

HARIJAN

Editor: PYARELAL

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TWO ANNAS

KHADI ON TRIAL

Khadi has passed through several phases during its variegated history in the last twentyfive years. From being an antique rarity, it has become the symbol of India's non-violent struggle for independence or, as Pandit Jawaharlal put it, the 'livery of our freedom'. It became the basis of the 'biggest producers' and consumers' co-operative. But that was not enough. If it was fully to play the role envisaged for it, viz. serve as a foundation for a non-violent social order, capable of withstanding all shocks of time and chance, its basis has to be re-examined and transformed. This was done by a series of resolutions adopted by the A. I. S. A. under Gandhiji's direction on his release from detention. The principal change was transference of the emphasis from the commercial to the self-help aspect of Khadi. The essential function of the A. I. S. A. was defined to be educative. Khadi Bhandars, under the new orientation, were to be centres for imparting instruction in the various processes of Khadi production rather than depots for the sale of Khadi for money. The rule of realizing a part of the price of Khadi in yarn was introduced and the proportion was gradually stepped up. By a curious coincidence, simultaneously with these changes, the production of Khadi in the country showed a sharp decline, owing to the operation of a series of causes independently of these changes. Those who had taken to Khadi merely as a livery but never accepted the obligations inherent in it, began to experience an increasing difficulty in obtaining Khadi from the depleted Khadi Bhandars who rightly refused to supply it to those who did not co-operate in its production. To this must be added maladjustment, resulting from the change over during the transitional period and the post-war abnormal conditions. A friend was discussing these difficulties with Gandhiji the other day. He could not see the justification of enforcing rules that would restrict the supply of Khadi at a time, when the demand for it was widespread and daily growing. A vacuum had been created and it was up to the A. I. S. A. with its long experience and widespread organization to step in and fill it. Instead, it has chosen to stultify itself, so that even sincere and life-long wearers of Khadi were finding it difficult to provide themselves with Khadi, unless they span for themselves which in very many cases, their public duties did not allow them to do. Did it not connote the failure of the A. I. S. A.'s new policy?—he asked.

IS NEW ORIENTATION A FAILURE?

"To appreciate fully the present policy of the A. I. S. A.," explained Gandhiji, "you have to take

in its etiology. In the initial stages the emphasis was on bringing relief to the poor. Incidentally it provided a living link between the classes and the masses, and assumed a political significance. . . We cannot make further headway on those lines. We cannot, for instance, further increase the wages. Khadi won't bear it. So far, it was spun and woven by the masses. Now it must still be by the masses, but for their own use. The new policy of the A. I. S. A. has not failed. The latest figures show that it is steadily though slowly, making headway

"There are difficulties. Weaving constitutes the bottleneck. We have not established a sufficient hold on the weavers. The fault, again, is mine. If I had from the very beginning, insisted on all, learning weaving along with spinning, things would have been different today. The working capital of the A. I. S. A. now stands at twenty-five lakhs. It has taken twenty-five years to reach that figure. During that period it had distributed over seven crores of rupees as wages among four and a half lakhs of the poor spinners and weavers, principally spread over twenty thousand villages of India. I do not know of another instance, of such a huge turn-over on so little capital in such a wide area."

"That is good but by no means unique. The Chinese Indusco did better," remarked the friend.

"That is not a fair comparison," replied Gandhiji. "I studied in detention Nym Wales' book which was recommended to me. Indusco's activities were carried on under abnormal circumstances with the backing of the Chinese National Government. Besides, all its production was war-time production. You need not have gone as far as China for your illustration. The work of the Calicut Mission in South India would have provided a more apt instance. In each case the field was restricted. In the case of Khadi it is trying to serve the whole of India."

"We cannot today attract more artisans by offering better wages. The general level of wages in the country is already so high."

"We do not want to."

"You mean to say you want them to produce for self."

"Yes."

WHAT HE TOLD MR. CASEY

"How can that be made practicable," asked the friend.

"I explained that to Mr. Casey last year," replied Gandhiji. "I told him that by adopting my scheme, not only could we solve the cloth problem for Bengal, but for the whole of India. The essence of that scheme was that, instead of supplying textiles to the people, they should be taught how to make cloth for themselves and provided the necessary means

—instruments, raw materials etc.—for the same. A reasonable time limit should be fixed after which no textiles would be rationed in the area covered by the scheme. In German East Africa, I am told, cloth shortage during World War No. 1, was actually met by the Negroes being induced to manufacture their own cloth. Whether that is so or not, if India made full use of her spinning and weaving tradition which is universal and the matchless hereditary skill of her artisans, she could not only solve her own difficulty but even help the world to meet the present crisis by releasing her mill production, for countries less favourably placed in the matter of cloth manufacture."

"The fact, however, remains that in spite of there being such an acute cloth scarcity, Khadi has failed to step into the breach," persisted the friend. "It has missed the bus."

"Thanks to Government interference," replied Gandhiji. "They arrested Khadi workers, burnt stocks of Khadi and put Khadi production under every conceivable handicap."

"The vacuum is growing. Production charges have already touched the ceiling and yet the wages that we can offer, are not adequate to attract even the unemployed."

"Where are these unemployed?"

"Well, there are one lakh of I. N. A. men."

"I made an offer to them. It has yet evoked no response. You can take the horse to the trough but you cannot make it drink."

NO COMPULSION

"Cannot Government formulate a scheme?"

"It has been done in Madras. It is under examination. Nothing can be imposed from above. Everything has to be worked from below. And those who work them should have faith and conviction and spirit of service. A Government ukase won't do the trick. Governments can assist. As I told Mr. Casey, I am prepared to work out my scheme if it is left to me and the Government accord necessary facilities. That offer still stands."

"The danger," interpolated the friend, "is that, if we stop the supply of textiles to any area, as envisaged in your scheme, it may accentuate the present discontent and even cause an upheaval. There are elements ready to pounce upon and exploit any excuse to foment discontent. Restriction on cloth supply might even be enumerated as an 'atrocious' as prohibition was by a certain section in Bombay. How can we contemplate or invite a disturbance like that? This is not a constructive approach to the question. It smacks of compulsion."

"Where is the question of compulsion?" asked Gandhiji. "As it is, there is not enough cloth to go the round. The stocks of cloth available for distribution being short of the demand, rationing becomes a necessity. The question is only of wise distribution. No stocks may be expected from outside for some time. America and England are making strenuous efforts to increase their cloth production. But it is all needed there. If we nationalize our textile industry and work it on a double shift basis, it would probably solve the problem of cloth shortage, but not of mass poverty. I won't then be able to press the case for Khadi, not because there would be no case but because I won't be able to carry conviction."

KHADI AND THE NEW ERA

"That is not my point," rejoined the friend. An element of compulsion there is in all governmental measures. Tariff, protection, excise duties—all these are disguised forms of compulsion. It becomes an evil when it is wrongly or unduly used. If a fundamentally unsound and unstable economic situation is sought to be propped up by governmental compulsion, there is danger that it will crash one day and spread ruin all around. I am wondering, if the organization of Khadi production on the present lines, is not an instance of that type, whether pure theory does not need to be tempered with a measure of practical realism to suit the changed conditions. For instance, the woollen manufactures in Kashmir are not for self-use. They cater for the market for fancy goods outside Kashmir. They are extremely popular. Now, if we introduce machine carding, they can hold their own against all competition. But that would be against the fundamental Khadi principles. I have been thinking whether a compromise cannot be effected. To run cottage industries with man-power exclusively, has not much prospect of survival in this age of machinery. We may try to canalize economic trends, we may not run against them in a head-on collision. If we could run cottage industries with the help of cheap electricity, for instance, they would be able to hold their own without losing their essential character. After all, decentralized production is what we want. We might have projects for the development of cheap hydraulic power as an aid to irrigation schemes. They can be in operation in from six to ten years. It will then be possible to take electricity to every village. Shall we under those circumstances be able to work Khadi on the present lines? Normally speaking, supply should balance demand. But instead of establishing Khadi on a permanent basis, we are crippling it by artificial restrictions with the result that a lot of corruption and dishonesty has crept in. The same yarn is presented again and again at the Khadi Bhandars as a counterfeit token. Apart from its economic aspect, Khadi has come to acquire a cultural and political significance. People are anxious to adopt it as a uniform. Hospitals would like to have their linen preferably in Khadi. I. N. A. people would want to adopt Khadi uniform. But today, thanks to the new policy, Khadi is nowhere to be had. Only hypocrisy and dishonesty seem to flourish."

I AM NOT AFRAID

"It is open to all those who cannot or do not want to spin," replied Gandhiji, "to go in for mill cloth, whether Indian or foreign. I am walking with my eyes open. This is not the first time in the history of Khadi that demand has outstripped supply and *vice versa*. Each time heroic measures were adopted and the crisis was overcome. I do not expect a different result this time. Only, we must have faith and patience and the courage to apply the right remedy which is what I am doing at present. If in the process Khadi dies, I must be prepared to take even that risk."

"That is begging the question," rejoined the friend. "It won't go down with the people. We have got to adjust our policy to the popular need."

"I cannot do that. Having discovered the error, I must correct it. That may take time. Therefore, I have suggested the removal of the Khadi clause from the Congress Constitution. When it was sought to be removed unsuccessfully at the Assam Congress, it gave me satisfaction. Now I will encourage and welcome abolition. If it has intrinsic merit, Khadi will survive the Congress abolition. If it has not, it will deserve to go under."

"That, however, would not solve our fundamental problem."

"I am afraid I won't be able to convince you by argument. Time alone will show who was right."

DIAGNOSIS AND THE REMEDY

"You said weaving was the bottleneck," resumed the friend. A weaver weaving mill yarn, can today earn as much as Rs.3 a day. The spinner and the weaver of the handspun won't work for lower wages."

"I don't want him to," replied Gandhiji. "That is why I have recommended doubling of handspun yarn. he depends on the supply of mill yarn, he is doomed. Millowners are not philanthropists to go on providing yarn to the hand-loom weaver when he enters into effective competition with them. But a weaver working on doubling handspun yarn will, in the end, be better off than the mill yarn weaver, for, the former will find steady employment all the year round."

"The very basis of textile industry has been revolutionized," continued the friend. "Now they are preparing synthetic textile fibres from coal, air and water. Felting of cotton fibres with the help of resins is taking the place of weaving. Unless we make sure that our Khadi policy rests on a sound practicable basis and fits into the over-all picture, Khadi is bound to fail."

"It may, but the labour expended on it won't have been wasted," replied Gandhiji.

CURE FOR PERPLEXITY

"No good effort is ever wasted", proceeded the friend. "But the latest orientation of your Khadi policy continues to perplex many a sincere Khadi lover and worker. Their perplexity ought to be removed. Some of them even talk of going in for uncertified Khadi."

"The perplexity won't be removed if they have no faith in Khadi," replied Gandhiji. ●

"So long as there is demand for Khadi, it ought to be fulfilled even if prices of Khadi have to be raised."

"That means that Khadi will become fancy goods. It won't be right to use a vast organization for such a purpose. Our duty is to find out and remedy if there is any fundamental defect in our Khadi policy and if in the process, it is found that Khadi is not basically a sound proposition, it should be given a decent burial. Today Khadi is on its trial. It will successfully emerge from it only by virtue of its inherent strength and if it lacks that strength, all bother about it will be love's labour lost."

"All I know," finally persisted the friend, "is that where there is widespread and genuine demand for a commodity and the supply falls short, it

should be possible to devise ways and means to adjust the economic balance and satisfy the demand in question."

A TESTAMENT OF FAITH

Gandhiji replied: "I can only warn you of the danger. There was a time when we used machine-carded slivers for spinning. We might as well have used mill yarn. For, what is a roving but unspun yarn? If we had not broken away from it and had not introduced hand-carding, Khadi would have been defunct by now. The late Sir Gangaram said to me: 'Only give up the spinning wheel, concentrate on the handloom and I am with you.' He did not realize, what we know today, that the use of mill yarn is the principal stranglehold on the handloom industry. In handspun yarn lies its only salvation. If the spinning wheel goes, the handloom is bound to follow suit. Khadi will cease to have any value in my eyes, if it does not usefully employ the millions. Many of the "compromises" that have been suggested are such as to take away from it its essential character. The late Sir Fazalbai prophesied to me when I saw him thirty years ago, that Khadi was ultimately bound to fail. He is gone but Khadi has remained. May be a new era has now opened and Khadi is an anachronism in it. Only, I do not feel so."

Sevagram, 17-8-'46

PYARELAL

Notes

"Remember the Harijan"

A correspondent writes:

"Shri Ganesh-utsava started by the late Lokamanya is coming near; most of our ministers and leaders will be invited by various associations to speak on this occasion. I desire to suggest to the speakers that they should accept such invitations, provided that the management would allow 'Harijans' to take part in the function; they should also make it a point to take at least one Harijan with them, when they go to address the congregation."

The above suggestion is apt. If caste Hindus really wish to stamp out untouchability, they should publicly associate Harijans with them, especially on such occasions as the celebration of Hindu festivals.

Sevagram, 16-8-'46

Goa

The following telegrams have been received regarding Shri Kakodkar's arrest and imprisonment:

"Purshottam Kakodkar arrested in connection recent Satyagraha movement Goa. In spite being political prisoner imprisoned dingy ill-ventilated cell in company criminals awaiting trials for murder robberies. Food supplied most ordinary insufficient being half normal meal. Expressed willingness to work for his meal. Also pleaded on behalf his other unfortunate companions in cell for better treatment. In respect food authorities turned deaf ear. He is on hunger strike since last three days. Authorities' attitude arrogant offensive."

"Purshottam Kakodkar fifth day hunger strike. Condition precarious. Allowed see persons under guard. Attitude authorities unconcerned."

If the charges attributed to the Goan authorities are true, they reflect great discredit on them. It is to be hoped that the civil resisters of Goa will not be cowed down by any ill-treatment, however grave it may be.

I am not sure about the wisdom of the resorted hunger strike. Let me hope that it will produce the desired effect. In any case, having been undertaken, it must be prosecuted to the end.

Sevagram, 18-8-'46

M. K. G.

HARIJAN

August 25

1946

WHAT CAN VIOLENCE DO ?

(By M. K. Gandhi)

If newspaper reports are to be believed, responsible ministers in Sindh and other equally responsible Leaguers almost all over, are preaching violence in naked language. Nakedness is itself a virtue as distinguished from hypocrisy. But when it is a hymn of obscenity, it is a vice to be shunned, whether it resides in a Leaguer or any other person. Any Muslim who is not in the League is a traitor, says one. The Hindu is a *kafar* deserving the fate of such, says another.

Calcutta has given an ocular demonstration of what direct action is and how it is to be done.

Who is the gainer? Certainly not the Muslim masses nor the sober follower of Islam which itself means sobriety and peace. The very salute '*salam alaikum*' means 'piece be unto you'.

Violence may have its place in life but not that which we have witnessed in Calcutta, assuming of course, that newspaper accounts are to be trusted. Pakistan of whatever hue does not lie through senseless violence. When I write of senseless violence, I naturally assume the possibility of sensible violence, whatever the latter may be. The Calcutta demonstration was not an illustration of sensible violence.

What senseless violence does is to prolong the lease of the life of British or foreign rule. I believe that the authors of the State Paper issued by the Cabinet Mission desire peaceful transfer of power to representative Indian hands. But if we need the use of the British gun and bayonet, the British will not go or, if they do, some other foreign power will take their place. We will make a serious mistake, if, everytime the British bayonet is used, we trot out the agent provocateur. No doubt he has been at work. Let us not ride that horse to death.

Calcutta has earned a bad reputation of late. It has seen too many wild demonstrations during the past few months. If the evil reputation is sustained for some time longer, it will cease to be the City of Palaces, it will become the city of the dead.

Would that the violence of Calcutta were sterilized and did not become a signal for its spread all over. It depends upon the leaders of the Muslim League of course, but the rest will not be free from responsibility. They can retaliate or refrain. Refraining is easy and simple, if there is the will. Retaliation is complicated. Will it be tooth against tooth or many against one?

Sevagram, 19-8-'46

MASS MURDER

(By M. K. Gandhi)

A friend writes:

"The food famine situation in Mysore and Rayalaseema is daily growing more serious. Unless imports pour in sufficient quantities, the local co-operative stores will fail to supply rations—starvation rations as they are, since only 8 oz. of rice is being given to peasants who need 24 oz. to keep them fit—to the peasant masses and I am afraid that we may have to be prepared to face deaths, due to starvation in November and December."

If even half of what he says is true, it is a sad reflection on our capacity to cope with food famine in a vast country like India where there is land lying waste or ill-used and water running rapidly into the sea for want of human ingenuity to dam and store it. The writer says that unless imports "pour in sufficient quantities", meaning undoubtedly that they come from outside India, "mass deaths due to starvation in November and December" are a certainty. I suggest to everyone concerned that if this happens, the Government of the country will be guilty of mass murder.

To look to outside sources for food supply is to invite starvation. Has it ever been made clear that India has no capacity for growing sufficient food between now and November? Need a vast country like India with its teeming millions starve, even if the whole world were to declare a blockade against it?

Sevagram, 16-8-'46

DISLOYALTY TO KHADI

(By M. K. Gandhi)

A correspondent writes:

"On 31st July 1946, at 6 p. m., 13 college students (Khadi wearers) headed by a prominent Congressman, who is also a councillor, came in the Khadi Bhandar. The sale was closed due to shortage of Khadi. Only a few pieces of Khadi were kept in the cupboard upstairs, as it was not possible to satisfy about 1500 Khadi wearers from these few pieces. They at once went up, took thirteen full pieces forcibly, asked the Manager to take money, and also without yarn, and on refusal of accepting money in protest by the Manager, they went away with the cloth."

"Was it not the duty of the Manager to lodge a complaint against them in the police, or what action should he have taken in preventing them from taking away the cloth?"

The Manager should really have resisted the looting, non-violently, even at the risk of losing his life. He is entitled to lodge a complaint against the miscreants, provided that all other avenues of voluntary return of the loot have been explored and have failed.

Rowdism by students has become a byword. If "a prominent Congressman" encouraged them, it was a matter of shame. The use of looted Khadi betrays woeful ignorance of the elements of Swaraj and makes Khadi such a mockery.

Sevagram, 18-8-'46

CONGRESS MINISTRIES AND RURAL UPLIFT

Resumption of office by Congress Ministers in the Provinces is by no means an experiment in constitutionalism. The task before them is to realize the content of Independence for the masses which the Congress has envisaged. What should be the end of our economic policy and the nature of social organization that should be built up and what are the obstacles in the present economic and administrative organization in achieving the goal of rural prosperity — these were the questions that the Ministers for Industries from the various Provinces, who met in conference in the Council Hall at Poona on the 31st of July, set themselves to examine.

Gandhiji explained his approach to Village Industries in the course of a thirty minutes address. The conception underlying both the Nai Talim and the Village Industries programme, including Khaddar, was rooted in the same thing viz. concern for the dignity and status of the Village unit as against the big cities and of the individual against the machine. The concern was further augmented by the fact that India lives not in a handful of her big cities but in her 700,000 villages. The problem was of re-establishment of justice between the town and the village. As it was, the balance was heavily tipped in favour of the former to the disadvantage of the latter.

THE MACHINE AGE

"Ours has been described as the machine age," observed Gandhiji, "because the machine dominates our economy. 'Now, what is a machine?'—one may ask. In a sense, man is the most wonderful machine in creation. It can neither be duplicated nor copied." He had, however, used the word not in its wider sense but in the sense of an appliance that tended to displace human or animal labour instead of supplementing it or merely increasing its efficiency. That was the first differential characteristic of the machine. The second characteristic was that there was no limit to its growth or evolution. That could not be said of human labour. There was a limit beyond which its capacity or mechanical efficiency could not go. Out of this circumstance arose the third characteristic of the machine. It seemed to be possessed of a will or genius of its own. It was antagonistic to man's labour. Thus it tended more to displace man, one machine doing the work of hundred, if not a thousand, who went to swell the army of the unemployed and the under-employed, not because it was desirable but because that was its law. In America it had perhaps reached the extreme limit. He had been opposed to it, said Gandhiji, not from today, but even before 1908 when he was in South Africa surrounded by machines. Their onward march had not only not impressed him but had repelled him. "It then dawned on me that to suppress and exploit the millions, the machine was the device *par excellence*, it had no place in man's economy if, as social units, all men were to be equal. It is my belief that the machine has not added to man's stature and it won't serve the world but disrupt it, unless it is

put in its proper place. Then, I read Ruskin's 'Unto This Last' during a train journey to Durban and it gripped me immediately. I saw clearly that if mankind was to progress and to realize the ideal of equality and brotherhood, it must adopt and act on the principle of 'Unto This Last'; it must take along with it even the dumb, the halt and the lame. Did not Yudhishtira—the Prince of Righteousness, refuse to enter heaven without his faithful dog?"

MINISTRIES AND THE A.I.V.I.A.

In the machine age these had no place. Under it the fittest alone survived to the exclusion and at the cost of the weak. "That is not my picture, of Independence in which there is room even for the weakest," observed Gandhiji. "That requires that we must utilize all available human labour before we entertain the idea of employing mechanical power."

It was with that background, that he was instrumental in founding the Talimi Sangh and the A.I.V.I.A. The object was to strengthen the Congress which claimed to be essentially the people's organization. The Congress had created these autonomous institutions. The Congress Ministries could requisition the services of these organizations always and without any compunction. They existed and laboured for the villagers who were the backbone of the Congress. But the Ministries were under no obligation. If they had no faith in what these organizations stood for, they should plainly say so through the Working Committee. To play with a thing when they had no heart in it, would be worse than useless. They should take it up, only if they believed with him that it alone held the key to the economic and political salvation of the country. They should not deceive themselves or others.

THE GOOD EARTH

The base and foundation of village industries was agriculture. "Years ago I read a poem in which the peasant is described as the father of the world. If God is the Provider, the cultivator is His hand. What are we going to do to discharge the debt we owe to him? So long we have only lived on the sweat of his brow. We should have begun with the soil but we could not do so. The fault is partly mine."

There were people, remarked Gandhiji, who said that no basic reform in agriculture was possible, without political power. They dreamt in terms of industrialization of agriculture by large scale application of steam and electricity. He warned them that trading in soil fertility for the sake of quick returns would prove to be a disastrous, short-sighted policy. It would result in virtual depletion of the soil. Good earth called for the sweat of one's brow to yield the bread of life.

People might criticize that approach as being slow and unprogressive. It did not hold out promise of dramatic results. Nevertheless, maintained the speaker, it held the key to the prosperity of both the soil and the inhabitants living on it. Healthy, nourishing food was the *alpha* and *omega* of rural economy. "The bulk of a peasant's family budget goes to feed him and his family. All other things

come afterwards. Let the tiller of the soil be well fed. Let him have a sufficiency of fresh, pure milk and ghee and oil, fish, eggs, and meat if he is a non-vegetarian. What would fine clothes, for instance, avail him, if he is ill nourished and underfed? The question of drinking-water supply and other things would come next. A consideration of these questions would naturally involve such issues, as the place of plough cattle in the economy of agriculture as against the tractor plough and power irrigation etc. and thus, bit by bit, the whole picture of rural economy would emerge before them. In this picture cities would take their natural place and not appear as unnatural, congested spots or boils on the body politic as they were today. "We stand today in danger of forgetting the use of our hands," concluded Gandhiji. "To forget how to dig the earth and tend the soil is to forget ourselves. To think that your occupation of the Ministerial chair will be vindicated if you serve the cities only, would be to forget that India really resides in her 700,000 village units. What would it profit a man if he gained the world but lost his soul into the bargain?"

Questions were then asked.

REMEDIES

Q. You have called cities boils or abscesses on the body politic. What should be done with these boils?

A. If you ask a doctor he will tell you what to do with a boil. It has to be cured either by lancing or by the application of plasters and poultices. Edward Carpenter called civilization a malady which needed a cure. The growth of big cities is only a symptom of that malady. Being a nature curist, I am naturally in favour of nature's way of cure by a general purification of the system. If the hearts of the city-dwellers remain rooted in the villages, if they become truly village-minded, all other things will automatically follow and the boil will quickly heal.

Q. What practical steps can be taken to protect our village crafts from the invasion of foreign and Indian manufactured goods under the present circumstances?

A. I can only speak in broad terms. If you have felt in your heart that you have taken office as custodians and representatives of the interests of the masses, everything that you do, your legislation, your executive orders, the instructions that you issue, will breathe concern for the villager. To protect his interests, you do not need the Viceroy's sanction. Supposing you want to protect the hand-spinner and hand-weaver against the competition of mills and solve the problem of cloth shortage for the masses, you will put aside red tape and send for the mill owners and tell them that, unless they want you to go out of office, they must make their production policy conform to the requirement of the masses, whose custodian and representative you are. You will tell them not to send mill cloth to certain areas, which are put under hand production or produce a certain range of yarns and textiles which comes within the hand loom weaver's domain. If you are in earnest, your word will go home and they will willingly give their

co-operation as they did recently, when they provided the required textiles for export to Indonesia, in return for Indonesian surplus rice for the relief of the Indian famine. But there must be that inner conviction first, everything else will then be all right.

Sevagram, 8-8-'46

PYARELAL

CONGRESS MINISTRIES AND BASIC EDUCATION

The worst sabotage during the Sec. 93 regime following upon the resignation of the Congress Ministries in seven provinces in 1940 was that of the basic education plans, prohibition and the programme of rural rehabilitation and resuscitation of basic rural crafts that were launched by the Congress Ministries. Naturally, the first concern of the Congress Ministries on resuming office was to salvage what remained of their experiments and to take up the broken threads where they had left them.

The Education Ministers from the Congress Provinces met at the invitation and under the presidentship of Shri Balasaheb Kher in a conference for the purpose in the Council Hall at Poona on the 29th and 30th July. Education Ministers from all the provinces had been invited. But from two, they could not attend. Gandhiji attended the conference for over one hour on the afternoon of the 29th. Although the basic education experiment had received a set back so far as Governmental and affiliated institutions were concerned, it was continued under the auspices of the Talimi Sangh, who, thanks to Gandhiji's prevision, was fully prepared for the emergency. With the completion of the first seven years, basic education came of age. In his first meeting with the members of the Talimi Sangh in 1944, after his release from detention, Gandhiji explained to them that a stage had been reached, when the scope of basic education should be extended. They would have to take post-basic as well as pre-basic training within their compass. Basic education must become literally education for life. Taking up the thread of the argument from that point, Gandhiji explained to the conference in the course of his address, on what line that extension should take place and what, according to him, the duty of the Ministers was in that respect. He was speaking in answer to the question of Dr. Zakir Hussain, who was anxious that in their overzeal, they should not take a bigger bite than they could chew. An over-ambitious programme, which they had not the means to implement, might prove a trap and danger.

"IF I WERE A MINISTER"

He knew clearly enough, said Gandhiji, what was to be done but he did not quite know how it could be done. So far they had their course mapped out for them, but now they had to sail on uncharted waters. He knew their difficulties. It was not easy for those who had been brought up in the old tradition, to break away from it at a stroke. If he were in the Ministerial chair, said Gandhiji, he would issue broad instructions that hereafter all educational

activity of the Government should be on basic education lines. Adult education drives had been launched in several provinces. If he had his way, he would conduct them also through a basic craft. In his opinion, cotton spinning and the allied processes were crafts *par excellence* for this purpose. But he would leave the choice of the craft to the people concerned in each case in the certain belief that in the end that craft alone which had the necessary intrinsic merit would survive. It should be the job of the inspectors and other officers of the Education Department, to go among the people and teachers of schools and by persuasion and argument, educate them in the value and utility of the Government's new educational policy. That was their primary job, not to lord it over them. If they had no faith in it or if they were unwilling loyally to work out the new policy, he would give them the choice to resign. But he did not think that it would be necessary, if the Ministers knew their job and put their shoulder to the wheel. Merely issuing orders would not do the trick.

REORIENTATION OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

What he had said about adult education applied equally to university education. It must be organically related to the Indian scene. It must therefore be an extension and continuation of the basic education course. That was the central point. If they did not see eye to eye with him on that point, he was afraid they would have little use for his advice. If, on the other hand, they agreed with him that the present university education did not fit them for Independence but only enslaved them, they would be as impatient as he was to completely overhaul and scrap that system and remodel it on new lines consonant with the national requirement.

Today the youth educated in our universities either ran after Government jobs or fell into devious ways and sought outlet for their frustration by fomenting unrest. They were not even ashamed to beg or sponge upon others. Such was their sad plight. The aim of university education should be to turn out true servants of the people, who would live and die for the country's freedom. He was therefore of opinion that university education should be co-ordinated and brought into line with basic education, by taking in teachers from the Talimi Sangh.

The Ministers had accepted office as people's representatives. Their writ would not run beyond the four walls of the Council Hall, unless they could carry the people with them. What was taking place in Bombay and Ahmedabad today, was an ominous symptom, if it portended that the Congress had lost its hold over the people. Nai Talim was as yet a tender sapling but it held out big promise. Its growth could not be forced by ministerial ukases, if popular support was lacking. If, therefore, they could not command popular support, his advice to them would be to tender their resignations. They should not be afraid of anarchy. Theirs was only

to do their duty according to their light and leave the rest to God. People would learn the lesson of true Independence even out of that experience.

He then invited questions. The first question was: "Can basic education be conducted minus the self-support basis?"

"You can certainly try," replied Gandhiji. "But if you ask my advice, I will tell you that in that event, you had better forget basic education altogether. Self-sufficiency is not an *a priori* condition but to me, it is the acid test. This does not mean that basic education will be self-supporting from the very start. But taking the entire period of seven years, covered by the basic education plan, income and expenditure must balance each other. Otherwise, it would mean that even at the end of their training, the basic education students will not be fitted for life. That is the negation of basic education. Nai Talim without the self-support basis would, therefore, be like a lifeless body."

Other questions and answers then followed:

Q. We have accepted the principle of giving education through a basic craft. But the Mussalmans are somehow opposed to the spinning wheel. Your emphasis on spinning is perhaps all right in cotton tracts. But do not you agree that it is unsuited to areas where the cotton crop is not grown? May not some other craft be substituted for it, in such places — agriculture for instance?

A. This is a very old question. Any basic craft to serve as a medium for education must answer the test of universality. As early as 1908, I came to the conclusion that to make India free and to enable her to stand on her own legs, the spinning wheel had to hum in every home. If England can become an exporter of textiles to India and to the whole world, although she does not grow a pod of cotton, I cannot understand why we cannot introduce cotton spinning in our homes, merely because cotton would have to be obtained from a neighbouring province or district. As a matter of fact, there is no part of India where cotton was not at one time grown. Localization of cotton cultivation in 'cotton tracts' is only a recent and anomalous development, forced upon India by cotton manufacturing interests at the expense of the poor tax-payer and cotton spinner of India. Even today tree cotton grows everywhere in India. Such arguments as yours, speak ill of our capacity for taking initiative, for our enterprise and resourcefulness. It would kill all manufactures if transportation of raw materials from another place were to be regarded as an insuperable handicap.

Moreover, to enable a person to clothe himself through his own effort, when the alternative is to go naked, is in itself an education. An intelligent pursuit of the various processes related to cotton spinning has besides, a very high instructional value. In fact, it covers the whole education of man as perhaps no other craft does. We may not today be able to dispel the doubts of the Mussalmans, as they are rooted in a delusion and delusion is a very real thing to its victim, while he is under its spell. But

if our own faith is clear and firm, and we can demonstrate the success of our method, the Mussalmans will themselves come to us and ask to be taught the secret of our success. They do not seem to have realized that the charkha has done more for the poorest Mussalman masses than even the Muslim League or any other Muslim organization. The bulk of the weavers in Bengal are Muslims. Nor should it be forgotten, that Dacca owed its world-wide fame for its *shabnams* to the deftness and skill of Muslim women spinners and Muslim weavers.

The same applies to Maharashtra. The best cure for the delusion is to concentrate on the performance of one's own duty. Truth alone will endure, all the rest will be swept away before the tide of time. I must, therefore, continue to bear testimony to Truth even if I am forsaken by all. Mine may today be a voice in the wilderness, but it will be heard when all other voices are silenced if it is the voice of Truth.

THE VICIOUS CIRCLE

"To produce efficient teachers for Nai Talim would take time. What should be done to improve education in the schools in the meantime?" asked Avinashilingam Chettiar speaking in English. Gandhiji chaffing him for it suggested amid general laughter, that if he could not speak in Hindustani, he might whisper what he had to say into his neighbour's ear, who would render it into Hindustani for him.

"If you realize," he proceeded, "that the present system of education cannot bring India Independence but only serves to deepen her slavery, you will refuse to encourage it, irrespective of whether any other takes its place or not. You will do whatever you can, within the four corners of the principles of Nai Talim and be satisfied with that." If people did not want the ministers on those terms, it would be better for the ministers to resign. They could not possibly be party to catering for poison, because they could not provide or because the people did not relish life-giving food.

Q. You say that for Nai Talim we do not need money but men. But to train men we again need institutions and therefore money. How can we get out of this vicious circle?

A. The remedy lies in your own hands. Begin with yourself. There is a good English proverb: 'Charity begins at home.' But if you yourself will sit in an easy chair like a *sahib* and expect others of the "lesser breed" to get ready for the job, you will get nowhere. That is not my way. It has been my practice ever since my childhood, to begin with myself and my immediate environment in howsoever humble a way. Let us in this respect take a leaf out of the book of the British people. A mere handful of them came to and settled in India in the first instance and carved out an empire for themselves which is even more formidable in its cultural than in its political aspect, so much so that, today we are so infatuated with English that we hug it just as a slave hugs its fetters,

even at the cost of the mother-tongue. Think of the faith, single-minded devotion, sacrifice and perseverance, which must have been at the back of it. It only shows that where there is a will, there is a way. Let us be up and doing with the firm resolve not to give up, come what may, and all the difficulties will melt away.

THE PLACE OF ENGLISH

Q. What is the place of English in this programme? Should it be made compulsory or taught only as an optional, second language?

A. I must cling to my mother-tongue as to my mother's breast, in spite of its shortcomings. It alone can give me the life-giving milk. I love the English tongue in its own place, but I am its inveterate opponent, if it usurps a place which does not belong to it. English is today admittedly the world language. I would therefore accord it a place as a second, optional language, not in the school but in the university course. That can only be for the select few — not for the millions. Today when we have not the means to introduce even free compulsory primary education, how can we make provision for teaching English? Russia has achieved all her scientific progress without English. It is our mental slavery that makes us feel that we cannot do without English. I can never subscribe to that defeatist creed.

Poona, 3-8-'46

PYARELAL

[The following resolution was passed by the Conference:

"The Conference of Education Ministers and Workers held in Poona on July 30th and 31st, discussed some of the most pressing educational problems before the nation and passed a few resolutions."

The last of these was :

"This Conference is of opinion that the physical well-being of children including adequate diet, medical care — both curative and preventive — and formation of health habits, forms an integral part of national education and necessary steps should be taken to introduce this educational programme in all primary and secondary schools — both basic and non-basic."

Ashadevi who has brought these adds that Ministers cannot implement them unless they are backed by popular support. To this end, she suggests the holding of a small conference of specialists such as educationists, medical men, nutritionists, social workers and workers for or in the villages. P.]

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