

Mohanbhai and His Shop-on-Wheels for the Sale of Gandhian Literature

Ankur Acharya

As I am writing the introduction to this article, two names come to my mind. Firstly, Shri T.R.K Somaiya, popularly addressed as Somaiyaji of Bombay Sarvodaya Mandal (BSM). He is the head of Gandhi Book Centre run by BSM. The second name is that of Shri Mohanbhai Jagandas Anwani, popularly addressed simply as Mohanbhai of Sat Sahitya Prachar Yatra, with his permanent home at Radhanpur in Gujarat. He happens to be a nomad moving around different parts of the country all round the year. These two members of the Gandhian fraternity are fairly well-known. Shri Somaiya happens to be senior in age and experience and volume of work than that of Mohanbhai. However, one thing is common to both of them. They are wedded to the spread of Gandhian teachings and thoughts through the sale of Gandhian literature. That is their life's mission. I may also point out here another important difference between the two: whereas Somaiyaji runs his books centre on behalf of a public body. Shri Mohanbhai runs his shop-on-wheels as his personal enterprise. However, in both cases, making profit for personal benefit is not the objective. Both are in fact, no-profit-no-loss enterprises. If any surplus is generated, it is ploughed back in the maintenance of the sales centres and their upkeep. Both are vegetarian, non-smokers, teetotalers and lead a simple life as prescribed by Gandhiji for Gandhian Social Workers.

As it is mentioned in this article, a person who inspired Mohanbhai to engage himself in the spread of Gandhian thoughts and teachings was late Tharumal Anwani, his paternal uncle. Shri Tharumal, in fact, was a refugee from the erstwhile province of Sindh who had migrated to India after the partition of the erstwhile Indian nation. As the article reveals, he was an inward-looking person not interested in ordinary materialistic life. He has been a strong influence on Shri Mohanbhai. He also conducted the mission of the selling of one lakh copies of the book of commentary on *Bhagawad Gita* written by the Gandhian Stalwart Acharya Vinoba Bhave. In fact, the late Acharya had assigned Tharumal with this mission. He completed it in 28 years, as it will be observed from this article.

This article is the result of an interview conducted by the Assistant Editor of *Ishani*, Shri Ankur Acharya. He has succeeded well in

throwing light on the personality of Mohanbhai and his major achievements. By all standards, I find the article to be a very interesting account of an extra-ordinary individual, nay an extraordinary missionary. I too have known Mohanbhai from close quarters and I am highly impressed by his dedicated work. The greatest joy he experiences in his day-to-day life is the joy of meeting a book-lover and telling to him the wealth of noble thoughts and directives that are scattered all over in the books by Gandhiji and also by many luminaries. I strongly recommend a reading of this article by all readers of *Ishani*.

N.Th.

Sindhi Mohanlal Jagandas Anwani or simply Mohanbhai was born at Tumsar near Nagpur in the state of Maharashtra in India on 23 January, 1960. His father Shri Jagandas had migrated to India along with his uncle from Sindh in Pakistan. Mohanbhai's life is intimately connected with that of his uncle Shri Tharumal who inspired him to take to the sale of Gandhi, Vinoba literature. He also stocks and sells Ramakrishna-Vivekananda and inspiring and good literature by other authors.

After his uncle migrated to India, the Govt. of India had offered him some money as compensation as well as a job in the police service. Shri Tharumal didn't want to keep the money and wanted to give it to charity. His wife, however, insisted that he keep the money for the children. With this disagreement between them, the husband and wife had approached Vinoba Bhave for his advice. Vinoba Ji asked Shri Tharumal's wife if she were allowed to keep the money, would she allow her husband to dedicate himself to social service and sarvodaya activities? Shri Tharumal's wife replied in the affirmative. Hence, Shri Tharumal's wife kept the money and Shri Tharumal resigned from his job in the Police and dedicated his life to sarvodaya activities as directed by Vinoba Ji. Vinoba Ji assigned a target to Shri Tharumal during the Ranchi Sarvodaya Sanmellan in 1960 to sell one lakh copies of *Gita Pravachan* authored by him. Shri Tharumal successfully accomplished this target in course of 28 years between 1960 to 1988.

It was uncle Tharumal who inspired Mohanbhai to take to selling of inspiring and good literature as his life's occupation and called him over to Gujarat to aid him in his task. Mohanbhai was just 19 years old when he engaged himself in this task 30 years ago. He first started selling books carrying them on a cycle. A little later he started using a rickshaw. Over time, he bought his present means of conveyance and shop on wheels, a 1988 model Tata 407 six-wheeler mini-truck. He purchased it second hand for a paltry sum of Rupees One Lakh and 11 thousand only. For this truck he received an interest-free loan for Rs. 75,000/- from the Gita Press, Gorakhpur and the rest was borrowed from relatives. He has already repaid the Gita Press loan through the sales of books, though some portion of the loans taken from his relatives is yet to be

cleared. His vehicle, though old, is custom made to suit his needs and has a LPG gas cylinder and stove, a water tank, and solar lighting system as well as a LCD T.V. which were donated to him by well-wishers. He drives the truck himself and maintains it regularly. It serves him beautifully to go about his chosen occupation. His is thus virtually a shop-on-wheels, as the pictures in this article shows.



Mohanbhai on his mobile shop.

Mohanbhai is mostly sustained by various charitable trusts of Maharashtra and by some individual donations, apart from the profit from the sale of books. Different publishers give him commissions with varying rates to promote sale of their publications. He earns on an average two-and-a-half to three lakh rupees annually with monthly sales going up to Rs 30,000/- at the maximum. Much of this is spent on his daily needs and the maintenance and upkeep of his large vehicle – which does prove to be expensive. So much so that many inquire how he can maintain himself with just the sale of his books with such a large vehicle to maintain. His reply is that God shows a way. He is promoting the sale of good literature. He thus helps society in various ways. The work never stops.

Mohanbhai mostly gets his books from Navajivan Trust of Ahmedabad in Gujarat which provides him with Gandhian and Ramakrishna-Vivekananda and Vinoba

Ji's literature, the Gita Press, Shri Ramakrishna Mission, Rajkot, and the Dhantoli, Nagpur Ramakrishna Mission in Maharashtra. Mohanbhai travels all over Gujarat and Maharashtra to sell his books. He goes mainly to the towns and the schools and colleges there, and sometimes visits the villages also. At times he visits other places of the country as well, going there by train to attend relevant events, and getting his books parcelled by bus or train to him. Assam is one of such places which is his favourite, and which he visits now and then. In Assam he sells books mainly in the public thoroughfares of Guwahati and near important locations like the Gauhati High Court and at Ganeshguri. While in Guwahati he mostly sells Assamese books, along with Hindi and English books. The *Gita Pravachan* of Vinoba Ji and the *Atmakatha* or autobiography of Gandhiji, both in Assamese, sell the most in Guwahati. Otherwise, the type of books he sells consist of Gandhian literature, Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature, Vinoba Ji's literature, and children's literature of Navajivan Trust and the Ramakrishna Mission in Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati and English.



Shri Tharumal, Mohanbhai's uncle: the source of inspiration

While in Maharashtra, Marathi books sell the most, and in Gujarat the Gujarati books. He says there is good sale of Gandhi and Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature. Health-related books, General books and spiritual books all have a good sale. Mohanbhai claims to have sold more than one lakh copies of the *Gita Pravachan* of Vinoba Ji by himself. Other than Vinoba Ji's, the Navajivan Trust (Gandhiji's) and Gita Press *Gitas* sell well. Besides selling books, Mohanbhai sometimes shows films and t.v. shows like of Discovery Channel to children in schools and colleges for free. He has got a DVD and Dish T.V. connection in his car.

On the personal front, Mohanbhai lives near Radhanpur in Gujarat with his aged parents. There are other earning members of the family too to look after his

parents. He mostly travels around. While on the road, he used to cook earlier in his car, but nowadays he just boils milk or water with the help of the gas stove in his car. For food, he partakes of *satvika* vegetarian food wherever he gets it. Sometimes he eats at the hostels of the schools and colleges that he visits. He had married once but is now single. He is fully satisfied with his work and loves it. When asked about his future plans, he said that he has the wish to continue this work of selling and distributing good, noble literature till the body lasts. He feels attracted more towards Vinoba Ji and Gandhiji and also admires Swami Vivekananda. He had the good fortune to meet Vinoba Ji once.

While speaking of his heroes Vinoba Ji and Gandhiji, Mohanbhai waxed eloquent. He said Vinoba Ji had travelled 43,000 miles on foot over 13 years in all types of weather and had led a simple life striving to see God in the multitude. He was indeed a great saint among saints. As for Gandhiji, Mohanbhai said that Gandhiji had almost attained the status of a deity. There has been many a Mahatmas in the past, but it was Gandhiji who took to the society at large the concept of seeing God in the people and not only in the image in the temple. This *sarvabhuta iswara darshan* or seeing God in all, in the poor, the miserable, the ignorant and the downtrodden was unique to him as he lived this ideal in the midst of society. He never repaid ill for any ill done to him or any insult to him, but strove to do good even to such people.

Mohanbhai here narrated the incident of General Smuts and Gandhiji in South Africa. The General had Gandhiji put in prison, but Gandhiji instead of harbouring enmity towards him made a pair of slippers and presented them to General Smuts to wear. This led the General to serious thoughts. He came to the conclusion that the sandals made by such a great one as Gandhiji were worthy of respect and not wearing on his feet. Such was the personality of Gandhiji. He believed in Truth so much that instead of saying that God is Truth, he used to say that Truth is God. Gandhiji had no possessions, wore a loin cloth only and was not extraordinarily qualified or talented. Yet he changed the heart of the great British Empire, in which the sun never set, without resort to arms. People initially called Gandhiji impractical when he started his non-violent struggle. But in the end he came out victorious.

Mohanbhai also briefly spoke of Vivekananda. He said Vivekananda led a unique life which he admired. The youth get much inspiration from him. And his literature is especially very popular among the youths as he has found out. Mohanbhai disclosed that he keeps Vivekananda's lectures on the *Bhagavad Gita* with him. Finally when questioned about his favourite literature, Mohanbhai said that he was especially fond of Vinoba Ji's *Gita Pravachan* and the books *Mangal Prabhat* and *Satya Ke Prayog* by Gandhiji.

I questioned him regarding the *Gita* he himself uses. Mohanbhai said he uses the Sanskrit *Gita* brought out by the Gita Press, Gorakhpur. He disclosed that he has committed to memory the 700 slokas of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Mohanbhai said that he keeps on chanting the *slokas* of the *Gita* while travelling. He also has a very good audio device on which he hears devotional music and other

such things from his 4 GB pen drive. Mohanbhai can speak four languages Hindi, Sindhi, Marathi and Gujarati and can follow a bit of English and Assamese also.

All in all Mohanbhai comes out as a highly committed and an amiable person to know. Though not highly educated himself, he loves the world of books, knows quite a bit about them and has made their dissemination his life's mission. He is indeed a roving missionary engaged in spreading good thoughts and deeds recorded in books authored by great luminaries.

Mohanbhai can be contacted through his postal address:

Shri Mohanbhai Anwani

c/o Sarvodaya Arogya Nidhi Eye Hospital,
Highway Char Rasta, At. & P.O. Radhanpur,
Dist. Patan, Gujarat - 385340.

Mobile: 0 94275 99308 & 0 99787 59566

Assam Mobile: 0 96787 01394.

**** Based on an interview by Ankur Acharya conducted at Nagaland Gandhi Ashram, Camp Office, Guwahati, on Friday, August 14, 2009.***

I've Followed Gandhi's Maxim: Shakira*

Colombian singer Shakira, who was awarded a medal by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) for her work to promote social justice and the advancement of children worldwide, says she has followed Mahatma Gandhi's maxim.

In her remarks, the singer said on Wednesday: "Gandhi used to say 'Be the change you wish to see in the world' and I've followed that maxim."

Shakira thanked the ILO for the prize and dedicated it to all children suffering from violence and extreme poverty, which is the focus of her Barefoot Foundation.

That non-profit organisation takes its name from the recording artist's first album and is devoted to ensuring that education is universally available to every child.

Its Colombian partner, the Pies Descalzos Foundation, works to assist vulnerable children affected by population displacement in the Andean nation, providing them with nutritious meals, education and psychological-support services.

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