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Zoya Subramanian

The Independence Diary

19th July 1929 Tara Gandhi

Dear Diary,

My name is Tara. I am 15 years old. And it's scorching!!

This morning I woke up, again to the sound of screaming, bangs, and protests saying "azadee!"

- independence. I live in Porbandar, India and we are fighting against the British to be an independent country. So I woke up, got out of bed and went downstairs to eat.

As I sat down with my parents, they told me to stop eating and listen. Then they told me straight out - I'm going to get an arranged marriage! But I said I wanted to fight for independence!

After what seemed like hours of arguing (as much as I dared) we came to a solution. I got 9 months to do "whatever nonsense I wanted" and then I had to get - ugh - married.

21st August 1929

So my grandfather is Mahatma Gandhi, the famous peace protester and he is my favourite person in the world. In my opinion, he is an inspiration to the world.

I have done a few protests and even a hunger strike (but I got so many bowls of chaat to eat after that!)

I sit with my Nanaji (grandfather) a lot, just planning the next protests or maybe he'd tell me the stories about being a lawyer in Africa!

Sometimes I ask my friends to join in, and they do! But some don't, as their parents believe that we need to fight fire with fire, in a hypothetical way i.e use violence against the British.

But my Nanaji thinks we should fight hypothetical fire with hypothetical water - which means not stoop down to the Britishers level.

7th September 1929

It's so HOT! And also, slight traces of the influenza have started to come back! So we are sort of doing smaller protests, just to distance ourselves for a bit, and then we will start our movement again.

Also, I'm really worried about Nanaji. He got arrested in March, and last week the British officers started screaming at him for breaking up a fight. And even though that makes no sense, I don't want him to get hurt - or - no, not that. But he is getting old, and frail. Should he even be fighting for peace anymore?

These protests can get pretty physical.

Also, yesterday, I had to meet a suitor for marriage. It was TORTURE! He was the typical parent's dream to-be-doctor, pretty rich but STILL asks for a huge dowry. I had to make chai and sit in silence, which is so not me!

I was speaking to Nanaji about this, and surprisingly he agrees! He says his wife (my Naani) did not have an arranged marriage with him. They ran off to Africa to get married, he says, and to study law.

25th December 1929

Today was a day for the history books! Because the Britishers were not rude, or mean, or calling us racist names! Nanaji says it's because today is a day called Christmas! They decorated pine trees with colourful balls and string! And, I was getting ready to go to our protest when Nanaji said to me: " Aaj unki Diwali hai. Hum usey kharaab nahi karenge. Kal." - This is their Diwali. We will not ruin it for them. Tomorrow, ok?

And I realised he was right. If anyone ruined my holiday, I would be so annoyed!
It's strange, I always thought of the Britishers as some inhumane aliens (the ones I'd seen anyway), but they had holidays as well. Their family time. But these soldiers couldn't be with their families. That's depressing.

18th January 1930

I CAN'T believe it! The soldiers literally rationed our salt! The salt that comes from OUR sea!! They don't have the right to do that! Everyone was so upset. Even Mama, who doesn't get involved in this independence fight, was LIVID. So me and Nanaji arranged for things like talks, fundraisers to get salt for our citizens and a big walk to Dandi to collect our own salt. The walk is not so much to get salt, but to show the Britishers what we can do.

And to add to the fuss, a close family friend of ours, Amit Mehta, was shot last night. His funeral is next week. He was a close friend of my Papa's, so he is devastated! And so am I. He was a really funny man, and I will miss him a lot. So here is a message to him:

Namaste Amit uncle!

I am so sorry that you passed. You will be dearly missed. And I promise, I will get revenge for you!

Yours truly, Tara.

21st February 1930

I am actually really excited for this Salt march! Me and Nanaji have been quietly spreading the word to our friends (who are not in league with the British anyway) and they spread the words to their friends too. So far around 25,000 people are coming for it! And since the walk is going to be for 2 weeks, I pestered the chaat vendor to give us a ton of vada pav!

I am so excited for India to get its independence! Because ever since I was born, the Britishers have been telling me what to do. But when they leave, no - one (except my parents) will be able to boss me around anymore!!

Anyway, my parents made me meet another boy today. His name is Prasad Bhattacharya. To be honest, he was okay! I talked him into it and he said he would be coming to the Dandi Satyagraha - salt march. And he loved to read, just like me!

.. Oh no. Do I like him?! No. No. No. But who cares. I have to focus on my country now.

15th March 1930

ITS TODAY!!! Wow! I can't believe it! Nanaji and I prepped walking around the park to be ready for the walk, and we are going to hold heavy bags of our own food. I was really amazed at how many people are going to turn up! Over 20,000 aunties and uncles and teenagers joined together to fight for our country. I'm so proud. I hope it goes well! I have to go now. Wish us luck!

31st January 1948 Tara Gandhi Bhattacharya

It's been 18 years since I have written in this diary. When I got married, I moved out of the house, and forgot about my diary. But I thought this would make me feel better. And everything has changed: I am married with 2 children, I now have a job in my charity, helping poor families. But one thing has affected me the most. My dear Nanaji is not with me anymore.

Even though he said I am a good writer, words cannot express how depressed I am. He was shot... 3 times in his chest by Vinayak Godse. It happened yesterday. But he died happy.

His lifelong dream was accomplished - India got its independence last year, and let me tell you - he was ecstatic! He also saw all his grandchildren get married, and he was the life of the party at my wedding!

The westerners had another war, And Nanaji has had enough of fighting for a lifetime. I don't know why, but these Britishers can't seem to stop fighting with other countries.

Just like I wrote a letter to Amit Uncle, I am writing one to my dear Nanaji:

Namaste Nanaji!

I cannot say how much I miss you, even though it's only been a day since you flew to the heavens.

I hope you get reborn as a tiger, your favourite animal, and when I die, I will join you. I miss you so much Nanaji.

Love from Tara.