



ON RURAL

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18/2/1965  
Gandhiji

RECONSTRUCTION

79

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1954 GOI

PUBLICATIONS DIVISION



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GANDHIJI  
ON  
RURAL RECONSTRUCTION

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"To serve our villages is to establish Swaraj.  
Everything else is but an idle dream."

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PUBLICATIONS DIVISION  
MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING  
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA



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ON RURAL

116  
25/10/55

# Gandhiji

RECONSTRUCTION



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## I. THE PROBLEMS OF OUR VILLAGES

### WHERE TO FIND INDIA

I have believed and repeated times without number that India is to be found not in its few cities but in its 7,00,000 villages. But we town-dwellers have believed that India is to be found in its towns and the villages were created to minister to our needs. We have hardly ever paused to inquire if those poor folk get sufficient to eat and clothe themselves with and whether they have a roof to shelter themselves from sun and rain.

*Harijan,*  
4-4-1936

### THE CHOICE TO BE MADE

We have to make a choice between India of the villages that are as ancient as herself and India of the cities which are a creation of foreign domination. Today the cities dominate and drain the villages so that they are crumbling to ruin. My Khadi mentality tells me that cities must subserve villages when that domination goes. Exploiting of villages is itself organized violence. If we want Swaraj to be built on non-violence, we will have to give the villages their proper place.

*Harijan,*  
20-1-1940

### THE EXPLOITED VILLAGER

I have found that the town-dweller has generally exploited the villager, in fact he has lived on the poor villager's subsistence. Many a British official has written about the conditions of the people of India. No one has, to my knowledge, said that the Indian villager has enough to keep body and soul together. On the contrary they have admitted that the bulk of the population live on the verge of starvation and ten per cent are semi-starved,



and that millions have to rest content with a pinch of dirty salt and chillies and polished rice or parched grain.

You may be sure that if any of us were to be asked to live on that diet, we should not expect to survive it longer than a month or should be afraid of losing our mental faculties. And yet our villagers go through that state from day to day.

*Harijan,*  
4-4-1936

#### ALLOW NO EXPLOITATION

Over 75 per cent of the population are agriculturists. But there cannot be much spirit of self-government about it if we take away or allow others to take away from ~~them~~ almost the whole of the result of their labour.

*Speeches and Writings of  
Mahatma Gandhi, p. 323*



## II. PROGRESS THROUGH SERVICE

### THE TASK OF THE PATRIOT

It is profitless to find out whether the villages of India were always what they are today. If they were never better it is a reflection upon the ancient culture in which we take so much pride. But if they were never better, how is it that they have survived centuries of decay which we see going on around us. . . . The task before every lover of the country is how to prevent this decay or, which is the same thing, how to reconstruct the villages of India so that it may be as easy for anyone to live in them as it is supposed to be in the cities. Indeed, it is the task before every patriot. It may be that the villagers are beyond redemption, that rural civilization has had its day and that the seven hundred thousand villages have to give place to seven hundred well-ordered cities supporting a population not of three hundred millions but thirty. If such is to be India's fate, even that won't come in a day. It must take time to wipe out a number of villages and villagers and transform the remainder into cities and citizens.

### TURN TO VILLAGES

The cities are capable of taking care of themselves. It is the village we have to turn to. We have to disabuse them of their prejudice, their superstitions, their narrow outlook and we can do so in no other manner than that of staying amongst them and sharing their joys and sorrow and spreading education and intelligent information among them.

*Young India,*  
30-3-1931

### DEVELOP VILLAGE MENTALITY

The village movement is as much an education of the city people as of the villagers. Workers drawn from cities have to



develop village mentality and learn the art of living after the manner of villagers. This does not mean that they have to starve like the villagers. But it does mean that there must be a radical change in the old style.

*Harijan,*  
11-4-1936

### IDENTIFY WITH THEM

We must identify ourselves with the villagers who toil under the hot sun beating on their bent backs and see how we would like to drink water from the pool in which the villagers bathe, wash their clothes and pots and in which their cattle drink and roll. Then and not till then shall we truly represent the masses and they will, as surely as I am writing this, respond to every call.

*Harijan,*  
1-3-1935

### LET US BE IDEAL VILLAGERS

We have got to be ideal villagers, not the villagers, with their queer ideas about sanitation, and giving no thought to how they eat and what they eat. Let us not, like most of them, cook anyhow, eat anyhow, live anyhow. Let us show them the ideal diet. Let us not go by mere likes and dislikes, but get at the root of these likes and dislikes.

*Harijan,*  
1-3-1935

### THE ROLE OF THE CITIES

It is only when the cities realize the duty of making an adequate return to the villages for the strength and sustenance which they derive from them, instead of selfishly exploiting them, that a healthy and moral relationship between the two will spring up. And if the city children are to play their part in this great and noble work of social reconstruction, the vocations through which they are to receive their education ought to be directly related to the requirements of the villages.

*Harijan,*  
19-10-1937



## THUS WE NEAR THE GOAL

The only way is to sit down in their midst and work away in the steadfast faith, as their scavengers, their nurses, their servants, not as their patrons, and to forget all our prejudices and prepossessions. Let us for a moment forget even Swaraj, and certainly forget the 'haves' whose presence oppresses us at every step. They are there. There are many who are dealing with these big problems. Let us tackle the humbler work of the village which is necessary now and would be even after we have reached our goal. Indeed, the village work when it becomes successful will itself bring us nearer the goal.

*Harijan,*  
16-3-1936

## MAKE VILLAGERS SELF-RELIANT

It is not proper that the relief rendered to villages should rest on the sentiments of townsfolk. We have to awaken villagers themselves and make them capable of tackling their own problems and forging ahead through their own strength. Multiplication of mills will certainly provide cloth for people and if there is proper governmental control of prices, it will be sufficiently cheap too. That will save people from exploitation and ensure decent wages also for the mill hands. But the special claim for Khadi is that it is an unrivalled means for rescuing the masses from the idleness and inertia in which they are today plunged and for creating in them the necessary strength for winning through.

Q. Did our claim amount to this, that Khadi can provide a supplementary means of livelihood to those who remain idle for so many months in the year?

A. That is so, of course, but it did not stop there. It was claimed that Swaraj hung on the yarn of the spinning wheel.

*Swaraj Through  
Charkha, p. 8*

## SAMAGRA GRAMSEVA

A Samagra Gramsevak must know everybody living in the village and render them such service as he can. That does not mean that the worker will be able to do everything single-handed.



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short space of time the seven hundred thousand dung-heaps which today pass muster as villages can be turned into abodes of peace, health and comfort. I am convinced that the capitalist, if he follows the *Samjrai* of Japan, has nothing really to lose and everything to gain. There is no other choice than between voluntary surrender on the part of the capitalist of superfluities and consequent acquisition of the real happiness of all on the one hand, and on the other the impending chaos into which, if the capitalist does not wake up betimes, the awakened but ignorant and famishing millions will plunge the country and which not even the armed force that a powerful government can bring into play can avert. I have hoped that India will successfully avert the disaster.

*Young India,*  
5-12-1929

### THE TRIPLE MALADY

We have to tackle the triple malady which holds our villages fast in its grip : (i) want of corporate sanitation; (ii) deficient diet; (iii) inertia. They are not interested in their own welfare. They don't appreciate modern sanitary methods. They don't want to exert themselves beyond scratching their farms or doing such labour as they are used to. These difficulties are real and serious. But they must not baffle us. We must have an unquenchable faith in our mission. We must be patient with the people. We are ourselves novices in village work. We have to deal with a chronic disease. Patience and perseverance, if we have them, overcome mountains of difficulties. We are like nurses who may not leave their patients because they are reported to have incurable disease.

*Harijan,*  
16-5-1936

### ECONOMY IN TIME, HEALTH AND MONEY

We have to teach them how to economize time, health and money. Lionel Curtis described our villages as dung-heaps. We have to turn them into model villages. Our village-folk do not get fresh air though they are surrounded by fresh air; they don't



this end, special organizing bodies or committees should be formed where there are none and those already in existence should be reformed where necessary. The Kisans are for the most part illiterate. Both adults and young persons of school-going age should be brought to a level that would ensure a decent living which should mean balanced food, dwelling houses and clothing, which should satisfy health requirement.

*The Bombay Chronicle,*  
28-10-1944

### DUTY TOWARDS THE TILLERS OF THE SOIL

If Indian society is to make real progress along peaceful lines, there must be a definite recognition on the part of the moneyed class that the ryot possesses the same soul that they do and that their wealth gives them no superiority over the poor. They must regard themselves even as the Japanese nobles did, as trustees holding their wealth for the good of their wards, the ryots. Then they would take no more than a reasonable amount as commission for their labours. At present there is no proportion between the wholly unnecessary pomp and extravagance of the moneyed class and the squalid surroundings and the grinding pauperism of the ryots in whose midst the former are living. A model Zamindar would therefore at once reduce much of the burden the ryot is now bearing, he would come in intimate touch with the ryots and know their wants and inject hope into them in place of the despair which is killing the very life out of them. He will not be satisfied with the ryots' ignorance of the laws of sanitation and hygiene. He will reduce himself to poverty in order that the ryot may have the necessities of life. He will study the economic condition of the ryots under his care, establish schools in which he will educate his own children side by side with those of ryots. He will purify the village well and the village tank. He will teach the ryot to sweep his roads and clean his latrines by himself doing this necessary labour. He will throw open without reserve his own gardens for the unrestricted use of the ryot. He will use as hospital, school, or the like most of the unnecessary buildings which he keeps for his pleasure. If only the capitalist class will read the signs of the times, revise their notions of God-given right to all they possess, in an incredibly



He will show them the way of helping themselves and procure for them such help and materials as they require. He will train up his own helpers. He will so win over the villagers that they will seek and follow his advice. Supposing I go and settle down in a village with a *ghani*, I won't be an ordinary *ghanchi* earning 15-20 rupees a month.

I will be a Mahatma *ghanchi*. I have used the word 'Mahatma' in fun but what I mean to say is that as a *ghanchi* I will become a model for the villagers to follow. I will be learned enough to teach their children. I may not be able to do so for lack of time. The villagers will come to me and ask me : "Please make arrangements for our children's education." I will tell them : "I can find you a teacher but you will have to bear the expenses." And they will be prepared to do so most willingly. I will teach them spinning and when they come and ask me for the services of a weaver, I will find them a weaver on the same terms as I found them a teacher. And the weaver will teach them how to weave their own cloth. I will inculcate in them the importance of hygiene and sanitation and when they come and ask me for a sweeper, I will tell them : "I will be your sweeper and I will train you all in the job." This is my conception of Samagra Gramseva. You may tell me that I will never say that we cannot hope to improve our villages in this age. Take the example of a *ghanchi* in Russia. After all the man who runs an oil mill is a *ghanchi*. He has money but his strength does not lie in his money. Real strength lies in knowledge. True knowledge gives a moral standing and moral strength. Everyone seeks the advice of such a man.

Harijan,  
17-3-1946

### HELP THE PEASANTS

The Kisan or the peasant, whether as a landless labourer or a labouring proprietor, comes first. He is the salt of the earth which rightly belongs or should belong to him, not to the absentee landlord or Zamindar. But in the non-violent way the labourer cannot forcibly eject the absentee landlord. He has so to work as to make it impossible for the landlord to exploit him. Closest co-operation amongst the peasants is absolutely necessary. To



get fresh food though they are surrounded by the freshest foods.  
I am talking like a missionary in this matter of food, because my  
mission is to make villages a thing of beauty.

*Harijan,*  
1-3-1935



### III. OUTLINES OF THE IDEAL

#### VILLAGE SWARAJ

My idea of village Swaraj is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbours for its own vital wants, and yet interdependent for many others in which dependence is a necessity. Thus every village's first concern will be to grow its own food crops and cotton for its cloth. It should have a reserve for its cattle, recreation and playground for adults and children. Then if there is more land available, it will grow *useful* money crops, thus excluding *ganja*, tobacco, opium and the like. The village will maintain a village theatre, school and public hall. It will have its own waterworks ensuring clean water supply. This can be done through controlled wells or tanks. Education will be compulsory up to the final basic course. As far as possible every activity will be conducted on the co-operative basis. There will be no castes such as we have today with their graded untouchability.

There will be a compulsory service of village guards who will be selected by rotation from the register maintained by the village. The Government of the village will be conducted by the *panchayat* of five persons annually elected by the adult villagers, male and female, possessing minimum prescribed qualifications. These will have all the authority and jurisdiction required. Since there will be no system of punishments in the accepted sense, this *panchayat* will be the legislature, judiciary and executive combined to operate for its year of office.

Any village can become such a republic. I have not examined here the question of relations with the neighbouring villages and the Centre, if any. My purpose is to present an outline of village government. Here there is perfect democracy based upon individual freedom. The individual is the architect of his own government. The law of non-violence rules him and his government. He and his village are able to defy the might of a world.



For the law governing every villager is that he will suffer death in the defence of his and his village's honour.

The reader may well ask me, as I am asking myself while penning these lines, as to why I have not been able to model Sevagram after the picture here drawn. My answer is, I am making the attempt. I can see dim traces of success though I can show nothing visible. But there is nothing inherently impossible in the picture drawn here. To model such a village may be the work of a life-time. Any lover of true democracy and village life can take up a village, treat it as his world and sole work, as he will find good results. He begins by being the village scavenger, spinner, watchman, medicine man and school-master all at once. If nobody comes near him, he will be satisfied with scavenging and spinning.

*Harijan,*  
26-7-1942

### PANCHAYAT RAJ

Independence must begin at the bottom. Thus, every village will be a republic or Panchayat having full powers. It follows, therefore, that every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its affairs even to the extent of defending itself against the whole world. It will be trained and prepared to perish in its attempt to defend itself against any onslaught from without. Thus, ultimately, it is the individual who is the unit. This does not exclude dependence on and willing help from neighbours or from the world. It will be free and voluntary play of mutual forces. Such a society is necessarily highly cultured, in which every man and woman knows what he or she wants and, what is more, knows that no one should want anything that others cannot have with equal labour.

This society must naturally be based on truth and non-violence which, in my opinion, are not possible without a living belief in God, meaning a self-existent, all-knowing living force which inheres in every other force known to the world but which depends on none and which will live when all other forces may conceivably perish or cease to act. I am unable to account for my life without belief in this all-embracing living light.



In this structure composed of innumerable villages there will be ever widening, never ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages, till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units.

Therefore, the outermost circumference will not wield power to crush the inner circle but give strength to all within and derive its own from the centre. I may be taunted with the retort that this is all Utopian and therefore not worth a single thought. If Euclid's point, though incapable of being drawn by human agency, has an imperishable value, my picture has its own for mankind to live. Let India live for this true picture, though never realizable in its completeness. We must have a proper picture of what we want before we can have something approaching it. If there ever is to be a republic of every village in India, then I claim verity for my picture in which the last is equal to the first, or in other words, none is to be the first and none the last.

In this picture every religion has its full and equal place. We are all leaves of a majestic tree whose trunk cannot be shaken off its roots which are deep down in the bowels of the earth. The mightiest of winds cannot move it.

In this there is no room for machines that would displace human labour and that would concentrate power in a few hands. Labour has its unique place in a cultural human family. Every machine that helps every individual has a place. But I must confess that I have never sat down to think out what that machine can be. I have thought of Singer's sewing machine. But even that is perfunctory. I do not need it to fill in my picture.

*Harijan,*  
28-7-1946

### SWADESHI

The law of Swadeshi is ingrained in the basic nature of man, but it has today sunk into oblivion. Hence the necessity for the vow of Swadeshi. In its ultimate and spiritual sense, Swadeshi



stands for the final emancipation of the soul from her earthly bondage. For, this earthly tabernacle is not her natural or permanent bode; it is hindrance in her onward journey; it stands in the way of her realizing her oneness with all life. A votary of Swadeshi, therefore, in his striving to identify himself with the entire creation, seeks to be emancipated from the bondage of the physical body.

If this interpretation of Swadeshi be correct, then it follows that its votary will, as a first duty, dedicate himself to the service of his immediate neighbours. This involves exclusion or even sacrifice of the interests of the rest, but the exclusion or the sacrifice would be only in appearance. Pure service of our neighbours can never, from its very nature, result in disservice to those who are far away, but rather the contrary. 'As with the individual, so with the universe' is an unfailing principle, which we would do well to lay to heart. On the other hand, a man who allows himself to be lured by 'the distant scene', and runs to the ends of the earth for service, is not only foiled in his ambition, but also fails in his duty towards his neighbours. Take a concrete instance. In the particular place where I live, I have certain persons as my neighbours, some relations and dependents. Naturally, they all feel, as they have a right to, that they have claims on me, and look to me for help and support. Suppose I leave them all at once, and set out to serve people in a distant place. My decision would throw my little world of neighbours and dependents out of gear, while my gratuitous knight-errantry would more likely than not, disturb the atmosphere in the new place. Thus a culpable neglect of my immediate neighbours, and an unintended disservice to the people whom I wish to serve, would be the first fruits of my violation of the principles of Swadeshi.

It is not difficult to multiply such instances. That is why the *Gita* says : "It is best to die performing one's own duty of *swadharma* : *paradharma* or another's duty is fraught with danger." Interpreted in terms of one's physical environment, this gives us the law of Swadeshi. What the *Gita* says with regard to *swadharma* equally applies to Swadeshi, for Swadeshi is *swadharma* applied to one's immediate environment.

It is only when the doctrine of Swadeshi is wrongly understood that mischief results. For instance, it would be a travesty of the



doctrine of Swadeshi, if to coddle my family, I set about grabbing money by all means, fair or foul. The law of Swadeshi requires no more of me than to discharge my legitimate obligations towards my family by just means, and the attempt to do so will reveal to me the universal code of conduct. The practice of Swadeshi can never do harm to any one, and if it does, it is not *swadharma* but egotism that moves me.

There may arise occasions, when a votary of Swadeshi may be called upon to sacrifice his family at the altar of universal service. Such an act of willing immolation will then constitute the highest service rendered to the family. 'Whosoever saveth his life shall lose it, and whosoever loseth his life for the Lord's sake shall find it' holds good for the family group no less than for the individual. Take another instance. Supposing there is an outbreak of plague in my village, and in trying to serve the victims of the epidemic, I, my wife, and children and all the rest of my family are wiped out of existence; then in inducing those dearest and nearest to join me, I will not have acted as the destroyer of my family, but on the contrary as its truest friend. In Swadeshi there is no room for selfishness; or if there is selfishness in it, it is of the highest type, which is not different from the highest altruism. Swadeshi in its purest form is the acme of universal service.

It was by following this line of argument, that I hit upon *khadi* as the necessary and the most important corollary of the principle of Swadeshi in its application to society. "What is the kind of service", I asked myself, "that the teeming millions of India most need at the present time, that can be easily understood and appreciated by all, that is easy to perform and will at the same time enable the crores of our semi-starved countrymen to live?" and the reply came that it is the universalizing of *khadi* or the spinning wheel alone that can fulfil these conditions.

Let no one suppose that the practice of Swadeshi through *khadi* would harm the foreign or Indian millowners. A thief, who is weaned from his vice, or is made to return the property that he has stolen, is not harmed thereby. On the contrary, he is the gainer, consciously in the one case, unconsciously in the other. Similarly, if all the opium addicts or drunkards in the world were to shake themselves free from their vice, the canteen



keepers or the opium vendors, who would be deprived of their custom, could not be said to be losers. They would be the gainers in the truest sense of the word. The elimination of the wages of sin is never a loss either to the individual concerned or to society; it is pure gain.

It is the greatest delusion to suppose, that the duty of Swadeshi begins and ends with merely spinning some yarn anyhow and wearing *khadi* made from it. *Khadi* is the first indispensable step towards the discharge of Swadeshi *dharma* to society. But one often meets men who wear *khadi*, while in all other things they indulge their taste for foreign manufactures. Such men cannot be said to be practising Swadeshi. They are simply following the fashion. A votary of Swadeshi will carefully study his environment and try to help his neighbours wherever possible, by giving preference to local manufactures, even if they are of an inferior grade or dearer in price than things manufactured elsewhere. He will try to remedy their defects, but will not because of their defects give them up in favour of foreign manufactures.

But even Swadeshi, like any other good thing, can be ridden to death if it is made a fetish. That is a danger which must be guarded against. To reject foreign manufactures merely because they are foreign, and to go on wasting national time and money in the promotion in one's country of manufactures for which it is not suited would be criminal folly, and a negation of the Swadeshi spirit. A true votary of Swadeshi will never harbour illwill towards the foreigner, he will not be actuated by antagonism towards anybody on earth. Swadeshism is not a cult of hatred. It is a doctrine of selfless service, that has its roots in the purest *ahimsa* i.e. Love.

1931

#### THE NEW ORIENTATION OF SWADESHI

Q. How does this *new* Swadeshi differ from the old ?

A. The old emphasized the indigenous nature of the products, irrespective of the method of production or the prospects of the products. I have ruled out organized industries, not because they are *not* Swadeshi, but because they do not need special support.



They can stand on their own legs and, in the present state of our awakening, can easily command a market. According to the new orientation, if it is new, I would certainly have our Swadeshi organization to seek out all village industries and find how they are faring. We will have experts and chemists who will be prepared to place their knowledge at the disposal of villagers. We will, through our experts, offer to test the articles manufactured by village handicraftsmen and make to them suggestions to improve their wares, and would sell them if they would accept our conditions.

Q. Would you take up any and every handicraft?

A. Not necessarily. I should examine each one of them, find out their place in the economy of the village life and, if I see that they must be encouraged because of inherent merit, I should do so. Now, for instance, I would be loath to allow the village broom to be replaced by the modern broomstick or brush. I would ask Mrs. Gandhi and other women of the household to tell me about the relative merits of both. Mind you, I would consider the advantages from all points of view. Thus, the village broom, I should think, must be preferred because it indicates tenderness and kindness to small life, whereas the brush makes a clean sweep of those things. Thus, I should see a whole philosophy behind the broom, for I do not think the Creator makes any distinction between minute insects and (in His estimation) minute men.

Thus I should pick up all kinds of village crafts and industries which are about to die and deserve revival, both because of their intrinsic merit and their other useful aspects, and I should thus go on making discoveries. Take our trifling tooth-sticks, for instance. I am quite sure, if you were to deprive the bulk of the Bombay citizens of their tooth-sticks, their teeth would suffer. I cannot contemplate with equanimity the modern tooth-brush replacing the tooth-stick. These brushes are unhygienic. Once used, they deserve to be thrown away. However much disinfectants you may use to sterilize them, they can never be as good as fresh ones. But the *babul* or *neem* tooth-stick is used once for all and has highly astringent properties. Again, it serves the purpose of a tongue scraper. The West has yet to discover



anything so hygienic as the Indian tooth-stick. You may not know that a doctor in South Africa claimed to have controlled tuberculosis among the Bantu miners by insisting on the regular use by them of these tooth-sticks. I would be no party to the advertisement of modern tooth-brushes even when they are made in India. I should declare my preference for the tooth-stick. This is cent per cent Swadeshi. If I take care of it, the rest will take care of itself. Ask me to define the right angle and I should do it easily, but do not ask me to define the angles between the acutest and the most obtuse you can make. If I have the definition of a right angle, I can make whatever angle I need. Though Swadeshi is eloquent enough as its own definition I have called mine cent per cent Swadeshi, because Swadeshi is in danger of being watered down. Cent per cent Swadeshi gives sufficient scope for the most insatiable ambition for service and can satisfy every kind of talent.

Q. You see Swaraj at the end of it ?

A. Why not ? Once I said in spinning wheel lies Swaraj, next I said in prohibition lies Swaraj. In the same way I would say in cent per cent Swadeshi lies Swaraj. Of course, it is like the blind men describing the elephant. All of them are right and yet not wholly right.

If you tap all our resources, I am quite sure we can be again the richest country in the world, which we were, I suppose, at one time. We can repeat the phenomenon, if we cease to be idle and profitably occupy the idle hours of the millions. All we need is to be industrious, not like a machine, but like the busy bee. You know I am now advertising what I call 'innocent honey' ?

Q. What is that ?

A. Honey scientifically drawn by scientific bee-keepers. They keep the bees and make them collect honey without killing them. That is why I call it innocent or non-violent honey. That is an industry which admits of great expansion.

Q. But can you call it absolutely non-violent ? You deprive the bee of its honey, as you deprive the calf of its milk.

A. You are right, but the world is not governed entirely by logic. Life itself involves some kind of violence, and we have



to choose the path of least violence. There is violence even in vegetarianism, is there not? Similarly, if I must have honey, I must be friendly to the bee and get it to yield as much honey as it will. Moreover, in the scientific bee-culture, the bee is never deprived of its honey altogether.

*Harijan,*  
28-9-1934



## IV. VILLAGE INDUSTRIES

### WHY PREFERENCE TO HANDICRAFTS

There are two schools of thought current in the world. One wants to divide the world into cities and the other into villages. The village civilization and the city civilization are totally different things. One depends on machinery and industrialization, and the other on handicrafts. We have given preference to the latter.

After all, this industrialization and large-scale production are only of comparatively recent growth. We don't know how far it has contributed to the development of our happiness, but we know this much that it has brought in its wake the recent world wars. This Second World War is not still over, and even if it comes to an end, we are hearing of a Third World War. Our country was never so unhappy and miserable as it is at present. City people may be getting big profits and good wages, but all that has become possible by sucking the blood of villages. We don't want to collect lakhs and crores. We don't always want to depend on money for our work. If we are prepared to sacrifice our lives for the cause, money is nothing. We must have faith and we must be true to ourselves. If we have these, we shall be able by decentralizing our capital of Rs. 30 lakhs in villages to create national wealth amounting to Rs. 300 crores. To do that main thing, what is necessary is to make the villages self-sufficient and self-reliant. But mind you, my idea of self-sufficiency is not narrow one. There is no scope for selfishness and arrogance in my self-sufficiency.

I am not preaching isolation. We have to be humble as the dust for the fulfilment of our cause. We have to mix with people even as sugar mixes itself with milk. Though villagers will be self-sufficient so far as it is possible, they will devote their time also to their intellectual development for creation of consciousness for the contemplated non-violent society of the future.



Cloth stands second to food as matter of necessity. If every village begins to produce its own cloth, its strength will greatly be enhanced. But to achieve that we don't want to close down the textile factories by legislation. We want to achieve our purpose by revolutionizing the psychology of the people by decentralizing; we want to produce cloth wherever cotton is grown.

But what of the city people who have taken to Khadi now? I would ask them to spin their own yarn and to find out for themselves weavers to weave that yarn into cloth. It is absurd that cloth should come from Manchester for those poor who produce cloth for the Bombay people. It is also not proper to compel the poor to accept part of their wages in the form of Khadi. They should be so educated that they may spin voluntarily and intelligently, and may use with love and pride the cloth produced by themselves. If the people of Bombay want to wear Khadi, they should spin for themselves or get their children and other dependents to spin. If the people, pledged to Khadi, spin for themselves, the practice will be contagious. Even if we are able to produce Khadi worth ten crores instead of one crore as at present, our object of reaching the whole of India will not be achieved.

*Hindustan Standard,*  
6-12-1944

#### WHAT IS MEANT BY VILLAGE INDUSTRIES WORK

An esteemed friend wrote the other day saying, among other things, that he had not before his mind's eye a full picture of what I meant by village industries work. It was a good question. It must have occurred to many people. This is the purport of what I wrote to him.

In a nutshell, of the things we use, we should restrict our purchases to the articles which villages manufacture. Their manufactures may be crude. We must try to induce them to improve their workmanship, and not dismiss them because foreign articles or even articles produced in cities, that is big factories, are superior. In other words, we should evoke the artistic talent of the villagers. In this manner shall we repay somewhat the debt we owe to them. We need not be frightened by the thought



whether we shall ever succeed in such an effort. Within our own times we can recall instances where we have not known that they were essential for the nation's progress. If, therefore, we as individuals believe that revivification of India's villages is a necessity of our existence, if we believe that thereby only can we root out untouchability and feel one with all, no matter to what community or religion they may belong, we must mentally go back to the villages and treat them as our pattern, instead of putting the city life before them for imitation. If this is the correct attitude, then, naturally, we begin with ourselves and thus use, say, hand-made paper instead of millmade, use village reed, wherever possible, instead of the fountain pen or the pen-holder, ink made in the villages instead of the big factories, etc. I can multiply instances of this nature. There is hardly anything of daily use in the home which the villagers have not made before and cannot make even now. If we perform the mental trick and fix our gaze upon them, we immediately put millions of rupees into the pockets of the villagers, whereas at the present moment we are exploiting the villagers without making any return worth the name. It is time we arrested the progress of the tragedy. To me, the campaign against untouchability has begun to imply ever so much more than the eradication of the ceremonial untouchability of those who are labelled untouchables. For the city-dweller, the villages have become untouchable. He does not know them, he will not live in them, and if he finds himself in a village, he will want to reproduce the city life there. This would be tolerable if we could bring into being cities which would accommodate thirty crores of human beings. This is much more impossible than the one of reviving the village industries and stopping the progressive poverty, which is due as much to enforced unemployment as to any other cause.

### INDUSTRIALIZATION WITHOUT EXPLOITATION

Industrialization on a mass scale will necessarily lead to a passive or active exploitation of the villagers as the problems of competition and marketing come in. Therefore we have to concentrate on the village being self-contained, manufacturing mainly for use. Provided this character of the village industry is maintained there would be no objection to villagers using even



the modern machines and tools that they can make and can afford to use. Only they should not be used as a means of exploitation of others.

*Harijan,*  
29-8-1936

#### INDUSTRIALIZATION IN 'MY SENSE OF THE TERM'

"You are against this machine age, I see."

To say that is to caricature my views. I am not against machinery as such, but I am totally opposed to it when it masters us.

"You would not industrialize India?"

I would indeed, in my sense of the term. The village communities should be revived. Indian villages produced and supplied to the Indian towns and cities all their wants. India became impoverished when our cities became foreign markets and began to drain the villages dry by dumping cheap and shoddy goods from foreign lands.

"You would then go back to the natural economy?"

Yes. Otherwise I should go back to the city. I am quite capable of running a big enterprise, but I deliberately sacrificed the ambition, not as a sacrifice, but because my heart rebelled against it. For I should have no share in the spoliation of the nation which is going on from day to day. But I am industrializing the villages in a different way.

*Harijan,*  
27-2-1937

#### VILLAGE EXHIBITIONS

If we want and believe that the village should not only survive but also become strong and flourishing, then the village perspective is the only correct viewpoint. If this is true then in our exhibitions there can be no place for the glamour and pomp of the cities. There should be no necessity for games and other entertainments that belong to the cities. An exhibition should not become a 'Tamasha', nor a source of income; it should never become the advertising medium for traders. No sales should be



allowed there. Even Khadi and village industry products should not be sold. An exhibition should be a medium of education, should be attractive and it should be such as to infuse in the villager the impulse to take to some industry or the other. It should bring out the glaring defects and drawbacks in the present-day village life, and show methods to be adopted to set them right. It should also be able to indicate the extent of achievement in that direction ever since the idea of village uplift was sponsored. It should also teach how to make village life artistic.

Now let us see what an exhibition will be like if it is to conform to the above conditions.

1. There should be two models of villages—one as is existing today and the other an improved one. The improved village will be clean all throughout. Its houses, its roads, its surroundings and its fields will be all clean. The condition of the cattle should also improve. Books, charts and pictures should be used to show what industries give increased income and how.

2. It must show how to conduct the various village industries, wherefrom to obtain the needed implements, how to make them. The actual working of each industry should be demonstrated. Along with these the following should also find place :

- (a) Ideal village diet.
- (b) Comparison between village industry and machine industry.
- (c) Model lessons on rearing animals.
- (d) Art section.
- (e) Model of village latrine.
- (f) Farm-Yard manure vs. chemical manure.
- (g) Utilization of hides, bones, etc., of animals.
- (h) Village games, village *akhadas* and forms of exercise.
- (i) Village music, musical instruments, village dramas.
- (j) Nayee Talim.
- (k) Village medicine.
- (l) Village maternity home.

Subject to the policy enunciated in the beginning, this list may be further expanded. What I have indicated is by way of



example only, it should not be taken to be exhaustive. I have not made any mention of the Charkha and other village industries as they are taken for granted. Without them the exhibition will be absolutely useless.

*Gram Udyog Patrika,*  
*July 1946*



## V. ESSENTIAL ITEMS OF VILLAGE WORK

### POINTS TO REMEMBER

If rural reconstruction were not to include rural sanitation, our villages would remain the muck heaps that they are today. Village sanitation is a vital part of village life and is as difficult as it is important. It needs a heroic effort to eradicate age-long insanitation. The village worker who is ignorant of the science of village sanitation, who is not a successful scavenger, cannot fit himself for village service.

It seems to be generally admitted that without the new or basic education the education of millions of children in India is well-nigh impossible. The village worker has, therefore, to master it, and become a basic education teacher himself.

Adult education will follow in the wake of basic education as a matter of course. Where this new education has taken root, the children themselves become their parents' teachers. Be that as it may, the village worker has to undertake adult education also.

Woman is described as man's better half. As long as she has not the same rights in law as man, as long as the birth of a girl does not receive the same welcome as that of a boy, so long we should know that India is suffering from partial paralysis. Suppression of woman is a denial of Ahimsa. Every village worker will, therefore, regard every woman as his mother, sister or daughter as the case may be and look upon her with respect. Only such a worker will command the confidence of the village people.

It is impossible for an unhealthy people to win Swaraj. Therefore we should no longer be guilty of the neglect of the health of our people. Every village worker must have a knowledge of the general principles of health.

Without a common language no nation can come into being. Instead of worrying himself with the controversy about Hindi,



Hindustani and Urdu, the village worker will acquire a knowledge of the *rashtrabhasa* which should be such as can be understood by both Hindus and Muslims.

Our infatuation for English has made us unfaithful to provincial languages. If only as penance for this unfaithfulness the village worker should cultivate in the villagers a love of their own speech. He will have equal regard for all the other languages of India, and will learn the language of the part where he may be working, and thus be able to inspire the villagers there with a regard for their own speech.

The whole of this programme will, however, be a structure on sand if it is not built on the solid foundation of economic equality. Economic equality must never be supposed to mean possession of an equal amount of wordly goods by everyone. It does mean, however, that everyone will have a proper house to live in, sufficient and balanced food to eat, and sufficient Khadi with which to cover himself. It also means that the cruel inequality that obtains today will be removed by purely non-violent means.

*Harijan,*  
18-8-1940

### RECONSTRUCTING VILLAGE

An ideal Indian village will be constructed to lend itself to perfect sanitation. It will have cottages with sufficient light and ventilation built of a material obtainable within a radius of five miles of it. The cottages will have courtyards enabling householders to plant vegetables for domestic use and to house their cattle. The village lanes and streets will be free of all avoidable dust. It will have wells according to its needs and accessible to all. It will have houses of worship for all, also a common meeting place, a village common for grazing its cattle, a co-operative dairy, primary and secondary schools in which industrial education will be the central fact, and it will have Panchayats for settling disputes. It will produce its own grains, vegetables and fruits and its own Khadi. This is roughly my idea of a model village. In the present circumstances its cottages will remain what they are with slight improvements. Given a good



zamindar, where there is one, or co-operation among the people, almost the whole of the programme other than model cottages can be worked out at an expenditure within the income of the villagers including the zamindar or zamindars, without Government assistance. With the assistance there is no limit to the possibility of village reconstruction. But my task just now is to discover what the villagers can do to help themselves if they have mutual co-operation and contribute voluntary labour for the common good. I am convinced that they can, under intelligent guidance, double the village income as distinguished from individual income. There are in our villages inexhaustible resources not for commercial purposes in every case but certainly for local purposes in almost every case. The greatest tragedy is the hopeless unwillingness of the villagers to better their lot.

The very first problem the village worker will solve is its sanitation. It is the most neglected of all the problems that baffle workers and that undermine physical well-being and breed disease. If the worker became a voluntary *bhangi*, he would begin by collecting night-soil and turning it into manure and sweeping village streets. He will tell people how and where they should perform daily functions and speak to them on the value of sanitation and the great injury caused by its neglect. The worker will continue to do the work whether the villagers listen to him or not.

Harijan,  
9-1-1937

#### VILLAGE SANITATION—SOME SPECIFIC TASKS

The things to attend to in the villages are cleaning tanks and wells and keeping them clean, getting rid of dung-heaps. If the workers will begin the work themselves, working like paid *bhangis* from day to day and always letting the villagers know that they are expected to join them so as ultimately to do the whole work themselves, they may be sure that they will find that the villagers will sooner or later co-operate.

Lanes and streets have to be cleansed of all the rubbish, which should be classified. There are portions which can be turned into manure, portions which have simply to be buried



and portions which can be directly turned into wealth. Every bone picked up is valuable raw material from which useful articles can be made or which can be crushed into rich manures. Rags and waste paper can be turned into paper, and excreta picked up are golden manure for the village fields. The way to treat the excreta is to mix them, liquid as well as solid, with superficial earth in soil dug no deeper than one foot at the most. In his book on rural hygiene, Dr. Poore says that excreta should be buried in earth no deeper than nine to twelve inches (I am quoting from memory). The author contends that superficial earth is charged with minute life, which together with light and air which easily penetrate it, turn the excreta into good soft sweet-smelling soil within a week. Any villager can test this for himself. The way to do it is either to have fixed latrines, with earthen or iron buckets, and empty the contents in properly prepared places from day to day, or to perform the function directly on to the ground dug up in squares. The excreta can either be buried in a village common or in individual fields. This can only be done by the co-operation of the villagers. At the worst, an enterprising villager can collect the excreta and turn them into wealth for himself. At present, this rich manure, valued at lakhs of rupees, runs to waste everyday, fouls the air and brings disease into the bargain.

Village tanks are promiscuously used for bathing, washing clothes and drinking and cooking purposes. Many village tanks are also used by cattle. Buffaloes are often to be seen wallowing in them. The wonder is that, in spite of this sinful misuse of village tanks, villages have not been destroyed by epidemics. It is the universal medical evidence that this neglect to ensure purity of the water supply of villages is responsible for many of the diseases suffered by the villagers.

This, it will be admitted, is a gloriously interesting and instructive service, fraught with incalculable benefit to the suffering humanity of India. I hope it is clear from my description of the way in which the problem should be tackled, that, given willing workers who will wield the broom and the shovel with the same ease and pride as the pen and the pencil, the question of expense



is almost wholly eliminated. All the outlay that will be required is confined to a broom, a basket, a shovel and a pick-axe, and possibly some disinfectant. Dry ashes are, perhaps, as effective a disinfectant as any that a chemist can supply.

*Harijan,*  
8-2-1935

## VILLAGE HEALTH

I hold that where the rules of personal, domestic and public sanitation are strictly observed and due care is taken in the matter of diet and exercise, there should be no occasion of illness or disease. Where there is absolute purity, inner and outer, illness becomes impossible. If the village people could but understand this, they would not need doctors, *hakims* and *vaidyas*.

Nature cure implies an ideal mode of life and that in its turn presupposes ideal living conditions in towns and villages. The name of God is, of course, the hub round which the nature cure system revolves.

Nature cure implies that the treatment should be the cheapest and the simplest possible. The ideal is that such treatment should be carried out in the villages. The villagers should be able to provide the necessary means and equipment. What cannot be had in the villages should be procured. Nature cure does mean a change for the better in one's outlook on life itself. It means regulation of one's life in accordance with the laws of health. It is not a matter of taking the free medicine from the hospital or for fees. A man who takes free treatment from the hospital accepts charity. The man who accepts nature cure never begs. Self-help enhances self-respect. He takes steps to cure himself by eliminating poisons from the system and takes precautions against falling ill in the future.

Right diet and balanced diet are necessary. Today our villagers are bankrupt as we are ourselves. To produce enough vegetables, fruits and milk in the villages, is an essential part of



the nature cure scheme. Time spent on this should not be considered a waste. It is bound to benefit all the villagers and ultimately the whole of India.

*Harijan,*  
2-4-1946



## VI. HARIJAN SERVICE

### REMOVAL OF UNTOUCHABILITY

Q. What methods do you suggest for propaganda for the removal of untouchability

A. Not much lip propaganda is necessary now. Work is propaganda. You should work fearlessly, unmindful of social ostracism, for bettering the condition of the 'untouchables'. Lectures may be arranged when leading men pay you a visit.

Q. Do you think that schools started exclusively for the Panchamas will help in any way in removing untouchability?

A. They must in the long run do so, as all education must. But such schools should not be exclusively Panchama schools as boys from other castes also should be welcomed. They will not come at present. But the prejudice will break down in time if the schools are well-managed. If you want mixed schools, you must start one in your locality. Suppose you own a house. Nobody can ask you to go away from your house. Bring an 'untouchable' boy to your house and start a school with him. Induce other boys to come and attend that school. You should not refuse help to schools or institutions where there are only 'untouchables'.

*Young India,*  
10-9-1925

### TECHNIQUE OF HARIJAN WORK

Q. The work of removing untouchability seems to be insuperable. How exactly are we to tackle it?

A. Silent plodding. I better tell you how I am doing it in Segacon. I do not preach to them, but work away never thinking of the result. The one condition is that you should not harbour untouchability in any shape or form. I have made it a point to have as many Harijans about me as possible. They come as servants but they soon know that they are brothers to us.



Q. What is the outlook, in view of the precarious financial position of our Ashrams and institutions today ?

A. It is not our financial position but our moral position that is precarious. No movement or activity that has the sure foundation of purity of character of its workers is ever in danger to come to an end for want of funds. Then we in Gujarat have to realize that we must not always depend only on our moneyed men, we have to tap humbler resources. Our middle classes and even our poor classes support so many beggars, so many temples, why will they not support a few good workers ? We must beg from door to door, beg grain, beg copper coins, do as they do in Bihar and Maharashtra. In Maharashtra they have *paise* funds and *mushti* funds (*mushti* means a handful). It will be the first form of propaganda among caste Hindus. But remember everything will depend on the singleness of your purpose, your devotion to the task and the purity of your character. People won't give for such work unless they are sure of our selflessness.

Harijan,  
28-11-1936

#### HARIJANS OUTSIDE THE HINDU FOLD

Q. Should not the Sangh take upon itself the service of those Harijans who have been converted to Christianity or Islam and are yet treated as untouchables ? Are we not out to remove untouchability root and branch and therefore help all who come under its way ?

A. The moment untouchability is utterly banished from Hindu society it will, *ipso facto*, disappear from elsewhere too. Whatever the merits or demerits of the case, it is clear that our interference with converts will be the cause of strife with Muslims and Christians. Such converts have either broken off all contacts with, or they have been in their turn boycotted by Hindus. They have thrown in their lot with other sects whose leaders will not allow them to maintain their old contacts. Hence the Harijan Sevak Sangh quite rightly decided from its inception to confine its area of work to Harijans who had not left the Hindu fold.

Q. Harijans are of opinion that Caste Hindus who are sympathetic to their cause should not use those temples where they are not allowed entry.



A. They are right. It is the bounden duty of Harijan workers not to go where Harijans are not allowed and likewise to dissuade Caste Hindus.

Q. Harijans are legally entitled to send their children to many educational institutions as also to draw water from public wells. But public sentiment still militates against this being put into practice. Should Harijans resort to the law courts for justice in these matters or wait patiently until the Caste Hindus are converted?

A. Where there is no danger of violence being done to them, the Harijans should exercise their legal right and where necessary, resort to law courts. Harijan workers must continue agitation among Caste Hindus and not rest content with mere legal rights.

*Harijan,*  
10-5-1942

#### SECURING POLITICAL POWER FOR HARIJANS

Q. Should not the Harijan Sevak Sangh try to secure for the Harijans political power by demanding due representation for them on Grama Panchayats, municipalities and legislatures?

A. Certainly it ought to. No effort can be too great for it.

Q. Should not the Sangh give instructions in the essentials of Hindu religion in the Harijan hostels and in Harijan gatherings of adults?

A. It ought to be the primary duty of the Sangh to give to Harijan children and adults a grounding in the essentials of Hindu religion.

*Harijan,*  
28-7-1946

#### AIM—SIMPLE JUSTICE FOR HARIJANS

‘Rather than do constructive work among Harijans, will it not be better to create intense dissatisfaction amongst them with their condition and thus promote such self-help as they can generate among themselves? It is no use your trying to convert the Savarnas.’ This was one of the questions asked at a meeting



of workers. As it is an important question, it is as well to give the gist of the answer by me at the meeting. The question betrays ignorance of the whole scope of the movement. To create dissatisfaction among the Harijans can bring no immediate relief to them and can only tend to perpetuate a vicious division amongst Hindus. The object of the movement is to do away with this utterly unnatural division and to secure for Harijans the simple justice to which they are entitled at the hands of Savarna Hindus.

*Harijan,*  
15-6-1934

### AN ESSENTIAL QUALIFICATION OF A HARIJAN WORKER

The one thing needful for effective Harijan service and for that matter all service of the poor, the forlorn, the helpless, is purity of personal character in the servant. Without it possession of even the highest intellectual ability and administrative capacity is of no account. It may even prove a hindrance, whereas possession of a pure character combined with love of such service will assuredly develop or provide the requisite intellectual and administrative capacity.

There is in modern public life a tendency to ignore altogether the character of a public worker so long as he works efficiently as a unit in an administrative machinery. It is said that everybody's character is his own private concern. Though I have known this view to have been often taken I have never been able to appreciate, much less to adopt, it. I have known the serious consequences overtaking organizations that have counted private character as a matter of no consequence. Nevertheless the reader will have observed that for my immediate purpose I have restricted the application of my proposition only to organizations like the Harijan Sevak Sangh which make themselves trustees for the welfare of dumb millions. I have no manner of doubt that possession of a spotless character is the indispensable requisite of such service. Workers in the Harijan cause or for Khadi or for village industries must come in the closest touch with utterly unsophisticated, innocent, ignorant men and women who might be likened to children in intelligence. If they have no character, they must fail in the end and for ever damn the cause they



espouse in the surroundings in which they are known. I write from experience of such cases. Happily they are rare enough for the numbers engaged in such services, but frequent enough to call for public warning and caution on the part of organizations and workers who are engaged in such services. These last cannot be too watchful or too exacting of themselves.

*Harijan,*  
7-11-1936



## VII. CALL TO THE YOUTH

### BE HUMBLE WORKERS

I ask you (young men) to go to the villages and bury yourselves there, not as their masters or benefactors, but as their humble servants. Let them know what to do and how to change their modes of living from your daily conduct and way of living. Only feeling will be of no use just like steam which by itself is of no account unless it is kept under proper control—when it becomes a mighty force. I ask you to go forth as messengers of God carrying balm for the wounded soul of India.

*Young India,*  
29-12-1927

### STUDENTS AND THE VILLAGES

Grown up students and therefore all college students should begin village work even whilst they are studying. Here is a scheme for such part-time workers.

The students should devote the whole of their vacation to village service. To this end, instead of taking their walks along beaten paths, they should walk to the villages within easy reach of their institutions and study the condition of the village folk and befriend them. This habit will bring them in contact with the villagers who, when the students actually go to stay in their midst, will by reason of the previous occasional contact receive them as friends rather than as strangers to be looked upon with suspicion. During the long vacation the students will stay in the villages and offer to conduct classes for adults and to teach the rules of sanitation to the villagers and attend to the ordinary cases of illness. They will also introduce the spinning wheel amongst them and teach them the use of every spare minute. In order that this may be done students and teachers will have to revise their ideas of the uses of vacation. Often do thoughtless teachers prescribe lessons to be done during the vacation. This,



in my opinion, is in any case a vicious habit. Vacation is just the period when students' minds should be free from their routine work and be left free for self-help and original development. The village work I have mentioned is easily the best form of recreation and light instruction. It is obviously the best preparation for dedication to exclusive village service after finishing the studies.

The scheme for full village service does not now need to be elaborately described. Whatever was done during the vacation has now to be put on a permanent footing. The villagers will also be prepared for a fuller response. The village life has to be touched at all points, the economic, the hygienic, the social and the political. The immediate solution of the economic distress is undoubtedly the wheel in the vast majority of cases. It at once adds to the income of the villagers and keeps them from mischief. The hygienic includes insanitation and disease. Here the student is expected to work with his own body and labour, to dig trenches for burying excreta and other refuse and turning them into manure, for cleaning wells and tanks, for building easy embankments, removing rubbish and generally to make the villages more habitable. The village worker has also to touch the social side and gently persuade the people to give up bad customs and bad habits, such as untouchability, infant marriages, unequal matches, drink and drug evil and many local superstitions. Lastly comes the political part. Here the worker will study the political grievances of the villagers and teach them the dignity of freedom, self-reliance and self-help in everything. This makes in my opinion complete adult education. But this does not complete the task of the village workers. He must take care and charge of the little ones and begin their instruction and carry on a night school for adults. This literary training is but part of a whole education course and only a means to the larger end described above.

I claim that the equipment for this service is a large heart and a character above suspicion. Given these two conditions every other needed qualification is bound to follow.

The last question is that of bread and butter. A labourer is worthy of his hire. A living wage is assured. Beyond that there



is no money in it. You cannot serve both self and country. Service of self is strictly limited by that of the country and hence excludes a living beyond the means of this absolutely poor country.

*Young India,*  
26-12-1929

### WILLING SACRIFICE

The village work frightens us. We who are town-bred find it trying to take to the village life. Our bodies in many cases do not respond to the hard life. But it is a difficulty which we have to face boldly, even heroically, if our desire is to establish Swaraj for the people, not substitute one class rule by another which may be even worse. Hitherto the villagers have died in their thousands so that we might live. Now we might have to die so that they may live. The difference will be fundamental. The former have died unknowingly and involuntarily. Their enforced sacrifice has degraded us. If now we die knowingly and willingly, our sacrifice will ennoble us and the whole nation. Let us not flinch from the necessary sacrifice, if we will live as an independent self-respecting nation.

*Young India,*  
17-4-1924

### DANGER FROM WITHIN

No movement or organization having vitality dies from external attack. It dies of internal decay. What is necessary is character above suspicion, ceaseless effort accompanied by ever-increasing knowledge of the technique of the work and a life of rigorous simplicity. Workers without character, living far above the ordinary life of villagers, and devoid of the knowledge required of them for their work, can produce no impression on the villagers.

As I write these lines instances of those workers who for want of character or simple living damaged the cause and themselves recur to my mind. Happily instances of positive misconduct are rare. But the greatest hindrance to the progress of the work lies in the inability of workers of quality to support themselves on



the village scale. If every one of such workers puts on his work a price which village service cannot sustain, ultimately these organizations must be wound up. For the insistence of payments on the city scale except in rare and temporary cases would imply that the gulf between cities and villages is unbridgeable. The village movement is as much an education of the city people as of the villagers. Workers drawn from cities have to develop village mentality and learn the art of living after the manner of villagers. This does not mean that they have to starve like the villagers. But it does mean that there must be a radical change in the old style of life. While the standard of living in the villages must be raised, the city standard has to undergo considerable revision, without the worker being required in any way to adopt a mode of life that would impair his health.

*Harijan,*  
11-4-1936

#### DEALING WITH VILLAGE FACTIONS

Alas for India that parties and factions are to be found in the villages as they are to be found in our cities. And when power politics enter our villages with less thought of the welfare of the villages and more of using them for increasing the parties' own power, this becomes a hindrance to the progress of the villagers rather than a help. I would say that whatever be the consequence, we must make use as much as possible of local help and if we are free from the taint of power politics, we are not likely to go wrong. Let us remember that the English-educated men and women from the cities have criminally neglected the villages of India which are the backbone of the country. The process of remembering our neglect will induce patience. I have never gone to a single village which is devoid of an honest worker. We fail to find him when we are not humble enough to recognize any merit in our villages. Of course, we are to steer clear of local politics and this we shall learn to do when we accept help from all parties and no parties, wherever it is really good.

*Harijan,*  
2-3-1947



## OVERCOME THE DIFFICULTIES

The village movement is an attempt to establish healthy contact with the villages by inducing those who are fired with the spirit of service to settle in them and find self-expression in the service of villagers.

Those who have settled in villages in the spirit of service are not dismayed by the difficulties facing them. They knew before they went that they would have to contend against many difficulties including even sullenness on the part of villagers. Only those, therefore, who have faith in themselves and in their mission will serve the villagers and influence their lives. A true life lived amongst the people is in itself an object-lesson that must produce its own effect upon immediate surroundings. The difficulty with the young man is, perhaps, that he has gone to the village merely to earn a living without the spirit of service behind it. I admit that village life does not offer attractions to those who go there in search of money. Without the incentive of service village life would jar after the novelty has worn out. No young man having gone to a village may abandon the pursuit on the slightest contact with difficulty. Patient effort will show that villagers are not very different from city-dwellers and that they will respond to kindness and attention. It is no doubt true that one does not have in the villages the opportunity of contact with the great ones of the land. With the growth of village mentality the leaders will find it necessary to tour in the villages and establish a living touch with them. Moreover the companionship of the great and the good is available to all through works of saints like Chaitanya, Ramakrishna, Tulsidas, Kabir, Nanak, Dadu, Tukaram, Tiruval-luar, and others too numerous to mention though equally known and pious. The difficulty is to get the mind turned to the reception of permanent values. If it is modern thought—political, social, economical, scientific—that is meant, it is possible to produce literature that will satisfy curiosity. I admit, however, that one does not find such as easily as one finds religious literature. Saints wrote and spoke for and to the masses. The vogue for translating modern thought to the masses in an acceptable manner has not yet quite set in. But it must come in time. I would, therefore, advice young men . . . not to give in but persist in their



effort and by their presence make the villages more livable and lovable. That they will do by serving the villages in a manner acceptable to the villagers. Everyone can make a beginning by making the villages cleaner by their own labour and removing illiteracy to the extent of their ability. And if their lives are clean, methodical and industrious, there is no doubt that the infection will spread in the villages in which they may be working.

*Harijan,*  
20-3-1937

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In the case of an Indian villager, an age-old culture is hidden under an encrustment of crudeness. Take away the encrustation, remove his chronic poverty and his illiteracy and you have the finest specimen of what a cultured, cultivated, free citizen should be.

*Harijan,*  
28-1-1939