

Lyricist Gandhiji – Revisited

September 20, 2012. 'Ganesh' festival holiday. So, set out for a short trip cum outing to Ahmadabad, (Gujrat, India) with my wife. As this was the first visit, tour to 'Akshardham' temple and 'Sabarmati ashram' were on top priorities. Akshardham temple was a very nice place but It was quite hot outside the temple as we set out towards Sabarmati. Car driver too was quite restless due to this unusual heat. However, as we approached the town, suddenly the atmosphere changed with black clouds in the sky and a real transfer scene. It was getting ready to pour anytime.

Just before this visit, I had read a nice book 'Meera and Mahatma' by Sudheer Kakkar. It had many pages describing this sacred place. This was an ideal laboratory for preparing volunteers for freedom struggle and 'Satyagraha'. Gandhiji had spent several years here with his novel experiments in many fields. His disciple and close associate Meeraben also spent many years of her youth. She was a British lady but had faith in Gandhiji's philosophy and joined his work at Sabarmati. This book describes lives of Meera and Mahatma, a young revolutionary Prithvising occupying her life for a while, Gandhiji's advice to her in such a situation and so on. So, I had lots of vague images of that period and people in my mind.

Akshardham temple is located far away from town and the ashram is now quite inside the city. The temple has lot of strict security due to a terrorist attack few years ago. However as we drove into the ashram straight from the busy road, even a security guard was not clearly visible. The straight road took us to the banks of Sabarmati river. On right, old buildings of the ashram were seen whereas on left modern exhibition area and book shop attracted our attention. Next to this area, Bapu statue has been installed in a lawn. He is in a sitting yogic posture, wearing loin cloth, body covered with another cloth and looking towards the old place where he had moved actively during 1920-35. While glancing on either side of the road we reached the riverside and spent quite some time silently. Now both the banks have concrete walls and quite modern amenities and many bridges joining two ends of the town. We could have spent more time but water droplets forced us to move away. So, we went to the Meeraben's hut – once made out of mud and rough floor, now in a memorial with nice flooring and her photograph on the wall. By the time we reached Bapu's Kutli called 'Hriday-Kunj', it actually began to drizzle. Many visitors were drawn in to avoid heavy rains. This is a rather large place with a spacious verandah – courtyard. On one side, Bapu's personal belongings viz. spinning wheel (Charkha), writing table and dining table have been preserved and the room with a meshed door is locked. Visitors were taking pictures from the window in the door. On the other side, replica of the charkha and writing desk are placed. Visitors

were encouraged to handle them and get a feel of the atmosphere. Many young and old persons were busy in canning the moments in the mobile pictures and videos.



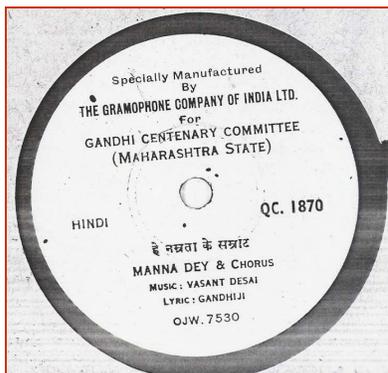
Bapu statue (L) and his hut Hriday-Kunj (R)

At the center of the corridor, my wife drew my attention to ‘The Prayer’ inscribed just below Gandhiji’s oil painting. I sat down to read it carefully. It had two prayers, one in Devnagri (Hindi) and another in Roman Script. I knew the Hindi version well due to the gramophone record in my collection. I had written a long article on it in ‘The record news’ – TRN 2011 [reproduced below, at the end of this article]. This was a gramophone disc issued by Maharashtra Government during Gandhiji’s birth centenary (1969). This prayer was sung by Manna Dey and Chorus. Music was composed by vasant Desai and credit for the lyrics was given to Gandhiji. Left over copies of this disc ended up in Mumbai Chor Bazaar and some of them were found by me in one of the Friday visits to this flea market. There is also a story cum myth in circulation, viz. this was a letter written by Gandhiji to little Maniben (daughter of Vallabh Bhai Patel) when she asked several questions about God and its existence.



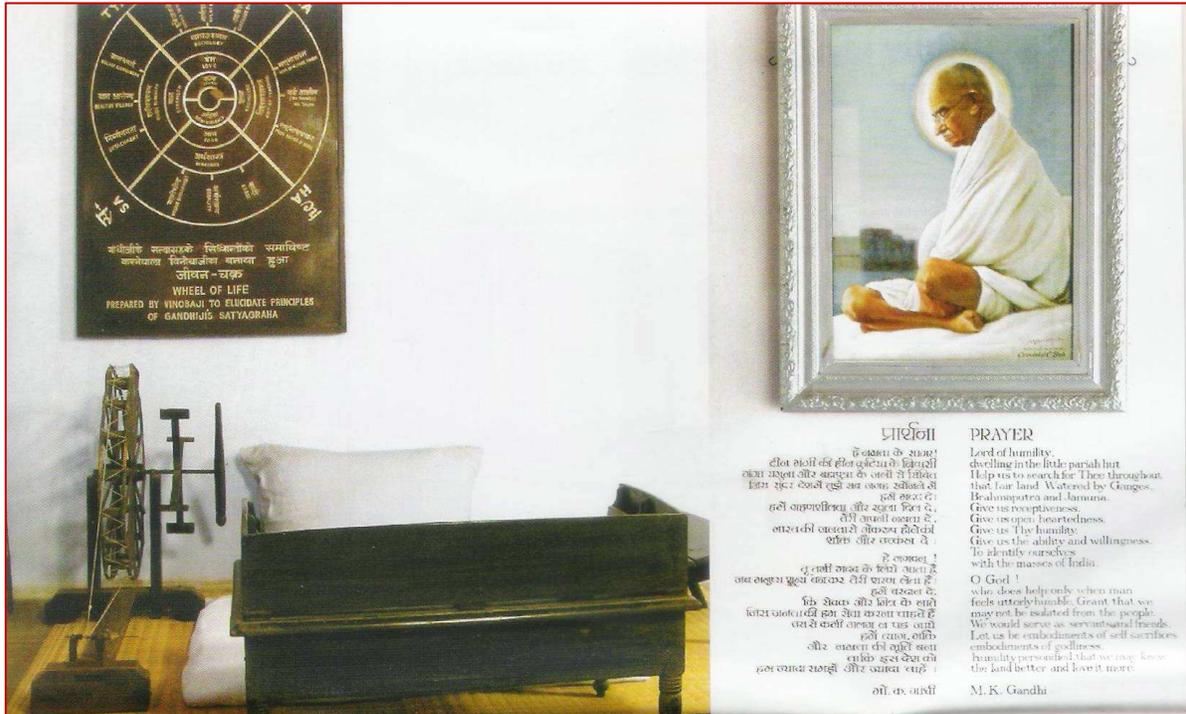
(L) – Bapu’s close room, (R) - visitors with charkha,

This was quite surprising and raised several questions in my mind: if this prayer was so old then what was the tune for singing? Was it sung by Bapuji himself with the disciples? And how is it sung today and what changes have occurred in the basic tune in all these years. I saw one lady employee talking to the visitors and hence decided to ask her. She said, 'This prayer is never sung in last so many years. Once an English woman had recited it here and she only read the English version in roman script. You might get some more information with our secretary in the office'. I was shocked and just took out my mobile and put it near the prayer plaque. I had Manna Da's song loaded in it. As the sweet voice of Manna Da began to fill the atmosphere, many visitors and employees flocked in to listen to it quietly. I played it couple of times and was quite moved. By this time another employee came with a booklet and a bunch of keys. The booklet contained words of this prayer in Gujrathi too. Credit for all the three versions was given as M. K. Gandhi. Now we were special guests and the locked room was opened for us and we were invited to enter. This was quite a surprise and an exciting experience for us. We went in and saw Bapu's room with moist eyes. By this time it had begun to rain heavily, as if we were destined to spend more time in this sacred place. So we went to backyard where Kasturba used to live and had a little kitchen and a guest room. We sat there for a while. As we came from Maharashtra and Mumbai, many questions were asked like – 'what was the role of V.D.savarkar in the assassination of Gandhiji? how is it that Maharashtrais love and hate Bapu with a similar intensity? etc. While discussing, I imagined that Bapu too would have joined us had he been alive.



Disc label of 'The Prayer' inscribed in the Bapu-kuti at Sabarmati Ashram

Soon the rains stopped and we set out to leave. Still, the questions regarding the prayer were haunting me. So, we went to the exhibition area to meet senior person Mr. Amrut Mody, Secretary of the Ashram. He listened to my query patiently and meanwhile called his assistant over phone. A young lady came in with a register in her hand. She was writing something in it and listening to us patiently. Soon She called peon and asked to



प्रार्थना
 हे लज्जता के सागर!
 दीन गंगी की हीन कुटीया के निवासी
 गंगा यमुना और ब्रह्मपुत्र के जलों से सिंचित
 जिस सुंदर देशमें तुझे सब जगह खोजने में
 हमें मदद दे।
 हमें ग्राहणशीलता और खुला दिल दे,
 तेरी अपनी भलाई दे,
 भारतकी जलवायु अंतरूप हीनेकी
 शक्ति और उत्कण्ठा दे।
 हे लज्जता !
 तू हमें मदद के लिये आता है
 जब अक्षय भूखे बनकर तेरी शरण लेता है।
 हमें बख्श दे,
 कि सेवा और मित्र के साथे
 जिस जनताकी हम सेवा करना चाहते हैं
 उससे कर्त्ता जलवायु पक जाये
 हमें त्याग, शक्ति
 और गहराई की मूर्ति बना
 चाकि इस देश को
 हम ज्यादा सज्जी और ज्यादा चाहें।
 गो. क. गांधी

PRAYER
 Lord of humility,
 dwelling in the little parish hut
 Help us to search for Thee throughout
 that fair land Watered by Ganges,
 Brahmaputra and Jamuna.
 Give us receptiveness,
 Give us open heartedness,
 Give us Thy humility,
 Give us the ability and willingness,
 To identify ourselves
 with the masses of India.
 O God !
 who does help only when man
 feels utterly humble. Grant that we
 may not be isolated from the people.
 We would serve as servants and friends.
 Let us be embodiments of self sacrifices
 embodiments of godliness,
 humility personified that we may know
 the land better and love it more.
 M. K. Gandhi

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PRAYER	प्रार्थना	प्रार्थना
<p>Lord of humility ! Dwelling in the little pariah hut Help us to search for Thee throughout that fair land Watered by Ganges, Brahmaputra and Jamuna. Give us receptiveness. Give us open heartedness. Give us Thy humility. Give us the ability and willingness. To identify ourselves with the masses of India. O God ! who does help only when man feels utterly humble. Grant that we may not be isolated from the people. We would serve as servants and friends. Let us be embodiments of self sacrifices, embodiments of godliness, humility personified, that we may know the land better and love it more. -M. K. Gandhi</p>	<p>नम्रताना निधि डे ! दीन भंगी तशी हीन कुटिया मधी निवसता नम्रताना निधि डे ! ज़ाडूनवी, ब्रह्मपुत्रा तशां जण वडे, सरित यमुना तशां पुण्य गडरां ओड सुंदर अछी देशमां शोधवा, सौ मथीअे तने, सडाय तुं था ! - दीन... थाय मन भोक्णां, हटय पुढ्वां रडे, डे डरि ताडरी नम्रता डे ! भूमिभारत तशा लोडथी अेकरस थै जवा शक्ति मति ने स्पृडा डे ! - दीन... डे प्रभु ! सडाय तुं थाय छे मात्र जथां थर्छ रडे नर निराधार छेक; मित्र याकर बनी सेवीअे लोक जे, तेथी विभूटा न पडीअे, तुं डेप. - दीन... आत्मबलिदाननी भूर्ति थर्छेअे अमे, दिव्य भूर्तिमती नम्रता शा, जेथी आ भूमिनुं थाय दर्शन सुभग ने वडे अे प्रति प्रेमधारा. - दीन... -मो. क. गांधी</p>	<p>हे नम्रता के सागर ! दीन भंगी की हीन कुटिया के निवासी गंगा यमुना और ब्रह्मपुत्रा के जलों से सिंचित जिस सुंदर देशमें तुझे सब जगह खोजने में हमें मदद दे । हमें ग्रहणशीलता और खुला दिल दे; तेरी अपनी नम्रता दे; भारत की जनतासे अकरूप होने की शक्ति और उत्कटादे । हे भगवन् ! तू तभी मदद के लिये आता है, जब मनुष्य शून्य बनकर तेरी शरण लेता है । हमें वरदान दे, कि सेवक और मित्र के नाते जिस जनता की हम सेवा करना चाहते हैं उस से कभी अलग न पड जायें. हमें त्याग, भक्ति और नम्रता की मूर्ति बना ताकि इस देश को हम ज्यादा समझें और ज्यादा चाहें । -मो. क. गांधी</p>

get 'The collected works of Mahatma Gandhi—vol. 58'. She saw the index quickly and opened up page 436 for me to show the original 'A prayer'. Dated late September 1934, this was a note added to the letter sent to F. Mary Barr. In turn this was a request of Miss Linforth of Chennai to get some message from Bapu. I also learnt that the Gujrathi version was penned by Bhanvarilal whereas Hindi translation was prepared by Uma Shankar Joshi. Reading my mind, a photocopy of this page was promptly given to me. I was now totally stunned with the revelation of 'The Truth' at this sacred place. As we thanked all and were about to leave, Amrutbhai asked me if I can give them a copy of the song? They want to play it at Bapu Kutī. Of course I had it with me on the mobile for quick transfer using Bluetooth. So, visitors henceforth will hopefully listen to 'The Prayer' while they are reading it at the Bapu Kutī corridor.

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Dr. Suresh Chandvankar, Hon. Secretary, 'Society of Indian Record Collectors'
 September 21, 2012.

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485. A PRAYER¹

[On or before *September 12, 1934*]²

Lord of humility, dwelling in the little pariah hut, help us to search for Thee throughout that fair land watered by Ganges, Brahmaputra and Jumna. Give us receptiveness, give us open-heartedness, give us Thy humility, give us the ability and willingness to identify ourselves with the masses of India.

O God, who does help only when man feels utterly humble, grant that we may not be isolated from the people we would serve as servants and friends. Let us be embodiments of self-sacrifice, embodiments of godliness, humility personified, that we may know the land better and love it more.

Bapu—Conversations and Correspondence, pp. 88-9

^{1&2} The prayer was an enclosure to "Letter to F. Mary Barr", pp. 437-8. In the source, Mary Barr explains: "Miss Linforth is an Englishwoman who was then working at a Hyderabad Welfare Centre run by an inter-communal committee of Hindus, Mussalmans, Christians and Parsis. She had asked me to get Gandhi to give her a message. So he enclosed in his letter to me this little prayer, which she framed and put in her Centre."

³ The addressee had sought Gandhiji's permission to go back to Khurja to attend to his ailing son.

⁴ *Vide* p. 443.

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The collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi
Vol. - 58

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Lyricist Gandhiji –

Namrata ke Saagar or Samrat ?

Namrata Ke Sagar [2008]

Recently 'You Tube' has featured a very interesting video based on Gandhiji's Bhajan - 'O Namrata Ke Sagar'. It could be viewed at –

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z86LscyJhNY>

The song is sung by Pt. Ajay Chakraborty and ending words are by Pt. Bhimsen Joshi. Mr. Amitabh Bachhan appears at the end, reciting some of the verses of the bhajan. This bhajan 'O Namrata ke Sagar' was chanced upon by the illustrious Aditya Birla family of India three years ago. They say that it must have been written by Mahatmaji at their house where Bapuji used to stay often. The composition pleads God to bestow humility on the people and bless the country with prosperity. Reportedly, neither the Congress nor the Gandhi family had any inkling about its existence. The Aditya Birla Group is going to introduce a music album soon, of which this bhajan of Mahatma Gandhi sung in Big B's voice is going to be a part of the album. The music for 'O Namrata ke Sagar' has been composed by southern maestro Ilayaraja. Sources inform that the Mahatma's bhajan is more like a prayer or soliloquy without poetic meter.

The lyric in this video sounds like –

He Namrata ke sagar, teri apni namrata de

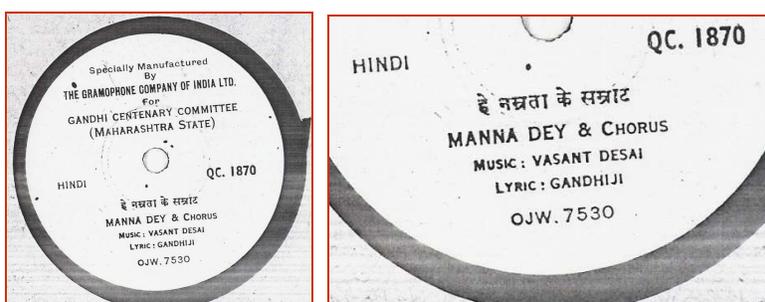
He bhagvan tu kabhi Madad ke liye aata hai?

Jab manushya shunya bankar teri sharan leta hai

Hindustan ki janatase, ek roop honeki shakti do utkantha de

The video is a spectacular one and made beautifully with lot of money spent and may become a hit if it reaches out properly. It is interesting to trace the origin and the history of this unusual song.

'He Namratake Samrat': August 1969– cut on a special 78 rpm record



Specially mfd. By The Gramophone Company of India Ltd.
For Gandhi Centenary Committee (Maharashtra State).
Hindi QC 1870 OJW 7530.
Manna Dey and chorus.
Music: Vasant Desai [Mfd. C.1970]

Transcript of the song from this gramophone record is

He Namrata ke Samrat, He Namrata ke Samrat,

Deen bhangi ki heen kutiya ke nivasi,
Deen bhangi ki heen kutiya ke nivasi,
Ganga yamuna aur godavari ke jalonse
Sinchit isa sundar deshmen
Tujhe sab jage khojanemen, hamen madad de
Hamen grahan sheelata aur khula dil de
Teri apni namrata de, teri apni namrata de,
Bharat ki janatase ekroop honeki,
Shakti aur utkantha de, shakti aur utkantha de, he bhagvan
He bhagvan,
Tu tabhi Madad ke liye aata hai
Jab manushya shunya bankar teri sharan leta hai
Hamen vardan de, hamen vardan de
Ki Sevak aur mitrake naate,
Isa janataki hum seva karna chahate hain
Usa se kabhi alag na pad jaye,
Usa se kabhi alag na pad jaye,
Hamen tyag bhakti aur namrataki moorti bana
Taki isa deshko hum jyada samjhe aur jyada chahe
Hamen vardan de hamen vardan de
He bhagvan, He bhagvan, He Bhagvan

Clearly this is not a poem but reads like a prose.

Recently I talked to Mr. Bal Deshpande on Phone. He lives at Nasik. As soon as I asked him about this record and the song, he began to sing it. This is because he was closely associated with Mr. Vasant Desai and was present at the recording of this song in Mumbai.

He told me that this is neither a poem nor a bhajan, but a letter. Gandhiji wrote it to Maniben Patel, daughter of sardar vallabh bhai Patel. Young Mani had asked gandhiji some questions about the God. How does he look like, where does he stay? Where can I find him? What should I ask him?

This letter was found by Mr. Madhukar Rao Chowdhury who was the President of the "Gandhi Centenary Committee" set up in 1968. Vasant Rao Desai was closely associated with the cultural and music department of Maharashtra State and had launched 'Ek Sur Ek Taal' movement among school children. Mr. Chowdhury requested him to set tune to this letter and thus the letter took the form of a song. Special records were made by state Government and distributed to its institutions. Many copies were

lying in godown and later on scrapped. Die hard record collectors found few copies in Mumbai 'Chor Bazaar' and thus this part of the history was preserved.

- Dr. Suresh Chandvankar

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