

The Youngest Freedom Fighter in India's Struggle for Independence

I must be possibly the youngest freedom fighter in India's struggle for Independence. I was born on April 3, 1930, just 3 days before the famous salt march of Mahatma Gandhi. Following the salt march all the major leaders were rounded up by the British to preempt widespread unrests. My father, Darbar Gopaldas, was arrested immediately. However, my mother, Bhaktiba, was spared imprisonment until her infant son was a little older. Finally she was arrested when I was about six months old.

As I was too young to be left to the care of others, my mother was obliged to take me to the prison with her. There were no cradles in the prison for the young infant. Fortunately, a wife on an industrialist Mrs. Sarladevi Sarabhai, arranged to send a cradle for me in the Sabarmati prison. They were on good terms with the British. Shri Kasturba, wife of Mahatma Gandhi was my mother's cellmate at the time.

After the well known Gandhi-Lord Irwin pact in the later part of 1930, all the political prisoners were released. However, it was soon feared that this agreement might be rescinded and the struggle would resume. During this period there was a chance meeting between my mother (who was with her infant sleeping son) and a wife of a maternal cousin at "Nadiad" railway station in Gujarat. The wife offered to take care of the infant to spare him the hardship of another prison term. The sleeping infant was transferred to the care of this lady in the middle of a railway station. I did not get to know my real parents until I was about five years old.

My father was a prince of a small principality named Dhasa-Rai Sankali. He joined the Indian freedom struggle in 1922. Prior to this he was known to give financial support to Gandhi and his Congress party. However, the matter came to a head when my father ignored warnings by the British Resident General against offering any financial support to Gandhi. His small state was forfeited. Following this both of my parents openly joined Gandhi and became active freedom fighters.

Hopefully, the above narrative will illustrate the extent of sacrifices people were willing to make under the charismatic influence of Mahatma Gandhi. It was not only a matter of service to one's country before the self, but also service before the welfare of his family.