



Baburao Anantrao Kadam

Translation to English-
Surendra Patharkar

TANDAV

**Autobiography
of a Soldier**

Script: **Adv. Yashwant Kadam**

E-Sahitya Pratishthan



Presents

Autobiography of a Soldier

T A N D A V

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Word-recording / Script: Adv. Yashwant Kadam

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Introduction of the Script Writer

Yashwant Baburao Kadam

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Date of Birth – 14 August 1948

Primary Education:

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Retired as an officer from the Income Tax Department (Mumbai).

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From the time of establishment, associated with the following literary institutions:

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Published Literature

Life introduction of Sadguru Dattatraya Shinde Maharaj –
1975

Phulora (Representative Poetry Collection) – 2008

Ghe Bharari (Representative Poetry Collection) – 2011

Jeevangane (Poetry Collection) – 5-6-2010

Antarang (Poetry Collection) – 28-2-2011

Bhaktirang (Poetry Collection) – 2012

Bolavita Dhani Vegalachi (Poetry Collection) – 11-1-2013

Tandav (Biography) – 11-1-2013

Preface

There was absolutely no possibility that such writing would ever happen. I was an unskilled, almost illiterate, rough soldier. A soldier like me, who had spent his entire life in struggling circumstances - such a person should write something about life and the events that occurred in it—this thought itself would never have come to mind.

All this happened, and truly it must be called extraordinary.

My eyesight had become weak. For the past five years I had been moving about in such a condition, almost feeling my way forward, approaching the age of seventy-five. Along with that, there was the immense emptiness created by



the death of my wife. Days were passing one after another like this. For the past year I had been trying to gather myself together. The entire enthusiasm of my life and my mind had vanished.

Why should I live? For whom should I live? In such thoughts, death alone appeared constantly before me—like a daydream.

But because of the insistence of my son, Yashwant, he forced me to undergo eye surgery at Bombay Hospital. An implantation was done. Through that I received new vision.

When I returned to the village, for the first time I saw the Dhokatya hill. I felt great joy. Getting down from the vehicle, I kissed the soil of my motherland. It felt as if something that had been lost had been found again. At home I was now able to move about independently.

To keep me engaged, my son repeatedly and curiously asked me about the many bitter and sweet incidents that had happened in my life and encouraged me to speak. He kept telling me that I should write about the events of the

Second World War. He brought me a notebook. And I sat down to write.

Truly, I found the rhythm. Countless incidents began to pass before my eyes like scenes of a film in the form of memory pictures. I felt tremendous enthusiasm and I started writing.

Every fifteen days Yashwant would come to the village and lovingly inquire about my writing. From that, this writing effort came into being. Along with him, there were many discussions about several incidents and events. Many of the questions he asked were answered by me through my writing.

Later my writing almost stopped. My hands would not move. After reading everything I had written, he tried to give it a literary language. Whatever I wrote and told is all true. Through his efforts, my memories were given this written form, and from it this creation came into existence.

I dedicate this creation of mine to my late wife, Lakshmibai, who stood by me throughout my life.

Late Baburao Anantrao Kadam.



मला जीवनभर साथ देणारी माझी दिवंगत पत्नी

कै. लक्ष्मीबाई हिला

अर्पण....

The Account of Life

When the thought of writing all this came to my mind, many questions arose in my mind. How should I write? What should I write? For what purpose and for whom should I write? And what use would all this be?

But putting all these questions aside, this effort is made only to release, all at once, the surge of countless incidents that had been suppressed in my mind for many years.

To be born is truly a gift of God. And along with that, whatever one receives is received according to destiny, according to the accumulated deeds of the past. The parents to whom I was born, the family whose protection I received, all the relatives there, my kith and kin, my brothers and sisters, the strong bond of their love, the poverty that came to my share, and also the richness of my family's past history—all this I received according to my destiny.

From the time of my birth I grew up in the environment in which I lived, played among my siblings, and grew from childhood to adulthood under the warm quilt of my parents' affection.

Later came job and family life, its hardships, and while moving forward through poverty, whatever I learned from the experiences of facing that fierce turmoil; the terrifying rain of fire that I faced in the Second World War; along with that the many years of imprisonment that I endured and the dreadful life within it—facing all this with courage—and later, after surviving and returning safely, the strange behavior of the British Government here, the mental suffering caused by it, and after that the job in the police department, retirement, and the dreadful fever of old age; some moments of satisfaction and happiness, sweet and bitter incidents—along with all these the endless grace of God and the affectionate support I received until my last breath.

While experiencing all this, the boat of my life faced many storms, and it is difficult to express all this fierce turmoil

in words. Yet, plainly, as best as I could, I kept writing. There was very little. Putting great strain on my mind to recall everything, I wrote and narrated whatever I could. Around me the dance of death was going on. In such a state, setting aside all the above questions, I decided—with the help of my children and to the best of my ability—to present the account of my life. Thus this form of the eternal word took shape in the form of this book.

The Social Conditions of That Time

My village Terav is a beautiful village surrounded by nature and mainly dependent on agriculture. Most of the farmers cultivate their own land and grow mainly rice for their livelihood. However, since almost everyone had very little land, there was no option except to seek employment besides farming. At that time, wages were also very negligible. Most of the workers from the Kunbi community worked for wages and managed their lives with just two meals a day. Only a few people, countable on fingers, used to go to cities like Pune or Mumbai in search of jobs.

Carpenters used to receive their wages in the form of rice. Once a year they would collect their share, known as baluti. In return, throughout the year they would repair the farming tools required by those farmers. Even today this tradition continues to some extent. Nowadays, however, farmers themselves are becoming fewer and much of the farmland lies uncultivated. The village is agricultural, and the

need for manpower used to be fulfilled within the joint family system.

At that time there were no proper roads in the village. There were only small paths connecting different hamlets. Water facilities were also not very good. Wells were the only source of water. Most of the people were poor. Their houses were also mostly made of mud and thatch. Only a few houses had tiled roofs. In the village festivals like Gauri Ganpati, Holi, and Dussehra were celebrated with great joy. At the place where Holi was celebrated, we used to play games like hututu and aṭyapaṭya. It was great fun. On the day of Gudi Padwa, Gudis were raised in front of every house. Sweets were prepared in every home. In the same month of Chaitra, on the full moon day (Chaitra Pournima), the annual fair of the Goddess takes place. On that day the palanquins from the villages Chinchghari and Kamthe come to visit our village Goddess. The ceremony of the meeting of these palanquins is indescribable. Watching it fills the heart with emotion and brings tears to the eyes. As children we would roam freely in that fair. On that day the clothes of the Goddess were auctioned.

During the Ganpati festival in my childhood, we children used to decorate the walls with beautiful designs made of clay. I used to draw very good pictures. For colors we used turmeric, red earth powder, charcoal, and similar natural materials. We used to draw pictures of the sun and the moon. Some people also drew pictures of Lord Shiva, Parvati, and Ganpati.

In our village small Ganpati idols used to come from the institution of the respected Parashuram temple. Those idols were worshipped, and the potters used to distribute them to each household. Now this custom has stopped. Today people buy Ganpati idols from the market or from artisans in the village who make them. These idols are very beautiful and finely made. Nowadays people who work in Mumbai return to the village during the Ganpati festival, and the entire hamlet becomes lively and crowded.

At that time most matters of justice were settled within the village itself through the village council. Disputes among villagers were resolved amicably. Influential members of the

Maratha community participated in these decisions. In those days Late Murarrao Kadam and Shri Dhondjirao Sakharamrao Kadam served as respected Police Patils. They commanded great authority.

For the worship in our village temple, the potters appointed for that purpose were given one payli of rice every year as house tax. Later this amount was increased to two paylis, or thirty rupees in cash. They collected it after the harvest season. Those who had no farmland paid the equivalent amount in money. Such decisions were taken collectively in the village assembly.

This balutedari system still continues. In return, those potters—who were also considered workers—had to perform several duties throughout the year: worshipping the deities in the temple, performing the twelve ritual duties of the temple announcing information in the village related to the temple, informing the management committee when required, maintaining records of offerings such as cloths and ornaments presented to the Goddess, and accounting for the platforms

during the palanquin procession. During the ten days of Dussehra, it was their duty to carry the sacred lamp of the Goddess to the houses where ritual pots (ghat) were installed. Even today this tradition continues.

The principal deity of our family in the village is Bhavani Mata, along with Waghjai Mata and other deities. Throughout the year twelve religious functions are performed in the temple. Among them are Gudi Padwa, Chaitra Pournima, Holi, the festival called Sama that occurs once in three years, the ritual installation during Dussehra, Diwali, and the annual protective ceremony. These rituals are performed according to the instructions of the Maratha community and under the supervision of two traditional representatives. This tradition continues even today.

The potter community is large in our village and they used to perform duties related to water supply. Earlier the oil-pressing community used to run oil mills, but this practice has now stopped. In the past the Mahar community used to take care of the village's protection. However, after they adopted

Buddhism, they left those traditional duties. Still, they continue working as laborers.

Overall, the village atmosphere is one of harmony and unity.

The Maratha community in the village is comparatively educated, economically self-reliant, and culturally rich. While preserving their traditions and celebrating festivals, they live together with other communities. The Kunbi community, which mostly works for them, is treated with great respect. Because of this, there is a strong sense of unity in the village.

The leadership of the village is mainly handled by the Maratha community. Among them, Late Shankarrao Kadam and Shri Prabhakarrao Kadam did excellent work as Sarpanch. However, I kept myself away from all these matters and remained mainly engaged in school-related work. Without entering into politics, I have lived with the attitude that one should mind one's own work.

The people of the Buddhist community who came to me for work were always treated with respect by me. A human being created by God is an extremely important divine creation, and everyone should look at it from a humanitarian perspective. Society should move forward by abandoning discrimination and untouchability and progress in a new direction

My Childhood

I was born in the year 1919 in a Kshatriya lineage belonging to the Shahanav Kuli Maratha family tradition. Our village Terav was a hereditary land (watan) granted to the Kadam family of the Maratha community. About four hundred and fifty years ago our ancestors came and settled in this village.

Our old house in Talewadi was located in our mango orchard. My grandparents, my father Anantrao, and his two brothers Narayanrao and Babajirao lived there together in a joint family. After my grandfather passed away, that house was divided into two parts. Later my father built a new house at the place where our house stands today. It was a mud house. At that time in our hamlet only Mahadeorao, Bajajirao, Keshavrao, and Gopalrao had tiled houses. All other houses were mud houses. In that house my father established our household.

My mother was very short in height, about five feet tall. Her name was Dhondi. My father, on the other hand, was a strong man about six and a half feet tall with a fair complexion. My mother was extremely hardworking. She worked all day. Besides farming, she also worked in nearby houses grinding grain and pounding rice. From that small earning we managed our livelihood. There was extreme poverty in our home, and we lived by eating whatever we could find.

Yet, because of constant hard work and simple food, my health remained strong. My brother Narayan, also called Bhikaji, was quite weak in comparison. He was eight or nine years older than me. His education went only up to the third or fourth standard. Then he left school and went to Mumbai to stay with our maternal uncle's family. Our aunt had called him to Mumbai promising him a job, but instead he was made to do household work such as washing utensils and clothes. She ran a small eating house, and he had to work there the whole day. Later when I went to Mumbai, I came to know about the hardships he faced there.

Our old house was very small—two verandas, one main hall, and a small platform. Only a very small share of the ancestral property had come to my father. At that time we did not even have a plough. Therefore, my mother—and later my wife—had to work in other people’s fields so that our own field could be cultivated. Even the grain produced in our field was not sufficient for the entire year.

There were four children in our family: two sisters, Krishni and Nani, my elder brother Narayan (Bhikaji), and myself. Our poverty was so severe that I never saw my sisters wearing new clothes. They always wore old, worn-out garments. Fortunately both were married. Nani was married to Shri Dudhajirao of Pendhabe village, who was the Police Patil there. Krishni was married in Kadavad village to my aunt’s brother.

Nani lived a comfortable life, but Krishni suffered greatly in her in-laws’ house. She was often ill-treated and sometimes even denied food. Once, after being driven away, she went into the forest of Devarhati and consumed poisonous

roots. Tragically she died there. At that time I was very young and could not understand much.

Our poverty was so extreme that even today my eyes fill with tears while describing it. We boys used to roam around the village wearing only a loincloth. We had never seen new clothes. We used to wear discarded clothes given by others.

During the rainy season many wild vegetables grew along the field boundaries, and we used to collect them. In summer it became difficult to find food, but we somehow survived by eating mangoes and jackfruits from the forests.

In those days the famous Alphonso mango did not exist there. Around our hamlet there were huge mango trees of local varieties. There were so many mangoes that no child ever returned empty-handed.

Father's Inclination Toward Spirituality

I must have been about nine years old. I remember it clearly. A spiritual authority, the saintly Sadguru Laxman Maharaj, came to our house. His native village was Kherdi. At that time, at the house of Shri Jijajirao Maharaj in our settlement, many disciples of the Avadhoot sect used to gather for bhajans and sermons. A spiritual assembly for initiation had been arranged at their house.

On that day, Sadguru Laxman Maharaj gave initiation to my father Anantrao, my mother, and Sajarika-akka and her husband Madhavrao. In other words, he accepted them as disciples. Maharaj belonged to the spiritual disciple lineage of the Avadhoot tradition of Balekundri Maharaj of Belgaum.

On another such occasion, an assembly was arranged at our house. Sadguru Laxman Maharaj called me forward as well to receive initiation. At that time I was nine years old. He ordered me to sit in the spiritual seat. All the people present there were surprised. Everyone began to say, "Maharaj, this is

a small boy. What will he understand? Whatever is confidential in this spiritual meeting he may go and tell others. Therefore do not give him initiation.”

But Maharaj did not listen. He seated me on his lap and formally granted me initiation. This surprising event happened when I was nine years old. I truly was fortunate, and the proof of this I realized later in my life.

After that, I developed a deep attraction toward God. I began constantly remembering the divine name. Hours would pass in this remembrance. My father was also on the same spiritual path, so our house had a devotional and sectarian atmosphere.

The power of the Guru-name that I received at the age of nine later helped bring me safely back from the terrible dance of death during the Second World War. The name of God was always on my lips. Even during battle I never forgot it. Therefore I say that on the strength of that single divine name I traveled across the world and returned alive. Many such

experiences came in my life, and by the power of that Guru-name I crossed through them safely.

The original seat of the Avadhoot sect is at Balekundri near Belgaum.

The lineage of Gurus is as follows: the original saint Balamukund Maharaj, then Pant Maharaj, after him Vinayak Maharaj, and his disciple Laxman Maharaj. Our Guru Maharaj had a very large family of disciples.

In our house bhajans and worship took place every day. All the people from around would gather there. This pure and spiritual atmosphere had a deep effect on my mind. My nature became truthful, gentle, and loving. My attraction toward God increased greatly and my faith in God became firm. This spiritual wealth remained sufficient for me throughout my life.

When life-threatening dangers later came, I remained steady and, through the power of the Guru-given mantra, I crossed that entire path of fiery destruction safely. I faced many

situations with determination. My devotion toward my parents was also unbreakable. It was through the values and teachings they gave me that my character was formed.

My voice was very good. From my sweet voice I used to sing beautiful songs and prayers from the book Premalahari. Everyone praised me, and I maintained this tradition of singing devotional songs until my last breath.

After all of us in the house became disciples of Sadguru Laxman Maharaj, the entire atmosphere of our home changed. My father's inclination toward spirituality increased. His mind no longer remained in worldly matters. He was constantly absorbed in meditation and contemplation.

All this had a deep effect on my mother. My father's visits to our Guru increased. He constantly felt that he should leave worldly life and go away somewhere far, renounce family life. And one day he truly left home.

No one knew where he had gone. My mother and I went to Kherdi to meet Laxman Maharaj. He consoled my mother and said, “Do not worry. One day he will return. He will become a saintly man and attain the position of a Guru. He will have many disciples. His name will become known as an authority in the spiritual field.”

After that, for ten or eleven years there was no news of him. We grew tired of waiting for him. We had to take care of our livelihood. My mother worked extremely hard and raised us. My elder brother had gone to Mumbai to stay with our aunt.

Father's Return

And suddenly one day two of his disciples came to the village asking, “Where is the house of Anantrao Maharaj?” They came to our settlement and stood outside our house, calling out in my father’s name:

“Avadhoot Chintan Shri Gurudev Datta! Victory to Anantrao Maharaj!”

In other words, they invoked the Guru’s name.

When we came out and asked them, we learned about my father. From this clue we realized that his arrival was near. My mother and I immediately went to Kherdi. After nearly ten or eleven years he had come there.

At that time I had just returned to the village from Mumbai. He had not come to the village but had stayed at the

house of Laxman Maharaj in Kherdi. When we went there we met him.

Seeing his appearance we were frightened. A very long beard, the attire of a saint, and a sharp gaze—was this really my father? I wondered. My mother was bewildered. Tears of joy would not stop flowing from her eyes.

My mother and I wanted him to come home. But if a saint who had renounced the world had taken sannyasa, then returning home was not possible. Once someone takes renunciation it is very difficult to return to family life. Moreover, a saint who has reached such a mental state cannot easily become settled again in worldly affairs. My mother pleaded with Laxman Maharaj somehow to send him home. She placed Maharaj in a moral dilemma. Even he seemed lost while thinking about how to resolve this situation.

At that time I was sixteen or seventeen years old and had just come from Mumbai. My father was about sixty years old then. His white hair, white beard, body inclined toward old age,

but his gaze was radiant. There was a spiritual bliss in him. Seeing his meditative state I was astonished. It all felt like a dream to me.

Finally the issue was resolved. Laxman Maharaj formally granted him permission for the position of Guru and ordered him to continue spiritual work while staying in the village. My father had to obey the Guru's command. To disobey the Guru's command would be a great sin.

Though hesitant, he finally agreed. But he said, "I will return, but do not expect me to return to worldly life. I will remain in the state in which I am." My mother agreed to that, and we brought him home.

Before leaving, he bid farewell to his disciples. When he came home, the news spread through the village like the wind. People began gathering to see him. Everyone started calling him Anandarao Buva.

My father came home but could never become involved in worldly life. He would sit absorbed in meditation in a trance-like state. Sometimes he would eat, sometimes not. He behaved as his mind felt. This affected the entire household.

My mother was alone at home. My father's condition did not change. However, the atmosphere had become peaceful. He remained in a joyful state, giving darshan to visitors and guiding people in spiritual matters. Because of this, many villagers began to be attracted to him.

By obeying the Guru's command he accepted many disciples and guided them toward the Guru's path. In our village my father also had many fellow disciples. Among them were Shri Gopal Kadam and Shri Vishram Kadam. Later Gopal Kadam joined the military with me, while Vishram Kadam stayed in the village and continued farming.

They had an aunt named Sakhubai who was very loving and managed their household. Because I frequently visited their home, sometimes I would eat there itself. Our brotherly

relationship continued until the end of life. Since everyone in that house was a disciple of my father, our visits there increased.

At night gatherings for initiation would be held in our house. Bhajans were sung. My father himself would sing prayers and songs from the book Premalahari by Pant Maharaj Balekundri in a very melodious voice. With the sound of the tanpura and cymbals, and with his powerful mountain-like voice, the bhajans became very lively. These programs would continue until late at night.

My father had hundreds of disciples in the village and outside. In such a religious and auspicious atmosphere I was growing up. I had unbroken faith in God and through the remembrance of His name I would merge with Him even at that young age.

In our settlement, where the Shiv Memorial now stands, there used to be a temple of Hanuman. All the villagers would gather there for bhajans and kirtans. In that temple lived Buva

Abajirao Kadam, the elder brother of Ramajirao from our settlement, who had renounced everything and returned to the village. He had settled there.

We children would gather in that temple and sing bhajans. In our childhood we used to make a small palanquin from tins, place pictures of different gods in it, and take out a procession through the entire settlement with music and celebration. It was great fun.

Thus this colorful childhood, touched by poverty, passed without even realizing when it ended. My schooling was over. My age was increasing. At that time my elder brother was in Mumbai. I strongly wished to go there somehow and follow him. Whenever people from Mumbai or Pune came to the village, I would tell them my wish. But no solution was found.

Journey to Mumbai

I kept requesting my mother to allow me to leave the village somehow. But she refused again and again. I was the only one with her at home. At that time my father had left home and became a renunciate. No one knew his whereabouts. In such a condition my mother was not ready to let me go.

The thought of my leaving made her extremely restless. But finally, because of my insistence, she permitted me to go to Mumbai. I traveled by boat through Dabhol and Harnai and reached Mumbai.

Though I was young in age, I was physically strong. When I first arrived, I stayed with our uncle Pomendkar Vichare in Girgaon. My elder brother was also staying there.

At that time we had no close relatives in Mumbai. There were some distant relatives, but because of our poverty they kept their distance from us. Not that they themselves were very

wealthy either. In our Maratha community in those days no one was rich or prosperous. There were no factories or businesses.

People earned their living through jobs and were busy in their own families. Some worked in the police or in government departments. In such circumstances I constantly wondered how I would survive in Mumbai.

Because of continuous work my brother's health deteriorated. There was no job, no money, no support. In that situation I had to return to the village with him. His illness increased and the doctors diagnosed him with tuberculosis. There was no money for medicines and hardly any food to eat. In that miserable condition we were trapped. His illness worsened and he passed away.

After my brother's death my mother became even more sorrowful. My grandmother came from Pedhambe to console her. After all the funeral rites were completed, a great emptiness filled our home. Now the entire responsibility was on my shoulders. Somehow I had to find work.

I decided to go to Mumbai again.

Again to Mumbai

I had left my job in Mumbai earlier and returned to the village. I had not decided what to do next. In such a home environment it was impossible to survive without doing something. Therefore I spoke to several respectable acquaintances.

A gentleman from our settlement, Shri Chandrarao Kadam, was in the military and at that time was living in Pune. I spoke to him about this. He agreed to take me to Pune. I had no money. He bought the ticket for me and took me there. But our misfortune had not yet ended. I stayed with him for one and a half months. I ate two meals a day and wandered in search of a job. Nothing worked out. I could not sleep at night. The feeling that I was a burden on him created great mental pressure on me. I can never forget his kindness.

Finally I decided to go to Mumbai again. He spent his own money to put me on the passenger train to Mumbai, and thus I reached Mumbai again.

I reached Mumbai, but remembering my previous experiences I decided not to go to my uncle's house. During my earlier stay I had met a man named Nilvarna who lived in the third lane of Kamathipura. From Byculla station I walked to his house. I had only a small bag in my hand. In it were one shirt and one towel. I did not have a single rupee in my pocket. In such a condition I once again stepped on the soil of Mumbai to try my luck. But our fortune was not strong. Shri Nilvarna had left that place. I asked about him from a man named Mistry who lived on the lower floor. I learned that he had moved to Phanaswadi in Girgaon.

I walked to that address in Thakurdwar. There his sister-in-law was living. She recognized me and gave me shelter. As soon as I arrived, her mother gave me food and asked about my situation. I was very hungry. She asked me many questions. I told her the whole story of my life. She felt sympathy for me

and said, “Son, stay here. Look for a job. Do not worry about food or lodging.”

Those were times when humanity still existed. Money was not everything, though nothing could run without money either. It was necessary to find work. When I had previously been in Mumbai, I had worked for a few days in a printing press. I went back there for work again. The owner of that press was Rajadhyaksha. He was fair-complexioned and strict by nature.

Without even asking about the salary I started working there. I began earning enough for food. But I was not satisfied. There was no real benefit in it. Earlier I had lost the job due to a mistake, and I constantly felt that something similar might happen again. While working there I kept trying to find work elsewhere, but nothing worked out.

At that time the movement for India’s independence was in full swing. Girgaon has become its main center.

Sometimes in the evenings I would go to the meetings held at Girgaon Chowpatty just to pass time.

I worked in the press, so I knew what was happening outside in the country. But politics did not enter my mind when my stomach was empty. The question of my future was more important to me. I was struggling with it. I admit this honestly. I did feel sympathy for the freedom movement, but the problem of my livelihood was more important to me. Whenever I had leave, I used to wander from Girgaon to Colaba. At that time the British government's navy and army were stationed in Culaba. There was strict security there.

Two men from my village were in the military camp at Culaba. One of them was Mahadeo Rao Kadam, who was a havaldar. I met him and requested him to help me get recruited into the army. The other villager was Keshavrao Kadam. I made the same request to him.

They felt great sympathy for me. They thought I could be recruited into the military and agreed to help me. They told me that whenever recruitment took place they would call me.

I was very happy. I had firm faith in God. I believed that He would save me in times of danger.

And indeed, an unfortunate incident happened in that press. A heavy block that had to be fixed on the machine slipped from my hand due to misjudgment and fell inside the machine. That was it. The machine was ruined—and we were kicked out of the job as well.

Recruitment into the Military

After the accident that happened at the Mouj Press, I lost my job. Once again we were unemployed! A big question stood before me—what should I do next?

At that time I again went to Culaba and met Shri Mahadeorao Kadam and Shri Keshavrao Kadam. They asked me to come after two days and also told me to bring my certificates. Though I was physically strong, mentally I was very broken. I had no idea what the future held for me. Still, without losing courage, I went to Culaba after two days as instructed.

That day around three hundred people had come for military recruitment. Out of them only twelve were selected. Fortunately, my number was among them. My sturdy and muscular body attracted attention.

The date of that day was 3 February 1938, and I was enrolled in the Maratha Light Infantry of the army.

I felt that now all my hardships were over because I had obtained a government job. I sent a letter to the village informing my parents. They too were very happy. Taking my belongings, I reported to the military camp at Culaba. From the next day onward our daily routine began according to military discipline.

According to regulations, our heads were shaved, leaving only a small tuft. Our parade was to start the next day. We were issued all the necessary kit and equipment. That night I tried on all the military clothes and felt very proud. I was no longer an ordinary village boy.

Soon afterward we were sent to Belgaum. After recruitment we had to take another train from Pune to reach Belgaum, and the next morning we arrived there. Havaldar Mahadeorao Kadam accompanied us to Belgaum and then returned.

Now I have become a soldier of the British Government's army. My happiness knew no bounds. I had become a government servant.

Military Training at Belgaum

At Belgaum we were divided into different platoons of three or four soldiers each and our formal training began.

My service number was 8468/10/5-MLI, and I reported to 10/5 Maratha Light Infantry, Belgaum.

The training lasted for nine months. During that time we were given every kind of training. Military training in those days was extremely strict. We were given the toughest physical and combat exercises. Early in the morning we had to run, then a physical training parade, then we went to the armoury to bring rifles and train with them. The whole day passed in these activities. If we made mistakes, severe punishment was given—sometimes kicks with boots or whipping with a hunter. Our instructors were experts. Under their guidance our training progressed well. From time to time senior British officers and company commanders would come to inspect the parade. We were very afraid of them.

Two havaldars constantly supervised us. Under their guidance all our tasks were performed without any delay.

On Sundays, after drinking milk and eating bread in the morning, we were allowed to play games until ten o'clock. We could play hockey, football, or volleyball according to our interests.

I had a special liking for hockey, and during training I mastered the game completely. I played as a goalkeeper, and I guarded the goal with great determination. Later in life, when I joined the police department, I continued to play as a goalkeeper in the police team.

In the afternoon during training we got a little rest, then again physical training parade, followed by uniform parade, then school, and again evening parade. The entire day was exhausting.

Along with physical exercises we also attended classes where we were taught English, map reading, signalling methods, military rules, conduct, and discipline.

Those nine months in Belgaum passed very happily. Food was plentiful, my health improved, and my personality became more confident. Discipline entered my life, and gradually I became a well-trained soldier. The strict training proved useful throughout my later life.

Belgaum had a very pleasant climate. The camp itself was very large—spread over many kilometres—with training centres, government offices, sports grounds, and firing ranges.

During holidays I occasionally visited the monastery of Balekundri Maharaj in Belgaum. Their arrangements were made for meditation, devotional singing, and spiritual practice. I attended the evening prayers and palanquin processions, but I had to return quickly due to strict military rules.

Every month ten rupees from my salary were sent home as a family money order. This helped my parents a little

Passing Parade and Leave

At the end of our training we had the Passing Parade. Before that we had to pass a rifle-firing examination. I passed the test with good marks.

After completing training we were granted twenty days leave. Since leaving home and coming to Mumbai and Belgaum, I had not visited my village even once. I missed my parents greatly. When I returned to my village wearing a military uniform, there was a huge difference from the condition in which I had left. Earlier I had left as an unemployed youth, but now I returned as a government soldier.

Everyone in the village welcomed me warmly. I visited every house and met relatives and villagers. My mother was extremely happy. But the twenty days of leave passed quickly. There was a festive atmosphere at home. After nearly a year I had returned to the village. My grandmother also came from Pedhambe to meet me. Soon the leave ended and I returned to Belgaum.

Oath Parade

When I reached Belgaum, preparations were going on for the “Kasam Parade”, which is the oath ceremony. After nine months of hard training, soldiers take an oath during this parade and are formally inducted into the army.

We had to wear perfectly pressed uniforms and highly polished boots that shone like mirrors. Preparations began two days earlier.

The parade ground was decorated with tents and colours. Most officers present were British; only a few Indian officers had reached the rank of captain. The parade began with a band and ended with a salute to the commanding officer. Afterward there was a grand feast (Badakhana). Separate arrangements were made for soldiers and officers. After that, the newly trained soldiers were distributed among different companies according to orders.

Before our posting, we were again granted fifteen days leave, and I returned to my village. Soon after returning from leave I learned that my first posting would be in Delhi.

First Posting – Delhi

After four or five days of train travel from Belgaum, we finally reached Delhi. We were taken by a small train to the cantonment, and from there our luggage was transported by trucks to the camp. Four soldiers from Belgaum were assigned to each company.

I was placed in D-16 Platoon under Havaldar Naik.

After reaching the camp we ate food, arranged our beds, and rested for some time. Later we deposited our rifles in the armoury.

The weather in Delhi was very hot. The camp had soldiers from many communities—Pathans, Gurkhas, and others. I was seeing such diversity for the first time. The British had ruled India mainly with the support of this army, and therefore they took good care of the soldiers. Everything was available in the camp. Delhi was a major military centre. There

were regiments like the Mahar Regiment, Gurkha Regiment, Maratha Infantry, Dogra Regiment, and others.

Soon our daily parades began again—road running, rifle drill, firing practice, and guard duty. Our company's commanding officer was Jamadar Garud, a strict but kind man.

Guard Duty at the Viceroy's House

Once our company was assigned guard duty at the Viceroy's House, which is today the Rashtrapati Bhavan. The place was magnificent, surrounded by beautiful gardens. Serving there was an enjoyable experience. At night the fragrance of night-blooming flowers filled the air. Rabbits could be seen running freely in the gardens. Watching them made me think about freedom, because at that time our country was still under British rule.

Occasionally political leaders wearing khadi clothes would come to that building to meet British officials. Their simple dress looked pale before the grandeur of the British rulers, yet it carried the pride of Swadeshi. I stayed in Delhi for nearly a year.

Journey to War – Second World War

Later our unit received orders to move outside India for war.

We travelled to Mumbai, where our weapons, vehicles, ammunition, and supplies were loaded onto a ship. We were to go to Africa to fight.

We did not know whom we would fight or where exactly we would go. We were soldiers who had to obey orders. We sailed from Mumbai toward the port of Aden. It was our first long sea journey. Many soldiers suffered from seasickness. After nine difficult days at sea we reached Aden. From there we moved to camps and later into battle areas.

At that time the war was between Germany and Italy on one side and the United Kingdom and its allies on the other. Soon real battles began.

Bombing attacks, artillery fire, desert marches, and fierce fighting followed. Hundreds of soldiers were killed or wounded.

Later we moved through Sudan, crossed the Suez Canal, and reached Cairo. There we continued military operations and defensive preparations. During one explosion caused by a mistake, a supply box exploded and many soldiers were killed, including some of our companions.

The Battle of the Saloon Hill

One day our company went for a jungle parade. Just then enemy aircraft appeared. We immediately lay flat on the ground. Within two seconds the aircraft dropped bombs on the airfield and flew away. A few days passed like this.

From there we set out to march toward the Saloon. Everyone moved forward; we did not even know if anyone had been left behind. We left the Masra–Majru camp and began to march ahead. After marching for many days our feet became swollen.

Finally we reached near Saloon Hill. We spent the night there. Early in the morning, while it was still dark, we advanced. As we moved toward the Saloon hill, suddenly the enemy started firing. Many of our men were wounded. Our Havaldar was also among them. He was struck by shrapnel and died there.

Havaladar Bhosale and I were on the hilltop. Two British soldiers saw us and went back after observing the situation. After some time the aircraft appeared. There was a fierce battle between our forces and the Italian army. Some aircraft caught fire and crashed. Our tanks fought bravely but it was of no use. They were destroyed because of mines.

That day passed in this manner. We spent the night there. In the morning we withdrew and came directly to Bhagas. Many soldiers had died. We kept retreating the entire day. We reported at the Bhagas camp. A few days passed after that.

Fighting Against the German Forces

One morning the battalion prepared to move forward again. Vehicles were loaded. Along with us were the Cameroon troops, the Jat Battalion, and several tanks. Our entire brigade moved toward Tinemili. We moved step by step. Ahead were the defensive positions of the German army. After some time we attacked those positions. At that time our commanding officer Major Arjunrao Palande was standing on a carrier vehicle. Enemy bullets struck his chest and he died there. He was buried at that very place. His uncle Bapuji Rao was deeply saddened.

Soon afterward German tanks attacked again. They fired red-hot artillery shells at us. Those shells bounced along the ground and exploded ahead. We ran from there and retreated with the entire battalion toward Devukar. Colonel Kosar shouted angrily, “Why did you leave your position?” Meanwhile the enemy tanks continued firing from their positions. It was almost eight o’clock in the evening. We spent

that night there. The next morning around eight o'clock about twenty German fighter aircraft arrived and dropped grenade bombs on our men. Within ten minutes they left. We suffered heavy losses.

Continuous Battles

We advanced again. Sometimes the enemy moved ahead and we moved behind them. This continued until noon. Later we clashed near Barsi village. The next day they pushed us back. There were several encounters until daylight.

After that defeat we moved directly toward Tobruk. German aircraft bombed us continuously from the sky and fired machine guns and artillery. On the way there was a large stream which we crossed while pursuing the enemy.

We reached Barsi where it was raining. At that moment German aircraft again attacked us with bombs. One soldier from our company died. Our convoy had fallen far behind somewhere. We stayed at Barsi that day.

The next day our platoon halted briefly at Benghazi, and from there we retreated again. While returning from Benghazi the German forces attacked us once more. Our guns also fired back. There was a huge battle. Eventually we retreated again up to Gatena.

Hardships at Gatena

At Gatena we faced great difficulty. German forces had cut off our rations and supplies. Our logistics had been completely disrupted. We suffered terribly.

One day our Colonel Kakshes scolded us severely. Our company captain was a prince from the royal family of Dewas. Addressing him, the colonel said, “You Indian people have come here only for your stomach.” Hearing this, anger rose within me. For a moment I felt like firing my loaded rifle at him. In such humiliating circumstances we suffered greatly.

The British had brought us from India to rescue them from the crisis created by the German and Italian forces. We were fighting with all our strength and did not show any negligence in our duties. But the African region was a barren desert unfamiliar to us and extremely harsh.

Among the thousands of soldiers who had come from India, many died in battle. Some were wounded, and some became permanently disabled. Those who remained fit were constantly sent from one front to another.

In this region there were British white battalions as well, but they were rarely sent to the front lines. In every battle it was mostly our men who were sacrificed. In these battles we won some fights and lost some. Victory was never guaranteed. Instead of appreciating victories, the British colonel often blamed us even for small retreats. Even the captains suffered greatly because they had to deal directly with the senior British officers.

In the African war the British did not follow any proper military strategy. Our forces had very little air protection, which may have been one major reason for defeat. Africa itself was a vast region, and controlling such a huge territory was extremely difficult.

The British mainly tried to resist the German–Italian forces arriving by sea, but those forces had firmly established themselves there. It became impossible for the limited British troops to drive them out.

The Battle of Tobruk

From Gatena our remaining troops were brought to Tobruk. Our battalion was assigned defensive positions there. We dug deep trenches and set up defensive posts everywhere. Strong barbed-wire fencing surrounded the camp. Defensive arrangements were very good. There were record offices and store rooms there. Our company captain was Hargreaves. We had been stationed there for a few days. Ammunition stores and wireless sets were kept in underground trenches. Through this place we maintained communication with other battalions. At that time I was working on the wireless set.

One morning around seven o'clock I went outside for nature's call. Everything was quiet. Because it was early morning and our camp was headquarters, there was not much war activity, though our defenses were ready. Beyond our barbed-wire fence, about a mile away, I saw a large army approaching. I felt suspicious and immediately returned. I reported it to Subedar Nikam, who informed the company

commander. The company commander reported it to headquarters.

At that time the commanding officer of headquarters was Lancaster. He said it was our own army and there was no need to worry. But within half an hour my suspicion proved correct. Enemy tanks reached our barbed-wire fence, broke through it, and entered the camp. A fierce attack began. Firing started from all sides. Hand grenades and bombs were thrown everywhere. Our soldiers had almost no time to respond. We took shelter in the trenches. From such close range the enemy fire was terrifying.

German–Italian tanks had air support. About forty aircraft arrived and completely destroyed our camp. Continuous firing went on from all sides. Inside the trench there were about ten to fifteen of us. Finally Subedar Nikam decided to surrender and ordered me to signal it.

Climbing up in the middle of such firing was extremely dangerous. I kicked the wireless set and broke it, then wrapped

a white cloth around its rod and climbed up the ladder holding it as a flag. I raised it toward the officer firing from the tank.

Seeing the signal he came out and gestured to his men to stop firing. The firing stopped. I signaled our soldiers to come out, leaving their weapons behind. Everyone came out carrying only their raincoats and blankets. Before I came out with my belongings, our headquarters commanding officer Lancaster and the rest of our soldiers had already been captured. The entire camp had been destroyed.

Prisoners of War

We were captured by German forces and taken to the port of Tobruk. There two or three hundred soldiers from the Gurkha Battalion had also been kept as prisoners.

Now we were prisoners. Everything seemed finished. We would have to live as prisoners and endure hardships. I thought that if an opportunity came, we should escape and rejoin our command. We made such a plan. But the plan failed because of an officer from the Gurkha command. That night none of us could sleep. We were lying in the open with all communications cut off.

To die in battle would have been better than living as prisoners. The thought filled us with sorrow.

In the morning we were lined up in rows of three and marched to a nearby airfield. German soldiers guarded us there. We were made to sit in the open sun the entire day without

water. Later a water tanker arrived. Everyone rushed toward it, but water was given only group by group. Even then no food was given.

More prisoners arrived, and soon we were thousands in number. Later soldiers from the Third Maratha Battalion were also brought as prisoners. We were handed over to the Italian army. In the evening they gave us some biscuits, including Indian biscuits. After eight days of suffering we finally got a little food.

Joining the Azad Hind Army

After some time a proposal was placed before all Indian prisoners. We could either remain prisoners of Germany and Italy, or we could join the Azad Hind Fauj.

If we joined, we would fight against the British Empire for the freedom of our country. All the prisoners from our command agreed to the proposal and gave our names. I felt very happy. The pressure of the past eight days disappeared. It felt as if we had become free.

An assistant of Subhas Chandra Bose and another officer named Chakravarti explained why we should join the Azad Hind Army.

We learned that Bose had visited Germany, and both Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini had agreed to support the formation of the Azad Hind Army. Many Indian soldiers abroad joined this army. Even women joined it, led by Lakshmi Sahgal.

Training in Italy

After joining the Azad Hind Army we were sent to Italy for training. We were first taken to Baghazi, and from there by ship to Italy. The journey took three days.

From there we were taken by train to a training camp near Rome.

When we arrived, we were given Indian parcels containing biscuits and supplies. Then we were served Italian food—macaroni, bread, and boiled potatoes. After many days we slept on proper beds. Here we were treated well, almost like Italian citizens.

About four hundred Indians were in that camp—people from many communities: Muslims, Marathas, Hindus, Madrasis, Bengalis, and Pathans.

Training began there. We were taught commands in Italian and also learned English. For example, in Italian “attention” was called Attenti and “rest” was called Riposo.

Training continued for five to six months. We were taught modern weapons, which were more advanced than those used by the British army.

We also received salaries during training. Food was good, and life during that period was comfortable. During that time we visited many places in Italy. We were even shown the residence of Benito Mussolini, which was very grand.

After training we were taken to a hill for a firing parade that lasted two days.

Prisoner Again

After returning from the firing duty, four days passed pleasantly. Just then orders came from the Italian officers. We were told that all of us would be taken to Libya. There was great commotion among us. The border where we were to be taken was the same border where, on behalf of the British, battalions of the Indian Army's Maratha Light Infantry—our own people—were stationed. We refused to go there and fight against them.

That was enough. Within the next five minutes our freedom was taken away. Mussolini became terribly angry. He ordered that we should be imprisoned immediately. All our concessions were stopped. Our movement outside was completely banned. Our ration was reduced and we were confined to the same place. There were nearly five hundred prisoners there.

We did not like the decision to send us back to Libya, where we had originally been captured during the war. We felt that the Italian government was sacrificing us for its own benefit. During this period Italy had suffered setbacks on many fronts. Germany had been badly beaten in Russia. They had withdrawn their forces from Africa and sent them to France and Russia, where fierce battles were going on. Mussolini wanted us to take their place there, and we understood this plan. By refusing, we once again became prisoners. We were handed over to Germany because we had earlier been prisoners of Germany.

After four days we were all brought to the military camp at Udine. There were thousands of prisoners there—white soldiers, and prisoners from Austria and New Zealand as well. The Indian prisoners had a separate camp. Since we were thousands of soldiers, there was great inconvenience. In the morning they gave us macaroni to eat, sometimes along with a piece of bread. By keeping us half-fed, they were making us suffer. In the evening they would give only a thin macaroni preparation. Our leaders were kept in strict imprisonment. Jem

Saheb and one Bengali along with two others were kept under strong custody.

We remained in this captivity for nearly a year. At that place I made a small box from a tin container. I used to keep my belongings, parcels, and other items in it. That entire year passed in great hardship. Life felt like a game of sun and rain. Here we experienced the true difference between freedom and slavery.

At that time the German and Italian armies were retreating on all fronts. The British captured Sicily. There was sudden confusion everywhere. British forces came and stood at the doors of Italy. At that time we were taken from the Italian border by the Germans to Austria. We were transported by train and kept in a camp there. We stayed there for eight days. From there we were taken to a place called Ananu. We were kept there for a month. After some days we were shifted to Limburg.

There our arrangements were somewhat better. People from the Azad Hind Sena used to come to meet us at various

places. They tried to influence our minds. The days there passed comparatively better. The terrible experiences of the previous year were not present there. In the camp next to ours there were Russian prisoners. The Germans treated the Russian prisoners very cruelly. They caused them great suffering regarding food and drink. They kept them half-starved, and due to strict punishment their bodies had become like skeletons. Many of them died. It was painful to see their condition.

For our meals we received porridge and pieces of black bread. It was barely enough to fill the stomach. But the Russian prisoners did not even get that. Whatever little food remained with us, we used to give them. We felt great pity for them.

The Power of Continuous Chanting of God's Name

After some days we were kept in a camp at Starberg. It was the time of Diwali. I clearly remember that we were given some sweet food. When Austria was being defeated, we were kept inside an underground fort. Austria fell, and we were brought by train to Epinal. There was a military camp there. At that time France was almost under the control of Germany. But because Germany had gone very deep into Russia, there was some relaxation here. At that time the British Army, especially the air force, was continuously carrying out bombing attacks. The German army was struggling hard to face them.

Near the Epinal camp there was a hill called Canfern. A fort of the same name was also nearby. Before we were brought to Epinal, snowfall had already taken place there. That meant the winter season had just ended and summer had begun. The sunshine there felt like the mild sun we experience during winter in India. There were six months of summer and six months of winter. We were not accustomed to such weather.

However, we were given sufficient warm clothes, and that helped us manage.

The Epinal camp was as strong and grand as a fort. Thousands of soldiers were kept there. All of us were soldiers of the Indian Army. All the prisoners from our Azad Hind group had gathered there. The arrangements there were fairly good. The box I had made was still with me.

The walls of the fort were massive and strong. One morning a terrible crisis appeared before us. British airplanes surrounded the entire city. Hundreds of aircraft came in formation. The sky was filled with them. First a fighter plane came down and dropped a green signal light. Immediately after that the large planes began dropping terrible bombs. The bombing continued continuously.

All of us came down from the building and lay curled up in the trenches near the prison wall. At that time I was continuously chanting the name of God. In front of us there was

a blazing inferno. Death was dancing everywhere. Only God could save us from it.

For many hours this destruction continued. I kept remembering God's name with my mouth. Fifteen-ton bombs were falling and exploding. Flames were rising everywhere. One huge bomb fell right in front of me, but it did not explode. I was saved.

In this terrible rain of bombs nearly five to seven thousand prisoners were killed. Even the wall under which I was lying had disappeared from its place. What else could this be if not divine grace? When thousands of prisoners were dying in the presence of such destruction, how could I alone remain safe? This question troubled me deeply.

When everything became quiet, I came out of the trench. On my back there was only a wooden plank. When I looked up, the entire fort had been flattened to the ground. Yet I had escaped safely from this rain of fire. There was silence

everywhere. The sentries were gone. The trees were gone. Even the stones of the fort were not in their places.

I came out, shook my body, and walked around the fort. Then I tried to climb over the fallen wall of the fort to search for our belongings. Everything was safe. Everywhere there were heaps of stones along with heaps of human bodies. I tried to see if anyone among them was still alive.

When I came out again, I saw ten or twelve prisoners wandering here and there. All of us gathered at one place. In the entire fort only ten or eleven of us had survived.

I believe that my survival was due to the power of the Tarak Mantra blessing that my Guru had given me when I was nine years old. During the entire war, even in such showers of fire, I did not receive even a scratch. Is this not astonishing? With the power of this single chanting of God's name, I passed through the entire business of the Second World War. I believe all this was possible only because of God's grace.

Escape to Switzerland

All eleven of us gathered together. Among them was Wadkar Rajaramrao Shinde with me. We were thinking about what to do next. Above us there was the sky and below us the ground—nothing else could be seen. We did not know what to do.

We somehow passed that day by eating whatever little we had. We spent the night under the open sky. Sleep did not come. The thought of what to do next kept troubling us constantly.

There was no control over us anymore. The military prisoner camp was assumed to be a German camp, so it had been bombed. Perhaps earlier there had been a German army post there, and that was why the attack had taken place.

All eleven of us made a firm decision. Now nobody had control over us. We were free. If possible we should escape to

a country like Switzerland, which was not participating in the war. This thought came to our minds.

And so we began running through the forest the entire night in whichever direction a path opened. Twice we came across railway lines. We ran along the tracks for some time. For nearly seven or eight days we travelled only at night. During the day we would lie hidden somewhere.

During this entire period we received guidance from a citizen of France. I do not remember his name, but he was a young man carrying a pistol. There was a difficulty of language in communication. Who he was, where he came from, and why he came near us—we did not know. But with great affection he guided us.

We used to call him “the French pistol man.” When we first met him he had fired at us, but we did not get frightened. Perhaps he was only trying to scare us. Later it was under his guidance that we advanced on the path of our escape. He would go to villages and bring bread and food for us. He seemed to

belong to that area, because we once stayed for a day at the house of one of his relatives. Sometimes while walking through open plains we would move ahead in groups of three, pretending to be on a military march. That way people would not suspect us.

At one place a Tommy gun was fired at us. There were green wheat fields there. We lay flat on the ground and were saved.

Eventually we came near a village called Belfort. This village was near the border of Switzerland. That gentleman showed us the road and took care of our food. Looking at him, I often felt that Lord Dattatreya himself was protecting me there.

At that time Switzerland had been declared a Red Cross country. It was not participating in the war, but during the war it took care of prisoners of war.

When we reached near the Swiss border, that French gentleman explained to us that he could not help us further. His limit was up to that point. The time ahead was extremely difficult.

From where we were standing, the border of Switzerland was only three hundred yards away. When we looked carefully we saw square marks carved on tall trees marking the border. Now we began to think about how to cross it. German soldiers had set up outposts there, which was extremely dangerous. German dogs were also roaming around.

That man said, “Do not be afraid. Run very fast and cross this border. Once you cross it, you will be free. Life and death will be experienced within these three hundred yards.” And then he disappeared. We tried to find him, but we never saw him again. The journey of seven or eight days with him felt like a dream. Just then one of our companions felt thirsty. Two of them went to a nearby house to ask for water. But the woman there handed them over to the German soldiers. We became

frightened. When they did not return for a long time, we understood that they must have been caught.

Without waiting further, we made a decision. We would cross the border from different points. We decided to run with full speed and cover those three hundred yards of life and death. We had almost no belongings with us. And we ran.

Because our two companions had been captured, the German posts had already been alerted. Even then we ran with great speed and crossed the border. Two of our companions were hit by bullets. But the remaining seven of us successfully entered Switzerland. For a long time we sat on the road on the other side of the border. We were extremely tired and breathless. The Swiss citizens and soldiers standing there were astonished. On the other side, on the French border, the German soldiers were grinding their teeth in anger. They had lost; we had won.

But during this eight-day journey four of our dear companions had lost their lives. Among them was our cook, Babaji. Even today his memory comes to my mind.

From there we were brought to the military camp at Pune, and I was made regular in the army. My mind did not settle there, and after some days I was sent to Belgaum. I joined my earlier Maratha Light Infantry Battalion. At that time the war had not completely stopped. In the eastern region, in Burma and other fronts, the war was still continuing. But in our camp at Belgaum there was relative peace. All the soldiers who had returned from the war were given their pending salary after settling the accounts, and we were granted three months' leave.

Return to the Motherland

As soon as I received three months' leave, I immediately came home to the village. Everyone was very happy. I had come back to the village after nearly five and a half years. At the same time my friends who had gone to the war with me—Gopal Kadam, Pandurang Rao, Shankarrao and others—had also come to the village. As soon as I arrived, I went around the entire village. There was a festive atmosphere in the house. My parents were extremely happy. My mother was overflowing with affection. She was small in stature, but without caring about her advancing age she was constantly moving around and working. I also went to Pedambe to meet my sister Nani. Everyone was happy that I had returned safely after the terrible sufferings of the war and the later trials of fire. At that time I was twenty-eight years old. My parents now wanted me to get married. Our brother-in-law Dudhajirao Shinde, who was a police officer at Pedambkar, and my sister Nani suggested the proposal of Babi, the daughter of Shripatrao Raghajirao Shinde of Pedambe. I went to Pedambe and saw

her. Everything was settled, and my marriage took place in the month of Magh in the year 1945. There was considerable expense, but the wedding was conducted properly. After the marriage, I completed my leave and returned to Belgaum

The Atmosphere of Struggle at Belgaum

When I returned to Belgaum, we were sent to the upper camp. The atmosphere was full of suspicion. The war had not completely ended yet. It had been only fifteen days since my marriage. Yet a plan was being prepared to send us again to the battlefield. Many of us had already been burned by the fire of war. No one wanted to hear the name of war again. I became very restless. I was mentally not prepared to go back to war. I personally went to meet our company commander, the Major. I told him that I had just been married and that not even fifteen days had passed since my marriage. Moreover, I had just returned from the war. I did not feel from my heart that I should go back again to the battlefield. Also, it was necessary for me to complete my unfinished signal course. But none of the officers were ready to listen. At that time the company commander of my platoon was the Raja of Sawantwadi, who held the rank of Captain. I also spoke to him. I told him that after completing my unfinished signal course I would go to war. I again went to meet the Major and pleaded a lot. Finally

he cancelled my order. I returned to my old camp and completed my remaining signal course. For the time being, I had escaped from the danger of war.

However, I constantly felt that I should leave the army service. The reason was that due to the prejudice against us we had suffered greatly. I submitted my resignation from the job. But for a long time it was not approved. The reason was that the British officers had no sympathy for us soldiers, and I too had developed great resentment towards them. I kept thinking that I should leave this job and take up some other employment.

At that same time the British government announced a plan to send some people on "Reserve." I took advantage of this opportunity and applied again. Reserve meant temporary retirement, but one had to return to the military camp for two months every year for fitness, parade, and war training. I showed my readiness for it and went personally to the recruitment camp for the Bombay Police at Belgaum. On 24-4-1946 I was recruited into the Bombay Police. Before that I had been granted three months of reserve retirement leave. Taking that leave, I again came to the village. After the leave ended, I had to join the police in Mumbai.

For my service in the military I received a pension of three rupees per month, along with some additional allowances. Apart from that, while serving in the police until retirement, I used to receive seven days of extra paid leave every year specially to collect my pension.

According to the reserve agreement I used to go to Belgaum until 1953. But after that the Government of India stopped it. In this way my military chapter came to an end.

For my bravery and courage in the war during the period from 3-2-1938 to 22-8-1946 I was honoured with the following medals:

1938–1945 Star Medal

African Star Medal

Defence War Medal

Looking Back a Little

While I had been away in the war for five to five and a half years, how my parents managed in the village is something that must be described here. In fact it is necessary.

While I was in the war they used to receive letters sent from there. But when I was captured, all contact was broken. My parents had no idea whether I was alive or dead. They only knew that I had been taken prisoner. They were growing old. They could no longer manage the farming work. My mother would cultivate the fields by sharing them with someone else. Even then it was not enough for their livelihood. Along with that there was constant worry about me. Their days passed in anxiety about what had happened to me. Terrible news from the war would reach the village. When they heard that someone had died in the war, their hearts would break. My mother would become very restless.

They did receive the family allowance that I had sent from the war, but those ten rupees were not enough. There was

no other source of income. At that time there was severe inflation. During that difficult period they were helped by a merchant from Kherdi, Shri Bhau Lakeshri. During that time he provided all the necessary household items on credit. He never demanded payment. But after I returned, I settled his entire account. He was such a noble man. Unfortunately he did not live very long. I never forgot his kindness throughout my life.

My mother was very loving, though she had grown tired. I do not remember her quarrelling with anyone. She endured all the poverty and suffering. On the other hand my father's nature had become very irritable day by day. His eyesight had become very weak. His body trembled continuously. I remember that during my marriage he performed the Navagraha ritual in that same weak condition.

The old house that my father had built was still standing. After I came back, the sons of our neighbour Vishramrao decided to rebuild their old house. I bought all the materials

from their old house and repaired and rebuilt our house. I also added two verandas to it.

Later, after retiring from the police, in 1989 I built a neat house on the same place where the old house had stood. It still exists today. I named it “Sadguru Nivas.” The house was built by a potter named Barku Phage. He was a very good man. The person who builds a house may not live in it, but he makes our living there happy.

Job in the Mumbai Police

On 24-4-1946, I was recruited as a constable in the Mumbai Police at the camp in Belgaum. After my three-month military leave ended, I reported for duty at the Police Department at Naigaon in Mumbai. Our job was considered a “civil” service. Therefore, it was necessary for us to learn the local laws and rules. Arrangements were made at Naigaon itself to provide us with this training, and we had to complete all the required procedures of the training. When I joined the Mumbai Police, I was posted in the Arms Section, meaning the armed division. At that time, the situation there was very difficult. The freedom movement had not yet completely subsided, although definite steps toward independence were being taken. At the same time, the country was heading toward partition. Because of this, both the Muslim and Hindu communities were restless. Poison was being spread in society in the name of religion, and the British were supporting these divisions. As a result, communal riots broke out. Muslims who felt insecure attacked

Hindus, and Hindus retaliated against Muslims. Such incidents became frequent.

My police training had not yet finished, but even then we were sent for security duty at the police posts in Nal Bazaar in Mumbai. There we had to make great efforts to control the riots. Our duties included everything from controlling the crowds to taking the injured people to hospitals.

On 15 August 1947, India became independent. After that, the atmosphere gradually became calm. Later, after completing the remaining part of our training, we were posted to the armed unit L.A. One at the Naigaon Police Headquarters. After finishing the training, I went to my village on leave and then returned to duty.

While I was in L.A. One, our work mainly consisted of guarding different government offices, banks, courts, and prisons. My revolver training had been excellent, so sometimes I was assigned as a bodyguard for VIPs. I also worked for some time as the bodyguard of Kher Saheb, who was the first Prime

Minister of Western India at that time. Later, I also served as the bodyguard of Morarji Desai, who was the Chief Minister of the Bombay region.

An incident from that time is worth mentioning here. There was a minister named Patil, and I was serving as his bodyguard. Once he went to the Mahalaxmi Temple for darshan. I accompanied him there. After he finished the darshan and came out, we found that someone had stolen his new slippers. He became very angry with me and shouted, “What were you doing?”

I replied firmly, “I am your bodyguard, not the guard of your slippers.” Still he kept complaining. I became extremely angry. For a moment a thought crossed my mind that I should shoot him with my loaded revolver. But immediately the sweet memory of the news that my son Yashwant had been born in my village came to my mind, and my anger cooled down instantly. Finally, he walked all the way to the bungalow with me without slippers.

My nature has always been somewhat hot-tempered. I am truthful and cannot tolerate injustice, nor can I swallow it silently. Even so, many times in such situations I had to control my mind and remain calm.

During this period, I was also attached to the Gas Platoon. This platoon was used to control small and big riots in Mumbai. For some time I also worked in the armoury. I had a special interest in handling weapons and in repairing and servicing them, so I worked there for quite a long time. At that time, J. K. Sawant Saheb was our in-charge inspector. However, most of the people working in that armoury were from the Malvan region, and they constantly played dirty politics. I got tired of it and left that place, returning again to the Gas Platoon.

The Samyukta Maharashtra Movement of 1957

All the events of that time remain very vivid in my memory. It was the period of the Samyukta Maharashtra–Gujarat riots in 1957. There was a huge movement demanding that Mumbai should become part of Maharashtra. During that agitation, the condition of us policemen was worse than that of dogs. We did not get food on time. There was round-the-clock security duty. There was hardly any sleep. The tension was enormous.

During those days we had to face many riots. Once I was standing guard under a building, and someone threw a heavy wooden plank down from above onto us. I was standing nearby but fortunately escaped without injury. In this movement hundreds of people lost their lives and there was heavy financial loss. Finally, after the state of Maharashtra was formed with Mumbai included in it, the agitation ended.

During the same period, after joining the police at Naigaon, my natural talents got an opportunity to develop. I was very good at playing hockey. As a goalkeeper I performed excellently in hockey matches. Opposing teams rarely had the courage to score a goal against me. I always faced them boldly and had great mental determination to block their goals, along with strong physical support. Everyone appreciated my performance.

At that time, J. J. Jameson Saheb had come as the Superintendent in charge of the police headquarters. He was tall, dignified, and very kind-hearted. He was the last British officer there. He had a special interest in sports such as boxing, football, hockey, and wrestling. During that period, the famous wrestler and Olympic medalist Khashaba Jadhav was also working as an inspector at our headquarters. Everyone felt enthusiastic working under Jameson Saheb.

Under his guidance, J. K. Sawant Saheb also developed his career and later retired as an ACP. He had joined the police as a simple constable but later completed his graduation and

rose to the rank of ACP. During a strike in the armed division of the police department, he handled the situation with remarkable efficiency. He locked the entire armoury under his control and did not allow a single weapon to go out. All of us had great respect for him. He was also deeply interested in spirituality and was very well-read in religious texts. Listening to his explanations of those texts was always enjoyable.

The Naigaon Police Headquarters was a very large area. There were old as well as new chawls, and most of the residents were policemen. The atmosphere there was very religious. During the month of Shravan and in the extra lunar month, public readings of religious scriptures were organized. Texts such as the Ramayana, Mahabharata, Bhaktivijay, Ramvijay, and Navnath were read every year. Since I had an interest in reading, I also attended these sessions. My voice was clear and strong, so I was often requested to read the scriptures aloud. Many times, bhajan competitions were also organized in our police chawls. I used to participate in them. Many well-known bhajan groups and singers from Mumbai attended these gatherings. Among them were Fulaji Buva, Kadam Buva,

Parab Buva, and our own Naik Buva from the headquarters. Overall, the atmosphere there was very religious and pure.

At first I lived alone in Mumbai. Later, in 1962, my son Yashwant came to Mumbai for his education. My wife stayed in the village to take care of my parents. I could not bring her to Mumbai until 1972. Therefore, we had to manage our meals ourselves along with our duties. Since our families were not with us, we were usually accommodated in shared rooms with other policemen. When their families came to stay, the situation became very difficult. We had to eat in the same small room, and there was very little space for sleeping. We had to share the limited space. It caused great inconvenience, and my son often could not study properly. The rules for allotting police quarters were very strict and troublesome.

I served in Mumbai for 31 years, but I could never buy a place of my own there. The reason was that people from the armed section were required to live compulsorily in the headquarters. When I retired, I did not have the financial ability

to buy a house. I did not have my own home in Mumbai, so my children had to live in rented houses.

J. J. Jameson Saheb later retired from service at Naigaon and worked as a security director in several big companies. He passed away in India in 1970. According to his wish, his cremation was performed according to Hindu rites at the Girgaum crematorium. At that time my son Yashwant and I went to Marine Lines to pay our last respects. There was a huge crowd. He was indeed a very popular officer and a pride of the police department.

During this period, I also had the opportunity to work as the bodyguard of Yashwantrao Chavan, the first Chief Minister of Maharashtra. Later I also worked as a bodyguard for Balasaheb Desai, Vasantnao Naik, and Shankarrao Chavan. I also got the opportunity to travel to Karad for the celebration of Yashwantrao Chavan's sixty-first birthday. Many ministers were present on that flight, including Sharad Pawar. The function was held very successfully at Vithamai High School

in Karad. At that time, I was serving as the bodyguard of a minister named Salunkhe.

Among the important personalities for whom I served as bodyguard, one must mention the famous lawyer Shrikant Bhat, a very intelligent and skilled advocate. I worked with him for two years. He was very gentle and affectionate, and he loved my son very much because he was his professor. At that time he was working as the lawyer of Shiv Sena and later became very well known.

Another personality worth mentioning is Vamanrao Mahadik, who was the Mayor of Mumbai and a Shiv Sena leader. He was very simple and humble. I liked his personality very much. Coming from extreme poverty, he spent his life serving poor people.

Association of Ex-Servicemen

In our village there is an association of ex-servicemen established in 1982, and I am also active in it. Every year on the day of Holi, all ex-servicemen gather in the morning at the Bhavani Devi temple. Retired soldiers and those who have received promotions are honored there. Young men who have newly joined the army are encouraged, and they are advised to follow the example of the retired captains and subedars from the village. On that day a Satyanarayan puja is performed, and prayers are offered to Goddess Bhavani for the long life and progress of all soldiers.

So far, seven people from our village have retired after reaching the rank of captain in the military or air force. Their names include Ramchandrarao Chandrarao Kadam, Rajaram Dadajirao Kadam, Bhagwan Baburao Kadam, Abaji Shankarrao Kadam, Vishwanath Pandurangrao Kadam (Air Force), Ramchandrarao Babajirao Kadam, and Bharat Shivajirao Kadam. Among those who reached the rank of

Subedar Major are Narsingrao Babajirao Kadam, Prabhakarao Yashwantrao Kadam, Shahaji Janrao Kadam, and Dattarao Ramchandra Kadam.

Those who retired after reaching the rank of Subedar include Ambajirao Kadam, Narayan Manaji Salvi, Dattaram Babu Menge, Shantaram Tatoji Kadam, and Sudam Ramchandra Salvi.

Among the Naik Subedars are Pramod Bharatrao Kadam and Ravindra Gangaram Menge. Today the association has 97 members. On behalf of this association, the main entrance gates of the temples of Goddess Bhavani and Waghjai have been constructed by us soldiers, which has added to the beauty of those temples.

Jaybhavani Gramonnati Mandal, Mumbai

In Mumbai, people from our village established an organization in 1938. It was founded by my cousin elder brother Sakharam Yashwantrao, also known as Mamasahab Kadam, and Ganpatrao Kadam from Dattawadi, with the support of the people of our village. The organization has now completed fifty years. It works for the overall development of our village and also supports the progress of the village school through financial and other assistance.

Today, workers like Hanmantarao Keshavrao Kadam, the first graduate from our village, as well as my nephew Laxmanrao Shivramrao Kadam, Vasanttrao Ganpatrao Kadam, J. B. Kadam, and Laxmanrao Shankarrao Kadam are actively working in this organization. The institution guides the younger generation in every possible way and is moving forward successfully. It is a matter of pride for our village. My children and I also participate in its activities.

It is also necessary to mention those who contributed greatly to this organization. Among them are Narayan Ramajirao Kadam, Gangaram Bajajirao Kadam, Tatojirao Dinkarrao Kadam, Bhau Bhikajirao Kadam, Uddhavrao Baburao Kadam, Raghunath Totajirao Kadam, and Kashiram Baburao Kadam.

Among these respected persons, Mamasahab Kadam has a square in the Borivali area of Mumbai named after him, and a road from Lower Parel Station to Worli is named after Ganpatrao Kadam.

My Blameless Life

I lived my entire life in an honest and spotless manner. I stayed completely away from addictions. I never indulged in corruption and never touched even a single rupee that belonged to someone else. I never hated anyone, and therefore I never made enemies. Whenever such situations arose, I tried to stay away from them. I always remained absorbed in remembering and meditating upon God. I never ran after illusions or worldly temptations.

I never took even a single rupee as a loan, nor did I lend money to anyone. I tried to manage my family life properly within whatever means were available to me. I taught the same lesson to my children as well—be content with what you have. Keep all money dealings transparent. Do not cause loss to anyone. Even if you lose a little money yourself, do not let even a single rupee of someone else be lost because of you.

I lived by these principles myself. Money matters often spoil relationships and create distance between people. Therefore, I always advised my children to follow these rules, and they also followed them sincerely.

My Family

While writing all this, it is necessary to say a few words about my family. My eldest son is Yashwant, and after him we have two daughters, Kusum and Sandhya.

Kusum was married in 1971 to Tukaram, the son of Nani from Pedhambhe. My eldest son Yashwant came to Mumbai and, after completing his S.S.C., continued his education by doing small jobs and standing on his own feet. This was something I could not have supported with my small salary. I advised him to follow his own path, and he succeeded in his efforts.

He attended night college and morning college and completed his education up to B.A. and LL.B. Today he has a good job in the Income Tax Department. Yashwant was married on 5 June 1972. His wife Sujata, earlier known as Shalini Surve, is very loving, service-minded, and devoted to the family, much like my own wife. After their marriage, in September 1972, Sandhya was born.

The birth of Sandhya can truly be called a miracle. Her pregnancy had occurred unexpectedly. Despite many attempts, the pregnancy could not be terminated, and Sandhya was born. She turned out to be a very intelligent girl. In our old age she served both of us with great dedication. While managing her studies, she worked very hard and achieved success. Like her mother, she created an example in the village. This was the result of the values we had given her.

Yashwant's son is now studying to become a dentist, and Sandhya is studying in a college at Chiplun.

My Father's Death

On 4 February 1962, my father, Sadguru Anantrao Kadam, passed away at the age of about 97. Due to old age, he suffered from many illnesses and had become blind. He sometimes behaved strangely. During all this time, my wife Laxmi served him with great love and patience. She fulfilled all his wishes. He often scolded her, but she never became angry with him. Whenever he was in a good mood, he would give spiritual guidance and teach lessons about devotion and philosophy. Because everyone knew his nature, people from our house and from neighboring houses in Talewadi tolerated all his difficulties.

Since he could not walk, he used to crawl from the house all the way to the Hanuman temple. Then someone had to carry him back home. He had deep spiritual knowledge and also seemed to know the time of his death. On 4 February 1962, when he was about to leave his body, he called all the family members. He asked my wife to place his head on her lap and

told her not to be frightened by whatever she might see. He asked everyone to start chanting God's name and then peacefully left his body. At that moment, my wife saw a powerful flame of light, like a flash of lightning, emerging from his body. She was stunned by this extraordinary experience. After his death, a small but beautiful memorial (samadhi) was built for him. He was a saintly person, and he had hundreds of disciples in our village and outside.

On the occasions of Gokulashtami and Guru Purnima, spiritual gatherings were held at our house, where many people received his blessings. He used to say, "Why go far away? My Pandharpur is here itself." By this he meant that God is present within us and nearby; there is no need to travel far for pilgrimages.

In fact, the tradition of spirituality was strong in our Talewadi area. Saints like Sadguru Anantrao Maharaj, Sadguru Jijaba Maharaj, and later Sadguru Babajirao Maharaj helped create and maintain the devotional atmosphere in the village.

A huge peepal tree planted by Babajirao Kadam still stands as a witness to this tradition. Thousands of birds gather on that tree, chirping happily and filling the surroundings with life. Behind that tree there used to be a Hanuman temple, which was later moved to the courtyard of the Kulswamini Bhavani temple.

Retirement from the Police Department

I retired from the police department as a Havaldar on 30 June 1976. By that time I had become tired of the job. In many ways, working in the police department felt like a kind of bondage. I often felt that I should retire soon and settle permanently in my village.

Therefore, on the very next day after retirement, I immediately went to the village. At that time my wife was staying at Pedhambhe because her father had become very old and was living alone. She stayed there to take care of him. I also went there, but my mind did not feel settled. After the death of my father-in-law, we returned to Terav village, and I lived there until the end of my life. With the pensions I receive from the police and the military, I manage my life comfortably. I depend on no one and remain self-reliant.

The Tandav Begins Again

In the evening of life, just as the setting sun turns deep red, I experienced something similar. I was completely exhausted by the storms of life. Even though my mind was strong, the intensity of those blows deeply affected my heart.

My wife Laxmi, who had stood by me throughout my life, was nearly ten years younger than me, but time separated her from me. She passed away on 7 September 1991.

She had been suffering from an incurable cancer. She was treated at the Mumbai Hospital and underwent surgeries. But the disease was detected very late. She had to be admitted to the hospital twice. Finally, when she was discharged, the doctors told my son that there would be no need to bring her back to the hospital again. They said that as long as she could stand and move, it would be fine, but once she became bedridden, she would live for only about ten days. This prediction turned out to be true. It was the time of the Ganpati festival when she became bedridden. We were frightened and

called all the children. Soon everything came to an end. We were all present at that moment, except Nitin, who could not meet her.

What can I say about her? She was truly the shadow of my love. Throughout her life she worked tirelessly for me. She served my parents with unmatched devotion. My father had a very difficult and fiery nature, yet she cared for him lovingly, and she did the same for my mother.

She created a noble example in the village. In our village she was known by her maiden name “Babi.” She was gentle and loving toward everyone. If even neighbors quarreled, it saddened her and brought tears to her eyes. She herself never fought with anyone. Losing such a gentle and virtuous wife at the age of seventy-four was a tremendous shock for me. My youngest daughter was still young, and the responsibility of taking care of her and ensuring she did not feel the absence of her mother fell upon me. The loss of my beloved wife created a deep emptiness in my life. Now I often remember her divine companionship, and my eyes fill with tears. All that remains for me now is to cherish her memories throughout the rest of my life.

The One Who Made Me Write

When my wife passed away, my eyesight had become very weak. Both of my eyes were affected by cataracts. It had become difficult for me even to move around alone inside the house. At that time my son, even though I kept refusing, took me to Mumbai and got one of my eyes operated on at Mumbai Hospital. A lens was inserted, and after that I could see clearly again.

After the operation, when I returned to the village and got down from the vehicle, I saw the Dhokatya hill, which I had not been able to see for the past four years. I was astonished. Overwhelmed with joy, I bent down and kissed the soil of my village.

It felt as if something that had been lost had been found again.

I began to move around the house independently, but time simply would not pass. I did not know what to do. Apart from the memories of my wife, no other thoughts came into my mind.

I shared all this with my son. Immediately he brought a notebook and a pen and placed them in my hands. He said, “All that you have told us until now about your life, about your bravery in the war—write it all down. The coming generations should know these things.” That was enough. Holding on to that thread, I began to write. Whatever I could remember, I wrote it down. I brought my past alive before my eyes and tried to portray everything exactly as it had happened. During that time, Yashwant used to come every fifteen days and read what I had written. He would ask hundreds of questions and try to connect the missing references. Later it became difficult for me to continue writing. My hands would not cooperate. I would get cramps in my hands. So I started narrating the events to Yashwant and sometimes to Sandhya, and they would write them down. Later Yashwant arranged everything and wrote it in a continuous form. This happened in the year 1992.

After that I also wrote a short note expressing my thoughts and even signed it myself, although writing had become painful.

Now my health has deteriorated greatly. I am suffering from many ailments. My movement has almost stopped. Apart from the memories of my wife, nothing else comes to my mind now. This lonely life no longer feels desirable. Sometimes I feel that death should embrace me—but that is not in our hands.

However, the remembrance of God continues. Old memories keep returning and troubling me, yet I endure them with a strong heart.

Now I wonder, with open eyes, how much longer I will have to witness this intellectual and emotional “tandav” of thoughts.

T H E - E N D



कै. बाबूराव अनंतराव कदम यांचा युद्धावर जाताना फोटो