congress was held in Calcutta. In those days Congress was considered an anti-government organization. People were arrested and police firing was resorted to on flimsy pretexts. Delegates who were considered important enough were arrested at Bardwan station and sent to jail in Asansol, which was originally made by the East India Company for Europeans. I was also arrested along with my three colleagues of Agra district. Eminent persons like Madan Mohan Malviya Ji, Devdas Gandhi, Swarooprani Nehru (mother of Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru), Rafi Ahmad Kidwai, Chandrabhanu Gupta, Kanhaiyyalal Khadiwala and Jagan Prasad Rawat were with us in the jail. Malviyaji used to address us daily in the evening throughout our stay there. Malviyaji and Mata Swarooprani used to treat us like their children. Malviyaji used to emphasize in his speeches that we should beg a paisa from every man and a handful of food grains from every woman to spread the message of our movement so that they may

realize that the Congress was their organization and the freedom struggle was their own struggle, being run with their cooperation and contributions. The thing might not have been important for others but I took serious note of it. The Rishi of yore maintained themselves, gurukuls and aranyakas on public alms (bhiksha). It had been pointed out to me by Gurudev that I was to take up an assignment in hand. I had been wondering where from the money would come for this purpose. In jail, I got the clue. After my release, I applied this formula, while launching important projects of moral and social upliftment and transformation. Amounts running in crores have been spent on these projects through willing and volunteer contributions (minimum of ten paise or a handful of grains per person per day) from lakhs and lakhs of well wishers and friends of the mission.

Like Gayatri and Gangotri, Congress had been the fount of my life's course. However, after independence I concentrated only on those tasks that would contribute to the fulfillment of the aims of political freedom. Politicians look after the political and economic affairs of the country. But far more important and crucial is the moral, intellectual and social transformation of the society to usher in an era of truth, equality, fraternity, freedom and harmony. This can be accomplished by persons and organizations committed to deeper values of life. This is the task dearest to my soul. Except for wearing khadi, I withdrew myself from active participation in all other programmes of the congress from the day of independence. This had the blessings of Bapu and the sanction of my divine guide. My friends sent me a form for accepting pension for having worked as a freedom fighter for about twenty years, I plainly declined to avail of this offer. Eminent persons of that age, who are still alive, would testify that when the time for rewards came, I withdrew behind the curtain.

All the aforesaid three assignments were accomplished with utmost dedication and concentration. In between I also visited the Himalayas only for six months each time. I was told that the work of the Congress was important from the point of view of attainment of freedom and so my sojourn for six months each time would be enough. It is not necessary to mention here what I was told and what I was required to do during these sojourns. There are events and happenings even of my work-a-day visible surface life, which I consider miraculous, acts of divine grace; and my heart is filled with deep gratitude and humility when I recall them.

(To be continued in the next issue)

Once upon a time an old emaciated man and woman (husband and wife) were begging for their sustenance and for nurturing their child. When Goddess Parvati saw them she was moved with compassion. She asked Lord Shiva how in His world people were so helpless and why can't the Lord remove their sufferings. Lord Shiva tried to explain His consort that their situation and sufferings were of their own making – of karmik law of sowing and reaping. But Parvati was unconvinced. Shiva had to appear before the old couple. He asked them to ask for any boon they wished. The old woman wished to be a young damsel of twenty years of age, and Lord Shiva granted the wish. The old man got infuriated with hate looking at her and said that she wanted to enjoy life all over again, deserting him in old age. His hatred arose. Lord Shiva asked the old man not to worry

and offered to confer on him any boon of his liking. The old man asked for the woman to be converted into a she-pig. Lord Shiva granted the wish and she became a pig. At this the child started crying and beseeched the Lord to give him back his mother. Again the Lord granted the child's wish and the she-pig became the original old emaciated woman. Thus all the three – man, wife and child – remained their old wretched selves in spite of Lord's boons. Thus, the Lord demonstrated to Parvati that even God does not help those who do not help themselves through noble, purposeful thoughts and deeds.

A Priest used to go to a particular sacred place to devoutly perform his daily prayers at a fixed time. But as soon as he went back home he behaved very rudely with everyone. One day his young son also went with him for prayers at the temple. The priest started praying "Oh Lord! You love everybody and you shower your blessings on each one of us!"

As soon as the priest finished the prayer, the child turned to him and said – "Father! In spite of your having repeated this prayer over a long time you have not yet learnt the lesson of love and affection. Your prayers are hollow and mechanical without any positive effect on your attitude and behavior." The priest instantly realized what was amiss in his prayers and from that day onwards he started praying with fervent aspiration for conscious inner transformation.