



DOMINIC THOMAS' RADIO DOCUMENTARY, "TITUSJI BAPU'S FOOT SOLDIER", GOES BEYOND THE MAHATMA.

Great people ensure others listen to them when they talk and think and act on what they say after they leave. That is what Mahatma Gandhi achieved. This has been brought out vividly in an English radio documentary titled "Titusji Bapu's Foot Soldier", written, devised and produced by Dominic Thomas, Programme Executive, External Services Division, All India Radio.

The 26-minute-long programme has won the Gandhian Philosophy Award-2014 — instituted from November 12, 2001 to commemorate Gandhiji's only visit to the AIR on same date in 1947. "Gandhian philosophy is confined to seminars, symposiums and conferences or limited to celebration of national days, like his birth and death anniversary and Republic and Independence days. But he lives in the hearts of the people," says Dominic.

An article in *Reader's Digest* about Thevarthundiyl Titus or Titusji (born in 1905, Maramon village of Kerala), who was part of the historic Dandi or Salt march (1930) intrigued Dominic who then located his younger son, Thomas Titus. The latter reveals in the documentary, "My father was the only selected Christian member of the historic Dandi March 1930." Comments Dominic, "I used the original recording of Thomas (about eight to nine minutes) to authenticate the content." Titusji's comments are in Kaushik Roy's voice and narration is by Abhishek Mukhopadhyaya. The programme includes audio of the first ever television interview of Gandhiji in 1930s and the original audio of slogans raised during the march, courtesy Gandhi Museum, Rajghat,

Though Titusji maintained a diary during his stay in Sabarmati Ashram (1929-1934) — which is mandatory for all the inmates — he surrendered it as per the compulsory custom. When called upon AIR Bhopal to talk about his association with Mahatma in Hindi, due to his inability to read and speak

the language, Titusji narrated the experience to his son, who till then was ignorant, transliterated it in Hindi but in Roman script.

Dominic traces how Titusji, a diploma holder in dairy management, became an associate of the leader. He was intimated to attend a job interview with Mahatma for the post of manager of Satyagraha Ashram's gaushala. Ironically, his elder brother had applied on his behalf. He remarks, "I decided to attend the interview not for the job but for availing the opportunity of having a personal talk with the Mahatma." Employment conditions specified no salary with all expenses taken care of and two hours daily to be devoted to kitchen and house work. Interestingly, Titusji's request for some money for remitting to his old father was agreed by Gandhiji.

Unable to decide, Titusji asked for time. "On the way back to Gorakhpur inner voice urged me to accept the offer," he says. He eventually joins on October 29, 1929 (Diwali day). He abided with all the rules of the hermitage, including spinning which Titusji admits, got on his nerves initially. "I got used to it and it turned out to be a pleasure," he reveals and adds, "From the yarn I spun I could get more clothes I needed for the whole year."

The producer highlights several facets of Gandhiji's personality through the inmate's writing. For example, aware that Titusji's father was worried about his son, Gandhiji during his visit to Parthasarathy temple at Aranmula, located in the princely State of Travancore, met him to assure that his son was in safe hands.

The 79 inmates of the ashram chosen for the march were briefed by Gandhiji about the hardships it entailed. Besides he instructed them to maintain discipline, observe diet restriction, complete their daily quota of spinning and praying every evening.

Besides they had to teach villagers about clean drains, toilet, environment and accepting whatever food is offered. The offer of a consignment by a biscuit manufacturer was turned down by Mahatma terming it "a luxury".

The radio show exhibits how Mahatma's followers passed on his message to others, like the way Titusji did to his wife. Though initially reluctant she gave away her jewellery for the country's cause. The ashram life made her industrious, disciplined, humble and simple and helped her develop respect for manual and hard labour.

The radio show highlights Titusji's complete devotion to the leader by showing how he challenged a bishop about reaching heaven through Christ and remarked, "I don't want to go a heaven which does not have Gandhiji. If such a good person does not have a place in heaven, how can I have a place."

Summing up his documentary on Gandhiji, Dominic comments, "His teachings and philosophy is not merely a theory or ideology but a pragmatic idea that can be practised in our daily life making percept and practice possible."