



## **CHAPTER IV**

# **GANDHI ON KHADI AND HAND-SPINNING**



CHAPTER - IVGANDHI ON KHADI AND HAND-SPINNING

In the last chapter Gandhi's economic ideas, trusteeship council have been assessed. Besides this Gandhi advocated the use of ' Charkha ' hand spinning. It is also essential to understand this aspect; as far as his economic thought is concerned. Khadi connotes the beginning of economic freedom and equality of all in the country - - - . It must be taken with all its implications. It means wholesale Swadeshi mentality, a determination to find all the necessaries of life in India and that too through the labour and intellect of the villagers . . . . The latter ( villages ) will be largely self contained and will voluntarily serve the cities of India and even the outside world in so far as it benefits both the parties.

This needs a revolutionary change in the mentality and taste of many. Easy though the non-violent way is in many respects, it is very difficult in many others. It vitally touches the life of every single Indian, makes him feel aglow

with the possession of a power that has lain hidden within himself, and makes him proud of his indentivity with every drop of the ocean of Indian humanity.

Khadi to me is the symbol of unity of Indian humanity, of its economic freedom and equality and, therefore, ultimately, in the poetic expression of Jawaharlal Nehru, 'the livery of India's freedom.'

Moreover, Khadi mentality means decentralization of the production and distribution of the necessaries of life. Therefore, the formula so far evolved is, every village to produce all its necessaries and a certain percentage in addition for the requirements of the cities.<sup>1</sup> The message of the spinning wheel is much wider than its circumference. Its message is one of simplicity, service of mankind, living so as not to hurt others, creating an indissoluble bond between the rich and the poor, capital and labour, the prince and the peasant.<sup>2</sup>

I can only think of spinning as the fittest and most acceptable sacrificial body labour. I cannot imagine anything nobler or more national than that, for say one hour in the day, we should all do the labour that the poor must do, and

thus identify ourselves with them and through them with all mankind. I cannot imagine better worship of God than that in his name. I should labour for the poor even as they do. The spinning wheel spells a more equitable distribution of the riches of the earth.<sup>3</sup>

I feel convinced that the revival of hand spinning and hand weaving will make the largest contribution to the economic and the moral regeneration of India. The millions must have a simple industry to supplement<sup>e</sup> agriculture. Spinning was the cottage industry years ago, and if the millions are to be saved from starvation, they must be enabled to reintroduce spinning in their homes and every village must repossess its own weaver.<sup>4</sup>

If the reader would visualize the picture of the Indian skelton, he must think of the eighty percent of the population which is working its own fields, and which has practically no occupation for at least four months in the year, and which therefore lives on the borderland of starvation. This is the normal condition. The ever recurring famines make a large addition to this enforced idleness. What is the work that these men and women can easily do in their own cottages so as to

supplement their very slender resources ? Does any one still doubt that it is only hand spinning and nothing else ? <sup>5</sup>

What is claimed for spinning is that :

- 1) It supplies the readiest occupation to those who have leisure and are in want of a few coppers.
- 2) It is known to the thousands.
- 3) It is easily learnt.
- 4) It requires practically no outlay of capital.
- 5) The wheel can be easily and cheaply made. Most of us do not yet know that spinning can be done even with a piece of tile and splinter.
- 6) The people have no repugnance to it.
- 7) It affords immediate relief in times of famine and scarcity.
- 8) It alone can stop the drain of wealth which goes outside India in the purchase of foreign cloth.
- 9) It automatically distributes the millions thus saved among the deserving poor.
- 10) Even the smallest success means so much immediate gain to the people.
- 11) It is the most potent instrument of securing co-operation among the people. <sup>6</sup>

The disease of the masses is not want of money so much as it is want of work. Labour is money. He who provides dignified labour for the millions in their cottages, provides food and clothing, or which is the same thing, money. The charkha provides such labour. Till a better substitute is found, it must, therefore, hold the field.<sup>7</sup>

Idleness is the great cause, the root of all evil, and if that root can be destroyed most of the evils can be remedied without further effort. A nation that is starving has little hope or initiative left in it. It becomes indifferent to filth and disease. It says of all reforms, 'to what good?' That winter of despair can only be turned into the 'sun-shine' of hope, for the millions only through the life giving wheel, the charkha.<sup>8</sup>

The spinning wheel is an attempt to produce something out of nothing. If we save sixty crores of rupees to the nation through the spinning wheel, as we certainly can, we add that vast amount to the national income. In the process we automatically organize our villages. And as almost the whole of the amount must be distributed amongst the poorest of the land, it becomes a scheme of just and nearly equal distribution, and the case for the Charkha becomes irresistible.<sup>9</sup>

The only universal industry for the millions is spinning and no t other. That does not mean that other industries do not matter or are useless. Indeed from the individual stand point, any other industry would be more remunerative than spinning. Watchmaking will be not doubt a most remunerative and fascinating industry. But how many can engage in it ? Is it of any use to the millions of villagers ? But if the villagers can reconstruct their home, begin to live again as their fore fathers did, if they begin to make good use of their idle hourse, all else, all the other industries, will revise as a matter of course.<sup>11</sup> This is how Gandhi looked upon the wheel as the main source of all economy of the villiages ; and he advocated for the development of village industries.

#### GANDHI ON VILAGE INDUSTRIES :

Now I have no historical proof, but I believe that there was a time in India, when village economics were organized on the basis of such non-violent occupations, not on the basis of such non-violent occupations, not on basis of the rights of man but on the duties of man. Those who engaged themselves in such occupation, did earn their living,

but their labour contributed to the good of the community. A carpenter, for instance, ministered to the needs of the village farmer. He got no cash payment, but was paid in kind by the villagers. There could be injustice even in this system, but it would be reduced to a minimum. I speak from personal knowledge of the life in Kathiawad of over sixty years ago. There was more lustre in peoples eyes, and more life in their limbs, than you find today. It was a life founded on unconcious Ahimsa.<sup>12</sup>

We shall have to see that the villagers become first of all self-contained and then cater for the needs of the city-dwellers.<sup>13</sup>

I am not asking the city-dwellers to go to and live in the villages. But I am asking them to render unto the villagers what is due to them. Is there any single raw material that the city-dwellers can obtain except from the villagers ? If they cannot, why not teach him to work on its himself, as he used to before and as he would do now but for our exploiting inroads. ?<sup>14</sup>



Involuntary and voluntary idleness of villagers make them a perpetual prey of exploiters, foreign and indigenous. Whether the exploiter is from outside or from the Indian cities, their state would be the same, they would have no Swaraj. So I said to myself, "Let these people be asked to do something else; If they will not interest themselves in Khadi, let them take up some work which used to be done by their ancestors, but which has of late died out." There are numerous things of daily use which they used to produce themselves not many years ago, but for which they now depend on the other world. There are numerous things of daily use to the town-dweller for which he depends on the villagers, but which he now imports from Cities. The moment the villagers decide to devote all their spare time to doing something useful and town-dwellers to use those village products, the snapped link between the villagers and the town dwellers would be restored. <sup>15</sup>

Khadi is the sun of the village solar system. The planets are the various industries which can support Khadi in return for the heat and the sustenance they derive from it. Without it, the other industries cannot grow. But during my last tour I discovered that, without the revival of the other industries, khadi could not make further progress. For villagers

to be able to occupy their spare time profitably, the village life must be touched at all points.<sup>16</sup>

Other village industries come in as a handmaid to khadi. They cannot exist without khadi and khadi will be robbed of its dignity without them. Village economy cannot be complete without the essential village industries such as hand pounding, soap making, paper making, match making, tanning, oil pressing, etc., Congress men can interest themselves in these and, if they are villagers or will settle down in villages, they will give these industries a new life and a new dress. All should make it a point of honour to use only village articles whenever and wherever available. Given the demand, there is no doubt that most of our wants can be supplied from our villages. When we have become village minded, we will not want imitations of the West or machine made products, but we will develop a true national taste in keeping with the vision of a new India in which pauperism, starvation and idleness will be unknown.<sup>17</sup>

The revival of village industries is but an extension of the Khadi effort. Hand spun cloth, hand made paper, hand-pounded rice, home made bread and jam, are not uncommon in West.

Only, there they do not have one hundredth of the importance they have in India. For, with us, their revival means life, their destruction means death, to the villagers, as he who runs may see. Whatever the machine age may do, it will never give employment to the millions whom the wholesale introduction of power machinery must displace.<sup>18</sup>

I am thinking of ways and means of improving the condition of the people through a rehabilitation of agriculture, cattle-breeding and all other village industries. My problem will be solved, if I succeed even in half a dozen villages, for as is the part so is the whole.<sup>19</sup>

Gandhian economic theory has been a target of severe criticism, almost all the economic ideas of Gandhiji with moral over tones are said to be outmoded, mystic and untenable in the modern process of economic development. But most of these criticisms are due to the misapprehensions of the real meaning of these elements and he took pains to make clear his economic ideas on each of these. He was not a mere idealist or visionary, but most practical man - a scientist. However, Gandhiji's views on economic matters need to be critically examined. His ideas or attacks on modern industrialisation,

machanism, and medicines cannot be fully defended now. There are many non essential elements in Gandhian economic thought and practice which have become fads now, some of them in the realm of thought, and some on practice. In India there is no "de - Gandhianisation in the realms of thought, it is observed mostly in practice, of the Gandhian economics. Khadi and village industries, prohibition, trusteeship, birth control, popularisation of modern medicines are the striking examples.

Though Gandhi's concept of village sufficiency has its own merits, it has certain limitation and drawbacks that cannot be overlooked. It may create a new crisis for the urban areas, in respect of the marketed surplus. Flourishing cities and deserted villages, widening gulf between the rulers and the ruled, centralisation economic power in few hands, economic inequalities, slow pace of self-reliance, ever increasing unemployment and prices, miserable conditions of the weaker sections, agricultural labour, and tribal people, all these go to indicate a clear deviation from the Gandhian economic theory and practice.

Gandhiji's emphasis on self sufficiency rather than on efficiency, neglect of increasing productivity, opposition to

mechanisation, competitive exchange, industrialisation, materialism, labour saving technology cannot be justified in today's world. Gandhian economy is considered a closed economy, which seeks to achieve ends other than economics. He is even censured as a hand maid of the capitalist. In spite of all these criticisms, Gandhian economics has relevancy to Indian economy in particular and a universal validity in some respects in general, the fact recognised by eminent economist such as Prof. Galbraith and Prof. Wilhelm Ropke. The major development crisis which India faces today, has to be looked from the rural level. It does not mean that the problems during Gandhian era, are quite different from what the Indian economy faces today. Today the problems of economy development have become irrelevant to Gandhian thought becoming irrelevant. Gandhian did have a constructive programme for the village economy.

.....

: REFERENCES :

1. Constructive programme ( 1961 ) : pp. 12-13.
2. Young India : 17-9-25. p. 321.
3. Young India : 20-10-21. p. 329.
4. Young India : 21-7-20. p. 4.
5. Young India : 3-11-21. pp. 350-351.
6. Young India : 21-8-24. p. 277.
7. Young India : 18-6-25. p. 24.
8. Young India : 27-8-25. p. 299.
9. Young India : 17-2-27. p. 52.
10. Young India : 27-5-26. p. 190.
11. Young India : 30-9-26. p. 341.
12. Harijan : 1-9-40. p.p. 271-272.
13. Harijan : 16-11-34. p. 316.
14. Harijan : 7 - 12-34. p. 340.
15. Harijan : 7- 12- 34. p. 340
16. Harijan : 16-11-34. p. 317.
17. Constructive programme (1961 ) : pp. 16-17.
18. Harijan : 4-1-35. p. 372.
19. Khadi - Why and How (1959 ) : p. 181.

.....