

WRITTEN REPORT OF STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE ; INDIA

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PLACE OF BIRTH, BHAVNAGAR CITY, BHAVNAGAR STATE, INDIA

NOW A PART OF GUJRAT STATE IN WESTERN INDIA

I was about seven years old in 1930 when Gandhiji began his famous SALT March. I remember what excitement we the children had even though we were in a princely state of Bhavnagar and not directly under the British rule

.. Some family history and report about my father is based on written record and some family stories that I had been told in my childhood ..

I think it will be helpful to mention about my family, particularly my father and his ancestral history. My father was born on November 11th 1882 in a Prashnora Brahmin family. This was a small clan that had accepted voluntary simplicity, if I may say so. They were well versed in Hindu scriptures and gave public discourses. They lived on what ever was offered at these discourses. They also were well versed in Ayurvedic medicine . They prepared needed medicines from herbs and plants and gave it free to their patients, both poor and rich. .

One of my father's grand uncles, a very good Ayurvedic physician was much in demand. He was forced to accept two bangles of gold by a wealthy patient. When he returned to Bhavnagar, he first went to a Shiv temple and donated the bangle before returning home. My father had heard this and other stories in his childhood. As a teenager he often thought about how to live by these ideals.

My father was a good student. He wanted to be a teacher. He obtained both B.A. and M.A. degrees from Bombay University in 1903 and was appointed as a professor at Samaldas College in Bhavnagar (affiliated to Bombay University). He soon realized that he was missing something, a closer contact with students where he can talk with them about their aspirations, problems and possible solutions.

He was so unhappy that he took a leave and founded a residential school, Daxinamoorti for high school students in 1910 with the help of a an elder colleague,(who treated him as younger brother)., "A teacher should have an open mind. And he should teach by personal examples rather than by lectures" was Nanabhai's motto from 1910 to 1961 when he died..

He had a Guru Nathuram Sharma, but he left him on issues of admission of untouchables to his school. Mahatma Gandhi came to see his school in 1916. That was the beginning of their close association which ended with Gandhi's death in 1948. In 1925, when Gandhiji was looking for a Vice Chancellor for

Gujrat Vidyapith, An university founded by Gandhiji, Nanabhai (My father) was his choice He worked there for two years before returning to his school in Bhavnagar.

Nanabhai was not involved in politics but Gandhiji, during his Satyagrah campaign in 1930, wanted some one to take charge of large camp freedom fighters in Viramgam. Gandhiji send a telegram to Nanabhai to proceed to Viramgam and take charge. Nanabhai, as per rules of his new school, resigned from the school the previous evening. Next morning he was to take the 10.30am train we called the "Mail" because it also

carried mail for the postal service. This train had to make connections with another train at Vuramgam which then carried passengers to Bombay . . Therefore this train from Bhavnagar always departed on time.

Nanabhai bade goodbyes to Friends and well wishers and boarded the train. The green Signal was given but the train did not move. Every one was surprised and concerned about the delay. Presently, Sir Prabhashanker Pattani , the Diwan of Bhavnagar State entered the platform and walked briskly to the compartment where my father's friends had been standing. My father had already boarded the train but he came out and bowed to Pattani Saheb, as we used to call him. Pattani Saheb conveyed his best wishes and gave his blessings. My father boarded the train and the train left.

This action by Sir Prabhashanker Pattani was most unusual. He was Diwan of a first class princely state. India was ruled by the British Government. For him to delay the departure of a train just for blessing a teacher of his state who was going to work with Gandhiji to end the British Rule in India was a bold step. More about this unusual man at the end of this narrative.

Nanabhai was not a politician. He was a very innovative teacher. He did well as leader of the camp at Viramgam. He was arrested and imprisoned for about six months in Sabarmati Prison with other political prisoners.

I had mentioned that I was just about seven years old when this happened What I have written above is based on stories that I have heard or read.

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Now I want to tell you what I, at seven years old, and children in my school did.

I was a student at BALMANDIR, a school of Daxinamurti Institute. Instructions were based on Montessori system as improved by Gijubhai Badheka. He was the one who introduced the Montessori System of child education in India.

We knew what was happening but always did not understand it. Our teachers used to organize processions and we would walk in procession of two abreast and go out in our neighborhood. Shouting slogans. Our group was known as The Monkey Brigade. We used to shout anti british slogans. And always shout "Monkey Brigade, Hook Hook" (VANAR SENA HOOK, HOOK") Our dress was Blue shorts and White half shirts and a blue badge to identify us. Girls wore blue skirts and white blouses. All made from Hand spun and hand woven cloth.

The British government had not only suppressed freedom of press but also banned various periodicals and books that exposed government of India's anti Indian policies. I was interested in poems of Zaverchand Meghani, a giant literary figure in Gujrati literature. These poems were printed by underground press. I used to close all doors and windows of my room and read these poems under a dim light. It was exciting for me to do so.

My father was in prison for about six months. We visited him once. He was wearing white shorts and a white shirt with short sleeves. The cloth was very thick.

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QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT 1942

1942 was different. I was 19 years old and a second year medical student at the Benares Hindu University. It was a private university founded by Madan Mohan Malvia, a national leader and supported by private dinors... Many national leaders used to be invited to come and speak to the students. Student groups affiliated with various political parties were active on campus. During 1941 and before 42 August leaders

such as Gandhiji, Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, Acharya Kriplani, Ram Manohar Lohia, Acharya Narendra Dev, just to mention a few that gave political lectures at the university. In short the mood on campus reflected the mood of the country.

World War TWO was in full swing. The Viceroy declared that India was at war with AXIS POWERS without consulting the leaders of India, let alone the elected Governments of the various states of India. The leaders of the Congress party and Gandhi were very unhappy with the situation. The British government was not willing to give or make any commitment about full independence after the war..

The Congress party met in Bombay in 1942 and adapted a resolution put forward by M. K. Gandhi. In short, it asked the British to leave India. It was called "Quit India " and the movement that followed was Labeled as "Quit India Movement." Gandhiji had clearly indicated that he will discuss the issues with the VICEROY. But Government thought differently and arrested all major leaders of the congress party in very early morning the next day

The news of the arrests of congress party leaders and Gandhiji on early morning of August 9th 1942 reached the BHU campus early. We held demonstrations and went out in large and small groups protesting the high handed actions of the British Government. Some students went out to disrupt train traffic and communications and electricity by cutting wires. Later they used to return to the university campus for safety, because the police could not enter the campus without proper papers and permission from the university authorities. However with rarely any students in classes and many others gone home the university was closed till after Diwali

Some of my friends who were from near Vardha, a city near SEWAGOAN, a village where Gandhi had settled after the salt march, decided to travel to that region and plan sabotage activities there. They knew the area and that was the main reason for selection of that place.

About six of us packed our belonging, placed them in safety of the university and left by a train for Vardha. We were openly discussing our plans and were, by gestures asking other passengers on major stations to cut government communications.. WE were novices at this and paid the price. At Allahabad station a railway junction we alighted from the train to transfer to another train. But we never made it. We were asked to show our tickets. We were out to break the law. And naturally the first opportunity was to travel without a ticket. That was our first crime. Police also suspected that we were out to do some mischief. We were in police custody for a few hours. Some other students of Benares Hindu University who live in Allahabad came to our rescue, convinced the police to send us to our home. Next morning police saw to it that each of us boarded the train that we were supposed to board. Two days later I reached home AT BHAVNAGAR.

Many political leaders of Saurashtra region were arrested as they were returning from Bombay. Balavantbhai Mehta was arrested at Surendranagar railway station as he was returning from Bombay where he had attended All India Congress committee (AICC) meeting. Nanabhai Bhatt, my father had gone to Bombay. He was not a politician but must have been asked by some one to be in Bombay. He returned to Bhavnagar and went to Ambla where he has founded a school in 1938. However he was arrested on August 27th 1942, as he was about to board a train for- Bhavnagar city where we had a home and my mother and siblings lived there.

I do not remember whether I met my father before he was arrested. People who were at the railway station informed the remaining faculty and students at Gram Daxinamurti school that he was arrested in the afternoon of 8/27/1942 but no one had any information where he was taken.. It was almost a month before we learnt that he was at the Central prison in Rajkot city. Rajkot is located in the center of Sourashtra and at that time there was a resident British officer to look after all the princely States in Sourashtra. He was the representative of the Viceroy of India and thus a representative of the British government.

I had written to my father that I want to join the Quit India Movement. He mentioned that he himself was already involved. It will be good if I can work at his school to help people still there. Also I can help my

mother and my brothers and sisters. I understood the need of such behind the scene participation so that people in the front can do their work without other concerns.

I worked at my father's school. There were about six students and about two faculty members. My job was to help who ever wanted my help. Plus take care of sick, obtain needed supplies from Bhavnagar and attend to visitors.

There were four faculty members living on campus. They were Nanabhai Bhatt (My father) Manubhai Pancholi a senior faculty, Haribhai Patel An agricultutist and Bhaishankerbhai, A teacher who lived in the village. Vijayaben, Manubhai's wife was nursing the new borne son. Haribhai's wife was pregnant and due for delivery in a few months .students have gone for Diwali vacation.

One of my assignments was to treat the sick. Malaria was very much around. Due to war (WW TWO) medical supplies were scarce. One day, the cook, a heavy set man had high fever 104 and was shaking. We had no ice, nothing to bring the fever down and I had two other patients very sick. I soaked a cotton bed sheet and placed on him and ran to the next patient. I came back two hours later his fever was down. I felt relieved.

But it was not over yet. There was no facility or well trained nurse to attend on delivering children so Haribhai had decided to admit his wife in the Takhtsingji hospital in Bhavnagar. Jethalal Mehta, Nanabhai's assistant who worked for my Nanabhai from Bhavnagar had made all the necessary arrangements. Haribhai was quite satisfied and had met with the physicians also.I was in Bhavnagar for some work. I used to go to bed by 9pm. Some one called my name at around midnight. It was Jethadada. He had some bad news. Haribhai's wife had died during delivery from excessive bleeding. Doctors could not stop it and there was to blood available for transfusion. Only way to get this information to Haribhai was to go to Ambla. To give the news and bring him to Bhavnagar. I took the midnight train to Songad, took a horse drawn tanga to Ambla, woke up and informed Haribhai about the sad news. We return to Songad took early morning train from Songad and reached Bhavnagar and at about 9am reached the hospital. Jethadada was there. We took the body from the morgue. Haribhai and Jethadada went to the cremation ground and asked me to go home and catch up some sleep.

Some other experiences were in store for me. Once I was in Bhavnagar to purchase some supplies for Gram Daxinamurti, my father's school. I purchased the materials and went to the railway Station to send it with a courier. This train left at about 5pm. And I thought of walking back to our home. But as I came out of the station, a uniformed person approached me. I recognized him. He was shouffer of Mr. Anantraibhai Pattani, the Diwan of Bhavnagar State. He said that Diwan saheb wanted to see me. He had gone to our home and my mother informed him that he can find me at the railway station (My father always informed my mother or us about where he was going and when he will come home). I have learnt this from his example. I went to meet Anantraibhai. He had, it seemed to me a bad cold or a mild attack of asthma. He inquired about the family and any news from my father who was in Central Jail in Rajkot. He also asked me about my activities. I explained that my father has suggested that I work Gram Daxinamurti as long as my university was closed. Then he said, "Pravin, some of my officers mention that some of activities of Gram Daxinamurti with farmers encourages them to protest against the state of Bhavnagar. Then why should we give any grant to Gram Daxinamurti? I have mentioned this to your father also."

" Pattani Saheb, my father (Nanabhai) has mentioned to you that we have not sold our beliefs and our aim to educate the village people in exchange for the money you give us" I have nothing more to add to what he has said to you". Then .we talked about my studies and youth at my university before I took his leave. His chauffeur drove me to our home. I thought, here I was, a volunteer at a private rural school and Yet was representing that school to the highest authority in our princely state!

Many schools and colleges opened their doors after Diwali festivals. I also went back to Benares Hindu University and plunged in my medical studies.

I did continue my correspondence with my Father, my mother and Indu Pathak, whom I had met in Ahmedabad in 1943 summer. By the summer of 1944 We had decided to inform our parents to announce our engagement. My father wanted to meet us before announcement of the engagement,. He was still in Rajkot prison. He wanted to do a simple ceremony there in prison, w agreed. . After my examinations in early summer I went to Ahmedabad and from there with Indu and her father Haribhai and Mother Deviben we went to Rajkot. We reached in the morning and went straight to the central Prison. Our appointment was at about 9.30AM.We reached in time. My father was waiting for us in the meeting room for prisoners and his visitors. A uniformed police with a loaded gun was at the door .After bowing to my father we all sat down. Indu's parents on left of my father, Indu and myself on the right of him. Now he was serious. He asked Indu and myself to think seriously if we will support each other in adverse or favourable conditions alike, be it financial, health or job related. Once he was satisfied, he placed red KUMKUM on our forehead.Indu's mother did the same and threw rice on us. Nanabhai presented a white cotton Sari to Indu. He himself had spun the yarn for it The police with the gun was watching all this. We will never know what he was thinking.

I went to Bhavnagar from Rajkot and Indu and her parents went back to ahmedabad.. I helped my mother and family in Bhavnagar. Also I probably went to Ambla Village to helping Gram Daxinamurti.. In July I went to my collge to complete my third year .

I was back at home in Bhavnagar in 1944 summer. My uncle my father's elder brother was very sick.. My father wanted to come and be at his bedside. His friends in Bhavnagar and Rajkot were trying to obtain his release. The British govt. refused to release his unconditionally. He refused to signed for any conditional release.

The halth of my uncle was deteriorating. But at last one of my father's lawyer friend worked out a deal with the British and the state of Bhavnagar that he will be transferred to Bhavnagar Jail as a prisoner. . then he couldit his brother but as a prisoner and will return to the prison at Bhavnagar..He was brought to Bhavnagar with police escort by train. Mastarambhai Pandya and myself were at the railway station when the train arrived in early morning .My father came out of his compartment escorted by two police officers. His hands were tied together and other ends of the rope was in hands of the police. We offered to take them to the prison but my father said the police had instructions about the procedures. Three of them went to the prison and we drove back home.

Around noon I saw that the chief judge of Bhavnagar Supreme Court B.V.Trivedi entered our garden and walked to the house. He had a hand bag , the kind my father used, in his hand. I went out to receive him. He said Nanabhai has been released unconditionally. I asked him where he wanted to go. He said to his brothers "home." I left him there. He gave me this bag of his papers and clothes to give to you and inform you where he is now. He will come home later. I thanked him and walked to the gate with him.

My uncle was in coma when Nanabhai saw him. He died without recovering from coma within a week after my father came home.