

# Ambedkar Times

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**VOL-15** 

ISSUE- 11

May 24, 2023

California (USA)

www.ambedkartimes.com

www.deshdoaba.com

#### REMEMBERING KOMAGATA MARU

#### **Prem Kumar Chumber**

**Editor-in-Chief: Ambedkar Times & Desh Doaba** 

Komagata Maru reminds us of the great sacrifices made by Punjabis for the honour of our motherland and to seek freedom in order to live with self-respect and dignity. Komagata Maru incident also reminds us of the draconian exclusionary laws brought into practice to keep out immigrants from the colonies of the British Raj. The first of such laws was passed on January 8, 1908, which debarred all those persons from entering into Canada who did not "come from the country of their birth or citizenship by a continuous journey and or through tickets purchased before leaving their country of their birth or nationality." In fact, this or any such type of law was enacted to preclude immigration from India. Given the long distance between India and Canada, unbroken or continuous voyage from India was next to impossible then. Generally, such a long distance voyage required some halt in Japan or Hawaii that activated the exclusionary clauses of theabove-mentioned laws.

A total number of 376 passengers from Punjab boarded



the Komagata Maru, a Japanese steamship hired by Baba Gurdit Singh Sandhu, who publicly espoused the Ghadarite cause during his sojourn in Hong Kong. Baba Gurdit Singh Sandhu was well aware of the exclusionary immigration laws of the Canadian government. But given his revolutionary spirit, he was determined to challenge such inhuman legislation leading to a prolonged battle with the Canadian white regime. In the due course of whole of the episode, tremendous political awareness was generated. Public meeting were organized by the Canadian conservative political leadership to build up pressure to keep the passengers out. On the other end a "shore committee" was organized under the leadership of Hassan Rahim and Sohan Lal Pathak. Indo Canadians also held protest meetings in Canada and the United States to build up pressure against the exclusionary immigration laws. After a prolonged confrontation which also witnessed some violent outburst from the stranded passengers who were demanding that justice be given to them, only 20 passengers were allowed to enter Canada and the rest of them were deported back on the same ship. The Komagata Maru, which sailed from Hong Kong, Shanghai, China to Yokohama and finally to its destination in Vancouver arrived in Calcutta on September 27, 1914. The political events that surrounded the episode met their thunderous flare up at the Budge Budge leading to the killing of 19 innocent passengers who were already harassed to the core. During the melee some of the passenger escaped and the remainder were arrested and imprisoned or put under house arrest in their respective villages until the end of the World War I.

The Komagata Maru incident provided impetus to the Ghadar movement and sharpened the ongoing freedom struggle in the country. This incident is metamorphosed into a vibrant memory of great sacrifices and candid concern for freedom, dignity and justice. The incident did not stop haunting the conscience of the perpetrators of such inhuman atrocities on the enthusiastic passengers who wanted to take a whiff of fresh air on the promised soil of Canada. On May 23, 2008, the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia did penance in unanimously passing a resolution that "this Legislature apologizes for the events of May 23, 1914, when 376 passengers of the Komagata Maru, stationed off Vancouver harbor, were denied entry by Canada. The House deeply regrets that the passengers, who sought refuge in our country and our province, were turned away without benefit of the fair and impartial treatment befitting a society where people of all cultures are welcomed and accepted

### Remembering a visionary personality: Chaudhry Ishwar Das Pawar

ertain people leave a lasting impression on our hearts and positively impact lives. As role sonable affordable level. Thousands of people from models they inspire others to follow their example and tread their time tested path. Super heroes in the vanguard to espouse social/humanitarian his interpretation of the rules. While serving in the

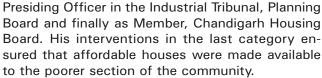
causes include, Baba Sahib B.R. Ambedkar, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela and Mother Teresa, among others. There are countless others at the next level, whose appeal is grounded to the earth, among the milieu they belonged to. Their contribution to the cause of the deprived is by no means insignificant. Chaudhry Ishwar Das Pawar represented the latter group. On the occasion of 115th anniversary of his birth, May 9, 2023, I propose to reflect upon and remind ourselves of the salient features from his life. And how he tried to change the condition of his exploited community. This trib-

ute is a way to express genuine emotion and appreciation for the significant contribution of the 'marg darshak', in order that his inspiration does not get marginalised or lost sight of. Among the early influence on him, Pawar Sahib mentions in his autobiography: "My Struggle in Life" about Babu Mangu Ram of Muggowal and the Ad Dharma Mandal he started on return from the U.S. He was ap-

plauded as among the early crusaders to raise the banner of revolt against 'the aggression, oppression, tyranny, deception, and exploitation of the poor and the ignorant committed behind the facade of religious philosophy.' Mangu Ram succeeded in creating awareness and awakening among the oppressed and the downtrodden to get back their dignity and self-respect. Pawar ji joined hands and even contributed articles to Adi Danka to espouse the cause that was close to the crusader's heart. Another illustration of

the dictum' wise men think alike'. Pawar Sahib's life exemplified the dictum 'Simple living and high thinking.' He never allowed his rustic and modest upbringing to come in the way of being one of the first member from the community to be a graduate in the mid nineteen thirties. This was because of his total commitment to the world of education and knowledge, inspired no doubt by Jyotiba Phule and Dr. Ambedkar. On his appointment to the Punjab Judicial Service, he mastered the intricacies of the legal procedure, which was necessary in his professional career. It also helped him fight the cause of the exploited class who were at the receiving end of the prejudices of the entrenched bureaucracy. He came out on top, challenging their interpretation based on cogent reasoning of a trained legal luminary. As Under Secretary in Home Ministry in Punjab Government, he was instrumental in streamlining the procedure, to overcome inbuilt regulation which acted against the issuance of Passport to the people of the lower strata of the society. The requirement of a minimum amount of money sonable affordable level. Thousands of people from the community were able to migrate to the U.K. and the U.S. in the 1950s and 1960s because of

> Subordinate Services Selection Board he was shocked to find an inherent practice that physical appearance and the absence of social grace could be the reason for elimination at the interview level for the Scheduled Caste candidates. He won the argument among fellow Members on the Board and ensured that the otherwise candidates deserving among them got better understanding and consideration. This prevented reserved posts going a begging and the resultant under-representation in the cadre. Chaudhry Pawar's pioneering zeal continued even in post-retirement appointments as



During his long professional career, Ishwar Das Pawar witnessed gross injustice, inhuman treatment and official apathy, social and political

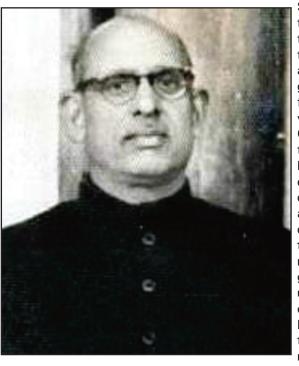
> victimization of the deprived community. In official positions held, imbued with missionary zeal, he championed their cause, opening new opportunities, ensuring that justice was done to them.

> For his sagacity and wisdom and the qualities of head and heart Pawar Sahib was highly regarded among the political establishment. He had direct access to senior Minsters in the Punjab Government, who frequently sought his advice on a wide range of ussies. At their request he would put up well thought out draft pro-

posals, which were invariably accepted and implemented. Chaudhry Sahib was invited by a wide spectrum of political establishment to join politics to provide useful inputs and leadership and to give a sense of direction to the cause of Scheduled Castes. Having been disillusioned by the skulduggery that goes in that realm he opted out of it. Instead he preferred to concentrate championing their cause, while remaining outside the system. That was a clear manifestation of the humanist's selfless devotion, without expecting personal recognition or reward.

The community should always be beholden to the noble soul. The best tribute to him will be to learn lessons from his life, follow the lifelong ideals for which he fought. May he continue to guide the coming generations to shake off the inertia and to throw off the yoke of subordination. Only then would they be able to occupy their rightful place as equal citizens in the society.

Long live the ideals of Chaudhry Ishwar Das Pawar and his cherished memory.



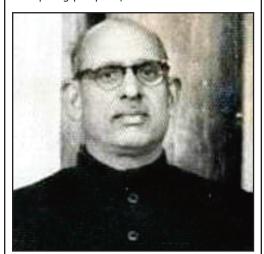


# Remembering Shri Ishwar Das Pawar on his Birth Anniversary

Prem Kumar Chumber

Editor-in-Chief
Ambedkar Times & Desh Doaba

Sh. Ishwar Dass Pawar is known for his significant contribution for the upliftment of Scheduled Castes. He had the honour of becoming the first Civil Servant Officer from the community. After assuming the portfolio of Passport Officer, many people belonging to Ad Dharmi community were issued passports. His helpful nature facilitated many SCs in acquiring passports, which was almost next to



impossible to have one in the absence of some registered property in their name. Ad Dharmis of Punjab were the pioneers of the Dalit movement in the Northwest India. Sh. Pawar Ji served the cause of the Samaj through his bold decisions in the direction of Dalit empowerment. When he was appointed as the passport issuing officer in the region, he made great contribution towards helping his people reach foreign lands to improve their life conditions. To obtain a passport one needs to show some property, which lowest of the low were deprived of simply for being born in such families. Sh. Pawar saw to it that this formidable hurdle should not come in their way to obtain passports. It was during his tenure at the Passport office that a large number of people belonging to various Scheduled Castes (SCs) communities started reaching abroad. Currently SCs of Punjab constitute the second largest emigrant group from Punjab in North America and Western Europe.

The lesson to serve one's community, Sh. Pawar Ji learnt from the teachings of Ad Dharm movement. Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia, the founder of the glorious Ad Dharam movement of Punjab, influenced Pawar Sahib deeply. Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia Ji used to visit him in Chandigarh at his residence and Mrs. Pawar look after them passionately as both of them were well aware of their commitment towards the Dalit Samaj. ID Pawar was not only a source of aspiration for his people but also great support to help them at various levels of administration for their day-to-day life requirements

# Many Congratulations to Dr. Gurpreet Kaur on her stupendous success

#### in the Union Public Services Commission (UPSC) civil services Examination 2022

It was Dr. Gurpreet's childhood dream, inspired from her father's long journey of hard work and experiments. Being from a humble background, Dr. Ajit Singh started with a course in the pharmacy as also worked in the Government Rural Health Service. He succeeded in the entrance exam and successfully completed his MBBS. He served BSF as an Asst. Commandant for four years in places like Ladakh and Bengal. As a great aspirant he also tried attempting UPSE CSE. Despite multiple attempts, he couldn't clear the interview stage. This didn't stop him, the next year he cleared UPSC CMS and joined the Indian Railways and served as Senior Divisional Medical Officer till his death in 2008.

**Dr. Gurpreet Kaur** has cleared the UPSC services, the result of which was declared on May 22, 2023. She born in Pune (Maharashtra) and spent initial years in Assam due to posting of father in the Indian Railways with schooling till 8th before moving on to hometown

Amritsar (Punjab, India) after the demise of her father Dr. Ajit Singh in 2008. She completed the last two years of schooling in Pune, Maharashtra along with preparing for medical entrance exam. Dr. Kaur qualified as a Dental Surgeon from the Government Dental College and Hospital, Amritsar. started the UPSC preparation during the last year of internship and eventually achieved the success in the fourth attempt in the UPSC exam. She worked for some time after graduation before turning to a full time aspirant. Starting with solely selfstudying, Dr Kaur took guidance from the online coaching to revise and identify the weak areas in the last attempt.

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Mother Parminder Kaur has been a successful homemaker and pensioner. She managed to support and guides her two children to achieve milestones in their life. Dr Kaur's elder brother did his B. Tech in the Mechanical Engineering in 2012 and joined the Indian Rail-

ways as senior section Engineer in 2014. Starting with serving the Central Railways at Pune, he moved to serve in the Northern Railways Mechanical Workshop at Amritsar (Punjab).

Incidentally, Dr Gurpreet Kaur is the niece of Prof.(Dr.) Rai Kumar Hans who retired as a Professor of History from the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda (Gujrat). He moved to Baroda when he was pursuing his M.Phil degree in the Guru Nanak Dev University in 1978. Along with his other works, Prof Hans has been meticulously pursuing his research and studies on Sikh history and Dalits of Punjab. His works have appeared in the eminent publication houses.

Prof Hans has visited many countries including the USA a few times. He was invited by the Sri Guru

Ravidass Sabha of New York in 2010 as he also visited many Gurdwaras and Sri Guru Ravidass Temples in California including Fresno, Stockton, Bay Area, Pittsburgh, Yuba City, and Sacramento. Prof. Hans had close interaction with Mr Prem Kumar Chumber, Editorin-Chief of "Ambedkar Times" (English) and "Desh Doaba" (Punjabi) weeklies, Sacramento (California). He also visited the office and members of Dr. Ambedkar Educational Aid Society, Fremont (California). The Society especially invited him in 2018 to deliver the special address on the celebration of Babasaheb Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's birth anniversary. Editor: Ambedkar Times





Dr. Paramjit S Takhar, MD

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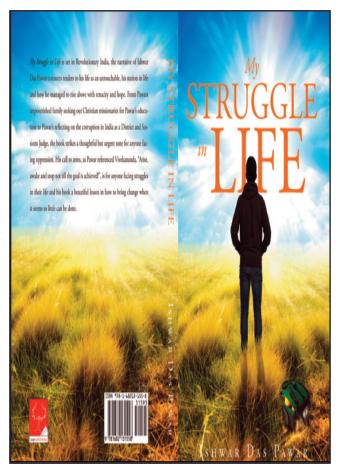


## The Passport Affair

took over as under secretary in the middle of October 1952 was given the charge of the Departments of Partition and Commerce and Industry. Later the work of the Passport Department was also entrusted to me. Meetings of the Par-

tition Implementation Committee between India

and Pakistan used to be held every three months, alternately at Simla and Lahore at the chief secretaries' level and sometimes at the ministers' level as the need was. Besides the official business, these meetings afforded me an opportunity to see the places and houses in Lahore where we had lived happily only a short while ago. Such visits were naturally emotive. During our stay at Lahore, we were not quite free to move about and see people who had been our friends or coworkers. The CID people kept a vigilant watch over our movements. These restrictions notwithstanding, I was able, with the cooperation of the nice driver of the car placed at our disposal by the Pakistan government, to visit places in Krishana nagar where I, along with my family, had resided for quite long. These places brought to my mind the happy and, at the same time, sad memories of the past. People there did not seem to be very happy with the changed state of affairs but would talk only in a subdued voice. Some of them, who were critical of their own people, requested me to convey their deep affection and great respects to India and her people. They had not forgotten the times they had spent here as their beloved home. As regards commerce and industry, the work was of a routine nature and nothing of much importance was to be done. But in this connection, I have to make a mention of one instance. The government had set up industrial estates at various focal points including Jalandhar city, and a number of persons interested in setting up industries were allotted plots for various trades. No plot was, however, allotted to a scheduled caste person, possibly for the reason that nobody came forward to make a demand. One day, Anant Ram Badhan, a promising young man of Jalandhar, saw me in my office and requested for a plot in the industrial area at Jalandhar. It was good that at least one person had come forward in this field. I told him he could have a plot out of the unallotted ones. He had a particular plot in mind and put his finger on that plot as shown in the map. Accordingly, I put up a proposal to the secretary of industries, recommending that the specific plot be allotted to Badhan. Thus the young man got the plot of his choice. He was happy. He set up an iron industry there and has been doing very well in the trade. The passport work was the important job. As I was absolutely new to the job and the grant of passport, especially for UK, carried with it a lot of responsibility, I started cautiously. Some scheduled caste MLAs and other leaders approached me in connection with the passport case of a young matriculate Harijan (person from low caste) boy of Ambala named Harbans Lal, whose family was carrying on the business of kikar (acacia) bark used in leather tanning. He wanted to go to UK to study the methods of tanning and finding out the scope for the business. His application for the grant of a passport had been turned down after obtaining the concurrence of the Government of India. He made two applications for the review of the orders, but these were also rejected after obtaining the concurrence of the Government of India, as had been done on the previous occasion. I thought it must have been done on the previous occasion. I thought it must have been a very bad case. I felt diffident whether it would at all be possible to help the boy. But in view of the fact that so many important persons had spoken to me about the case, I asked them to tell the boy to make another review application, which he did in due course. I asked the office to put up the case to me with facts and their comments. The case came to me with a lengthy office note, justifying the orders of rejection. I went through it and the office note carefully but was not convinced of the correctness and justification of the orders. Then I sent for the office superintendent in order to find out if he could throw more light on the case. He vehemently defended the previous orders mainly on the ground that all the three orders had the concurrence of the Government of India. Confronted with the facts of the case, he had to admit that a passport could be issued then but not now. It became clear to me that it was a case of a wrong decision. Why a special procedure was adopted in this case for obtaining the concurrence of the central government while the case could have easily been decided at the state level as was the rule? I had already learnt that there was a lot of corruption



in the passport office. Therefore, one of the probable reasons for not granting passport to the scheduled caste people could be that they were too poor to grease the palms of the concerned officials. It was evidently a case of injustice. Accordingly, I put up a note to the secretary, stating the facts of the case and proposing that in view of the fact that the previous orders were wrong and the concurrence of the Government of India was obtained by wrongly representing the facts of the case, we might review our previous orders, grant a passport to the applicant, and then inform the central government. On seeing my note, the officials got perturbed. They told me that the orders could not be reviewed without first getting the Government of India revise their own orders. I told them not to get excited as it was my responsibility. The Home Secretary agreed with me, and the case came back. I directed the office to prepare a passport and dispatch it to the person concerned the same day and then to send the case back to me for further action. This was done, and I then informed the minister also accordingly. I knew that accepting the advice of the office would inevitably mean tying the case in red tape, as it was likely to get bogged down at one stage or the other for months together. This delay would have robbed the decision and its purpose of much of its grace. Delay was and is a routine phenomenon in government offices. But I wanted to cut the red tape, and I did it successfully and very rightly too. Then I wrote a demi-official letter to the passport officer at Delhi detailing the reasons for the review of the previous orders and the grant of a passport to the boy. I specifically told the passport officer, Broughton, that the central government's concurrence was obtained by us by wrongly representing the facts of the case. There was a whisper in the office that a nasty stinker from the central government was in the offing. A few days later, I received a demi-official letter from Broughton in reply to my letter. It was on unexpected lines. I feel tempted to reproduce below Broughton's letter, which is both revealing and refreshing: Ministry of External Affairs New Delhi. No.F. 8(48)-PU. 11/52 6th April, 1953. My dear Pawar, Your official letter No. 2744-PE-53/6310, dated 21st March, 1953 has come as a breath of cool and refreshing air. Hitherto the sequence has been that you receive and reject an application for a passport, we then receive an appeal and, in several cases, overrule your objections. In the present case the reverse has taken place and, in spite of our agreement with your first reactions that a passport should not be granted to the applicant, the Punjab Government have reconsidered the position and guite correctly, issued him with a passport. As it is our policy to be as liberal as possible in the grant of passports consistent with the security and honour of the country, it should always be the object of State Governments to grant passport facilities as freely as they can and only to refuse them when the evidence is really strong that the issue of a passport in a particular case would be detrimental to our interest. We receive frequent complaints about the arbitrary severity with which the passport rules are administered by the passport authorities, particularly in the Punjab, and we are inclined to feel from our experience that, by and large, there is some degree of justification for these complaints. Yours Sincerely, I. J. Broughton Shri Ishwar Das Pawar, B.A.LL.B., P.C.S., Under-Secretary to Goverment, Punjab, Partition Department, Simla This letter strengthened my hands, and much of the mist surrounding the working of the office was cleared. I had started well. Red tapism and rigmarole were no favorites of the higher authorities. The Government of India appreciated bold and generous decisions. I sent up Broughton's letter for the information of the secretary and the chief minister, who was also the minister-in-charge. I found myself on the right path. Scheduled caste people would come to me grumbling that they were denied passport for UK while others got them quite freely. They also made a similar complaint to the Harijan minister Chaudhari Sunder Singh. I too realized that their grouse was quite well-founded, as they were not getting justice in this regard. Therefore, I discussed this problem with the minister. On the basis of this discussion, he put up a note to the chief minister, setting out the grievances of the scheduled castes and requesting him to look into the matter personally. The note travelled down to my table as it had to. The point raised was to be examined first by me as the passport officer. The office appended a note in routine and hackneyed lines. It was merely a reiteration of the procedure in force. They had no worthwhile suggestion to make. On the other hand, I had a clear idea of the problem and enough perception of the real difficulties being faced by Harijans. I began my note with the admission, rather confession, that the complaint and the grouse of these people were perfectly genuine and justified but at the same time noted that they could not be helped in the face of the prevalent rules, which were too rigid and cumbersome to be complied with by them. The other difficulty, which was even more important, was that the police and the CID reports about them

were mostly unfavorable and rather adverse. The (Contd. on next page)

## The Passport Affair

(Continue from page 3)

department was helpless in this matter. I however made certain suggestions which, if accepted, in my view, would go a long way in mitigating the hardships faced by them. The following were two of them: (a) the amount of cash of Rs 10,000 required to be shown deposited in a bank should be reduced by at least half the sum; and (b) the concerned officers and departments, the CID, the police, and the DCs, in particular, should be directed to deal with the cases of Harijan applicants with care and sympathy. This much was a must, according to me, if the complaints of the Harijans were to be substantially removed. With this note, I sent the case file to the Home Secretary who was in charge of the department. I had some hope that the suggestions made by me had a sporting chance of being accepted. In this matter, I had the full support of our minister Chaudhri Sunder Singh. Anyway, I had spoken out my mind and made the proposals in good faith. The secretary sent for me. He looked a bit unhappy. He asked me as to how it was possible to make the proposed changes in the rules. I simply said that that was the only way if we wanted to help the Harijans. Then I left. I got apprehensive. The case file came back after a short while, and it was a pleasant surprise to find that the secretary had agreed with my proposals in their entirety. The battle was half won. In terms of this decision, a suitably drafted circular letter was issued to all the departments and officers concerned. They were required by the instructions to deal with the passport applications of the Harijans with due care and sympathy. Their attention was also drawn to their complaints and grievances. The problem got wings. I informed the minister about the fruitful results of his note. He was evidently happy and gratified. These instructions had the desired effect. The difficulty regarding financial position was softened considerably, and the police and the CID reports became generally favorable. My path lay smooth. In view of the changed conditions, it became possible for me to grant passports to quite a

number of Harijans more easily and justly. Whenever they needed any guidance and help here and there, I did the needful with a sense of satisfaction to do so. Nothing was done which was unusual or out of the way much less against the rules. In those days, there was no visa system as far as UK was concerned. It was introduced later. This way, quite a number of Harijans were able to get passports for UK and other countries. Many of those families are now in that country and some of them had acquired citizenship of that land. It gives me a great pleasure and unbounded satisfaction to know that they are living there happily and are much better off. I was just an instrument in the hands of nature that was bent in the service of the poor and the needy who had been unjustly ignored by others. Being in a position from where I could help them, it became my legal and moral duty to do justice to them. Our people living in UK remember me with great love and affection. It is so nice of them. I wholeheartedly reciprocate their sentiments. They send me message after message to visit the country of their adoption, but for reasons of health, I have not been able to comply with their request. They have a grouse about me; I am not quite in touch with them. But on my part, I love them in equal measure and can possibly have no grievance whatsoever against them. They are flesh of our flesh and blood of our blood. My mind often goes out to them for their loving remembrance. In view of my erratic and unsatisfactory state of health, I am not much optimistic whether I would ever be able to go there and meet them though it would have been a unique privilege for me if I could satisfy my strong desire to go there. Incidentally, my daughter Kamlesh is also in London. My son-in-law, Vidya Bhushan Soni, is a counsellor in the Indian High Commission there. They too are pressing me to pay a visit to London. Howsoever I might wish, my health does not permit me, at least for the present, to undertake the journey to that country of my dreams. My only regret has been that I did not remain in the job relating to the grant of passport for

a longer time to render a bit more service to the helpless people. Within less than a year, I was shifted from this post and appointed as a member of the newly constituted Punjab Subordinate Services Selection Board. There too, duty was awaiting me to render in a different form and sphere of service to the neglected people. In that post I remained for full eight years. Shortly after leaving the passport post, I saw Chaudhri Sunder Singh at the secretariat at Chandigarh. It was only a courtesy call. During our talk, he told me that there was a whispering campaign in official circles that an enquiry be held against me. "Any corruption charge against me?" I enquired. "No such charge is possible," came a prompt reply. The allegation made against me was that I granted so many passports to the Harijans, which was uncalled for and unwarranted. I told the minister that it was correct that I grant passports to quite a number of Harijans but strictly on merits. There was not a single case where the order was either not justified on merits or was against the rules. My only fault was that I treated Harijan applicants on a par with other applicants. This was not being done before. Therefore, this irked non-Harijans. Consequently, there was nothing to fear if an inquiry was held. As a matter of fact, such an inquiry was welcome as others could be exposed for their discriminatory treatment of the Harijans.

I did nothing wrong. What I did was by way of faithful and honest discharge of my duties and trying to undo the grave injustice that had previously been done to them. I further told the minister that actually, as the boot was on the other leg, an inquiry should be held against those responsible for illegally and unjustly denying passports to the Harijans and thus were guilty of dereliction of their official duty by treating all not on the basis of equality. On hearing me speak thus, the face of the minister bore a broad smile, and he said, "Nothing to worry." Ultimately, better sense prevailed, and the whispering talk of an inquiry proved empty and futile.



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