

**GANDHI'S KHADI, AN ALTERNATIVE AGENDA FOR  
DEVELOPMENT: FROM EMPLOYMENT TO ECOLOGY  
1915-1945**

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21 July, 1997


**CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that this dissertation entitled "GANDHI'S KHADI, AN ALTERNATIVE AGENDA FOR DEVELOPMENT - FROM EMPLOYMENT TO ECOLOGY 1915-1945 submitted by Mr. MANOJ KUMAR in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY, has not been previously submitted for any degree of this or any other University and this is his own work.

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**TO**

**MY GRANDMOTHER**

**who laid the foundation for this study**

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Let me at the very outset declare that what to others I seem to be me is not me but my surroundings. Except for the mass of the flesh that I inherited in my mother's womb if I exist I exist because of my passionate intercourse with living and non-living things around me.

This work, therefore, is the outcome of a combined effort, which began, ironically, not at the beginning of my M.Phil. career but from the day I was born. In it, therefore, lies hidden my agenda for my people, my society, my country, my earth. If there exists lacunae in expression, I am sure there would be, then it is the power of articulation, not the agenda itself, which is to be blamed.

Coming to the specificity, this work owes in equal measure to two person besides me of course. Mr P.V.Rajgopal and Ms. Malika Basu, I bow before you both with enormous respect for the kind of contribution you have made towards the completion of this work. Rajgopal, to introduce him as a former Secretary to the Gandhi Peace Foundation, New Delhi, would be an understatement, is a man of action. His activity in Madhya Pradesh, through the organisation of Ekta Parishad, has given him an unparalleled knowledge of the basic realities that I adore. I hope to march in the future on the path shown by him.

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JNU is the den of debates. Debates, not for registering the victory points but dictated by the genuine concern for society. Since my post-graduation days I have been part of such informal and formal (tutorial and seminar discussions) gatherings where something the discussion began after dinner and stretched into the wee hours of morning. Gangatharan, Chandranna, and many others would go on shredding and stretching the points till it would become obvious that either we take a short nap or go sleepless. To be in JNU is bliss. But to be in CHS is heaven!

Reenu Mishra, Mahesh, Vanky, Ajay, Praveen, my seniors at CHS, who would trudge in to provide insights and encouragement without any air of seniority. With Reenu particularly (we met while she was continuing her Ph.D. and I had just entered CHS) the discussions were intense and always extremely enriching. Sharp and engaging but down to earth she is my greatest find in JNU. There were other seniors too. Abhay, Biplov, Murali, Kullumal ... the names go endless.

It was my juniors at CHS, some like Ratn and Parvinder, with whom I talked endlessly, putting forth my ideas and they engaging me in intense duel, helping me in attaining the clarity over most of the ideas put across in this dissertation. Parvinder would find fault with Gandhi for not being a

system-builder. But, Parvinder, I still stick to my contention that had Gandhi built a system then he would have been turned into a clone of Marx and not remained Gandhi that he is. Ratn as well as Parvinder would disagree vehemently with my support for Gandhi's attitude towards the question of land reform. Discussion, intensely argumentative and passionate, with these two were extremely helpful in formulating some of my ideas.

Then, there is Kamla. For most of the time she would remain content with gentle probing of my ideas, prodding me to delve deeper. With her, unlike two of my juniors, it was shaping of ideas, not through the contentious debates but through mutual desire to discover the truth. With her ego got crushed and what remained was pure, pleasant and stimulating conversation. Kamla, it was sheer pleasure talking to you.

Here I would like to mention some of those whom I met at Sevagram. Johra, intelligent, introspective and intensely inspiring; Vijay, effervescent and effective; Sambhu, calm and composed; Chitra, profound; Abby, who thought I debate more to register victory points, to him I would like to say that passion has its own pleasure. But how can I ever forget Ramakrishna who gave some really blasphemous pointers on the khadi movement. All of them, who hail from IIT, I owe an unquantified gratitude.

Technology while facilitating one's job, also has the potential of producing occasional nightmares. During the period of research my personal computer broke down twice bringing me close to perilous and ignominious end. But, while I write this acknowledgement piece, I am aware of the facility that it offered. Bhawani Das, my neighbour in the hostel, was always there to solve occasional snags that the computer developed. I thank him for assuaging my fear and for providing extremely helpful tips on computer functioning.

There can be no words of gratitude for one's parents and other family members, considering the fact that they are the soil to sprout from. At this juncture of my career I remember all those who nurture enormous expectation about me. I also remember the Upadhyay family, my home in Delhi. And my two friends, Vineet and Akhilesh, who remain closest come what may- and Paul K Chepkuto, and Esther Lucht.

The names mentioned are not exhaustive. But I would like to thank the library in charge of Gandhi Museum, Rajghat, GPF, New Delhi; Sarva Seva Sangh, Wardha; Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad. I thank GPF and Lok Jagaran, Bihar for assisting me financially. The financial assistance enabled me to undertake acquainting tours to various khadi producing centres such as Jaura, Paniput, Kanodar, Ahmedabad and Sevagram.

Lastly, but not by any account least, I thank my Supervisor, Prof Aditya Mukherjee, for the guidance that he provided, clearing my doubts, channelling my thoughts, and encouraging me when was battered by the depression bug. Greatest thing that happened during the period was unveiling of him as a wonderful human being, equally concerned with personal as much as academic problems of his students.

I thank all who are mentioned above and who remain in the background.

CHAPTER ONE  
INTRODUCING THE **PASSION**  
...*What Gandhi preached was an Economy of Equilibrium*...



Uncertain that the age is, what it breeds is uncertainty. Never in human history man felt so helpless, so emasculated; caged by vices camouflaged as modern virtues. A generation overwhelmed by an abundance of opportunities, but intimidated and groping. Man's reasoning faculty, the distinctive possession that marks him from the nature's other progenies, blunted, he with an impotent rage, has capitulated to the 'system'. It is strange that the very forces that collude in making such a scenario possible are also the forces that harangue for strengthening the 'system', thus jeopardising life further. This has inaugurated, what can safely be called, an Age of Cynicism.

Cynics, therefore, abound. Understood disparagingly, they, however, have an indispensable role to play. For the first time in recorded history, a circumstantial conspiracy has necessitated, the very premise of material growth (on which the modern civilisation bases itself) to be questioned. Given the aeons of accumulation in the womb of the earth, it is not improbable for the human race, not even partly but wholly, to witness an unparalleled degree of material prosperity. But, whereas the accumulation is of limited kind, man's rapacity is of unlimited nature. Pursuit of prosperity is endless. Dis-equilibrium thus induced spells disaster for the human race. So, the cynics ask, 'To what end?' The question, however, has helped only in further complicating the scenario. What it has not led to, and this is not the job of the cynics, is the change of agenda, of thought, of action.

Gandhi had attempted doing just the same. He fought and died, trying hard to convince his countrymen. He tailored and changed the dimensions of his thought constantly, to make himself comprehensible to his compatriots. He bowed, he wept, and lastly, he lay down, parallel to the earth, never to rise again; all in vain. His tragic but classic capitulation, explained sometimes in terms of non-violence or truth or love, has been brought out excellently by T. K.

Mahadevan<sup>1</sup>. The writer, a compatriot of Gandhi, considers him to be a *Dvija*, who died twice, once in 1908 and, then, again in 1948, the second being the physically fatal. He divides Gandhi's life, accordingly, into two equal halves and says of the first, when Gandhi remained 'unperceived, unheard and unheeded':

This Gandhi is little known and less understood. Not even those who were closest to him in those dark days had the faintest idea what it was he was trying to communicate. Natural enough. They were men of small minds. Their horizon lay not farther than the reach of their limited visions. They were pettifoggers, self-centred creatures, entangled in the endless round of 'my family, my community, my country, my self-respect'. In a word, the life of Gandhi-and here I mean both halves of it-can be aptly described as the story of a giant trying hard, and tragically failing, to communicate with pigmies.

But prolonged failure of communication can be fatal in two ways. One way, whereby a prophet remains unheard, is well known. This kind of fatality is relatively harmless. It is the stuff of human history. Had the prophets been heard-and heeded-history would have taken different course. But the other way, whereby the prophet himself loses track of his prophecy, gives up his long vision and takes to the shortcut is tragic. It turns the course of history backwards. I have a fear that for much the larger part of what I have called his second birth, Gandhi allowed the block in communication to divert him from his major task. This diversion may have been, to him, nothing more than an exigent and marginal superficiality. To the others, the diversion provided a much needed alibi, allowing them to tailor Gandhi to their size and shape. So that from being an emancipator of man, Gandhi became-and remains-a mere liberator of the Indian nation. Destined to remain *sui generis*, a mind apart, Gandhi's interpreters turned him into a member of the common herd.

What Gandhi preached, and practised, was an Economy of Equilibrium. His answer to the ills of modernism. For preaching this, Gandhi earned an epithet of the 'Medieval Monk'. What he meant was the maintenance of a balance between man's rapacity and the earth's regenerative potential. Any imbalance in this equilibrium, owing to man's rapaciousness and his tendency to rapidly transform his need into greed, would be civilisationally catastrophic. His reluctance to allow machinery to acquire a dominant role in man's economic

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<sup>1</sup> Mahadevan, T. K., *Dvija: A prophet Unheard*, 1977, pp. 12-15.

quest stemmed from this concern. Machinery is permissible as long as it does not become a complementary tool to man's rapacity. Machine would exploit nature many times more than a man can do himself. As the earth has its own pace of regeneration and the man's greed knows no bounds, there was the need to put a restraint over man. This aspect of his criticism of modern civilisation was a later day development. In the beginning, as he lays down in his 1909 publication, *Hindswaraj*, it is the moral aspect of modern civilisation with which he was more concerned.

Charkha was the product of this Economics of Equilibrium. Gandhi was often ridiculed for his obstinate obsession with charkha. He, however, regarded his contribution in the revival of the charkha as of more vital importance than his role as the leader of the India's freedom struggle. He wanted posterity to remember him as a man who revived the charkha.

This study began with a single line hypothesis: *The khadi movement, in the ultimate analysis, despite being an obsessive ambition and backed by a magnificent propaganda, was a failure.* Negative in its formulation, it, however, inaugurated a process of investigation that needed to take in account as much of its ideology as its practical achievements. This is important. Most of the analysis, taking the practical achievements for granted, concentrate on the investigation of the ideological aspect. That is the way to intellectual abyss. Throughout his career, in South Africa and India, the man's forte was action. If India is to learn from a man whom she gave an indulgent but hollow epithet of the Mahatma, then she has to investigate his actual achievements in practical terms and not content herself with analysing his mind alone.

A cause, at any time, is more magnificent and greater than the man who undertakes it. Both, the cause and the man, are born out of their time. But it is

the cause that takes precedence over man in the history of the human race. History, itself a tool of man to take account of his action, focuses on cause. A civilisation that gives greater importance in its history to the man, however great he might be, than the cause, relegates itself to the marginality of the human race. Hence, this study's emphasis on the practical concern.

'Were our mothers mad that they used to spin?'<sup>2</sup>, a desperate Gandhi asked the women of Sojitra, in Petlad district of Gujarat, on January 16, 1925. This was the time when the theoretical formulation of charkha ideology had been completed. Despite the sustained propaganda in its favour, the charkha, in its material achievements, was of marginal-or of no-impact. Khadi sales had slackened, scepticism had mounted and Gandhi's efforts to transform the Congress into a Khadi organisation was effectively check-mated. Twice, once in 1933 and then again in 1945, however, Gandhi would effect major changes in the direction of the khadi movement. But this fact does not rob off the vitality of the unfolding argument.

The women of Sojitra could have answered Gandhi's query with a resounding 'No'. Although the source contains no pointer to the fact, it can safely be gleaned from the prevailing environment, that their answer, at best, was a mild and confused nod. In their mothers' time it seemed perfectly logical to ply the charkha, stood as they were, on the same technological scale as of charkha. A combination of factors that ranged from the misuse of political power by unsympathetic and alien rulers to an unfair competition from Manchester mills to the technological progress that the Industrial revolution inaugurated in England, destroyed the charkha. What in their mothers' time, therefore, seemed logical, now, in the daughters' time was an anachronism. The women gave a

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<sup>2</sup> 'Speech at Women's Conference, Sojitra', Gujarat, 16 January 1925, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (hereafter CWMG), Vol. XXV, p. 3.

mild and confused nod, as here was a personality of undoubted charisma asking them to adopt an implement with which they could barely relate. The revival of the charkha was going to be an uphill task, that was perhaps the meaning of the nod.

Revival has a deceptive connotation. It is often understood as re-enacting in the present an element of the past. In practical terms, however, it is never the same. Nothing is revived as it is. To a protagonist of the revivalism, the past-distanced and overpowered-in contrast to the chaotic and convulsing present, seems calm and comforting. By reviving an element of the past, the protagonist thinks that he is making a contribution to the present. Here, therefore, lies the deception. Revival is an impossibility. Past is important when it is seen from the prism of the present. Past, as it is, is of no consequence. Present draws from the past a legitimacy in order to stand on itself, a frame of reference to measure itself. Tradition, whose lineage extends to the past, is not so much about a common practice in the past. It is ever generative. It is sculpted by the present. New elements go into the making of the tradition, but at the same time it needs to have a history, to draw legitimacy. Tradition, therefore, is the legitimate past. History is important not because it is the tale of the human exploits in the times bygone. It is important because the present regards it so. Tradition is like an over-grown tree, whose roots are entrenched in the past with its offshoots sculpted by the present above the ground. Both the root and the shoot, however, rarely have a commonality in externals.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Of this interplay between the past and present and their link, the tradition, Marx writes. 'Men make their own history... but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutionising themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed, precisely in such periods of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle cries and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honoured disguise and this borrowed language.' From 'The Eighteenth Brumaire Of Louis Bonaparte', By Karl Marx, K. Marx, F. Engels, V. Lenin, *On Historical Materialism: A Collection*, 1976

Was charkha, in its second occurrence, a farce, having ended earlier in a tragedy? Was Gandhi a revivalist in the sense of above? Gandhi was a revivalist not in the sense that, convulsed by the present, he sought solace in the past. It was not 'retrogressive', not attempting to withhold the march of time. In fact, he probed the past for the onward march of the present into the future. Charkha was a product of this aspiration. But where he seems to have erred is in the understanding of his economics. Gandhi, a 'total' economist with a strong ethical sense, regarded not material but spiritual growth as the supreme human goal. Aware that charkha needed technical improvements to make it more efficient, more productive, he did commission people and institutions to introduce improvements. But it seemed to have had no impact on his dominant viewpoint. His economic concern emanated from the need to provide employment to the people inhabiting at the margin of starvation. 'To the last man'- that is where his concern took him to. That is why the improvements in charkha was to be of a technical level which was easily comprehensible to the poorest among the poor. Further, concerned as he was of the future of human civilisation, his emphasis lay not on material but moral progress.

'People in the west generally hold that it is man's duty to promote the happiness-prosperity that is of the greatest number. Happiness is taken to mean the material happiness exclusively, that is economic prosperity. If in the pursuit of this happiness, moral laws are violated, it does not matter much. Again, as the object is the happiness of the greatest number, people in the west do not believe it to be wrong if it is secured, at the cost of the minority. The consequences of

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Nirmal Varma, the noted Hindi author in his Moortidevi Award acceptance speech recently said: 'It has been the singular characteristic of Indian tradition that past and present are not divided in historical fragments, but are integral and intimate part of the same time-flow. Tradition is not the memory of time past, which is kept safely in a museum and got rid off. On the contrary, it actively and creatively intervenes in all our contemporary conflicts and concerns as a moral yardstick. *Biblio: A Review of Books*, VOL II NO.6, June 1997.

this attitude are in evidence in all western countries.<sup>4</sup> A recent writer<sup>5</sup> on Gandhian economics point out that Gandhi had two points to make: that one should be concerned with the good of *all* rather than just with those of a majority; and that one should not be exclusively concerned with material prosperity but also with the moral aspect of actions. As far as improvements in charkha were concerned, it was not in keeping with Gandhi's economic formulation. More on this later.

Charkha, however, was not economics alone. It encompassed in its span a symbolic connotation which went much beyond the realm of economics. Gandhi had a rare gift for picking on symbols which would be readily intelligible to the majority of his countrymen, villagers as they were, and still are. Spinning, for Gandhi, apart from being sound economic sense as an occupation for peasants in between crops, became a symbol for a common activity which can link men of all castes, a sacrificial act in the sense that it meant giving up of time, indeed a husbanding of time in the interest of bringing man together. Spinning provides him with some of his loveliest metaphors which can be seen as illustrations of his use of religious language. We must spin the 'gossamer string of love', the 'silken net of love being attuned with truth'. Krishna manifested himself in the form of clothes to Draupadi. Spinning and weaving are, then, the Lords' work. The thread spun by the lowest of the low in society can be seen as a vehicle of redemption both economic and spiritual, for the two could not be separated in Gandhi's eyes.

This is an account, impelled by self-curiosity and a desire to disseminate among the larger public an analysis of how the movement was built. What were the instruments and aims of the propaganda and other activities connected with

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<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Iyer, Raghavan, *The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 3, 1986, p.410.

<sup>5</sup> Dasgupta, Ajit Kumar, *Gandhian Economic Thoughts*, 1996, p 9.

khadi? The desire for delving deep in the past is to procure lessons, if any, for the present and not see the past with pre-conceived hypothesis and then trying to fit findings in them. It is an honest assessment of the past with a desire of course to derive lessons for the present but not situating the past according to the needs of the present.

Khadi was, for Gandhi, a passion. It remained so till the end. But khadi itself underwent changes throughout the period of its growth. The growth of the Khadi Movement could be seen as organic to India's struggle for freedom. We have attempted to juxtapose its growth with that of the national liberation movement. Gandhi had come to India with clear conception of his agenda. By swaraj he did not mean political liberation without any social responsibility. If India was to get swaraj, it was to be by the masses and for the masses. Khadi embodied this agenda. From 1915, the year he landed in India, to 1920, the year he gained acceptance as India's undisputable mass leader, he was busy laying not just his agenda for swaraj but also his method of struggle. The second chapter, **Positioning the Passion**, attempts to put khadi in perspective.

As has already been noted, the khadi movement moved along with the national liberation struggle. It therefore went through a series of troughs and crests. After the suspension of non-co-operation movement, pandemonium broke out in the Congress against Gandhi's emphasis on Khadi. Out of jail, Gandhi did everything possible to make Congress accept his reasoning on khadi. But in vain. The third and fourth chapter, **Ideology of Passion**, chronicles the reasoning and its result.

It was in the decade, 1920-30, that Khadi found its ideological moorings. With growing understanding of the needs of the village India, Gandhi, in 1933, effected a major manoeuvre in the movement's momentum. It sprang from the



realisation that in the impoverished villages spinning was not the supplementary occupation undertaken in leisure. It was the sole occupation.

In a situation, confronted, at first with conditioning the British withdrawal and then preparing for nervous reception to freedom, khadi, for Gandhi, was on top of the agenda. In 1945, Gandhi met his close confidants at Sevagram to discuss the future of khadi. The conclusion reached was path breaking. 1933 and 1945, therefore, were years of manoeuvre as far as khadi was concerned. The fifth chapter, **Moments of Passion**, deals with these turns.

Being a practical idealist, the khadi movement had been formulated with its practical aspects constantly in mind. Gandhi was as fond of founding the organisations as of closing them. For the purpose of propagating khadi he founded organisations as if with mother's care. It was not extraordinary people who were recruited but ordinary men and women were turned into brilliant emissaries of his message. The fifth chapter also takes a look into the hard facts about the message.

Some seventy years after its foundation, Sevagram stands marginalised. Museumified, it seems, for eternity and erased from India's societal memory, the ashram is reviled by the inhabitants of the region. Sevagram to Gandhi was a laboratory for village reconstruction. People now inhabiting the surroundings of Sevagram hold the cluster of dilapidated hutment as the cause of their underdevelopment. Is Gandhi's passion dead? **Concluding the Passion** gleans from the preceding chapters to discuss the question.

With independence and Nehruvian economic ideas firmly entrenched, Gandhian economic thoughts were relegated to the background. Khadi was taken over by

the government and despite the presence of the saintly Vinoba Bhave, it could not become a people's movement as conceived by Gandhi.

Not much academic work, therefore, is available on khadi, although writings on Gandhian economic thoughts abound. Except for the study of Sri Krishnadas Jajoo,<sup>6</sup> himself a protagonist of khadi movement, no systematic study of khadi movement has been taken. Even Jajoo's work is only on the history of All India Spinners Association (AISA). In this paper, the attempt is to present the history of the khadi movement in totality.

This study depends for its facts considerably on Gandhi's Collected Works, including his edited weeklies such as *Young India*, *Harijan* and *Navjivan*. The study also draws from the publications of the AISA, such as *Khadi Guide* and its *Annual Report* since 1926. Then, there are the writings by some of the prominent khadi workers such as Shankarlal Bankar, S. Ramanathan, Pattabhi Sitaramaiya and many others.

Gandhi's Collected Work (CWMG) spans over close to hundred volumes. In them, facts and figures abound. He is quite generous with his critics while giving them space in his writings and his edited weeklies. I have focused primarily on the Collected Works and the three weeklies brought out by Gandhi, not so much on the numerous secondary writings on Gandhian economics. Gandhi is the best interpreter of himself.

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<sup>6</sup> Jajoo, Srikrishandas. *Akhil Bharatiya Charkha Sangh ka Itihaas*. 1962.

CHAPTER TWO

POSITIONING THE **PASSION**

1915-1920

The saint<sup>1</sup> left the shore of South Africa and sailed, amidst the raging World War, for his mother country, India. On January 9, 1915, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi disembarked at Bombay, to be virtually 'suffocated' by a plethora of public receptions in his honour. Bound by Gokhale's 'compact of silence' for one year, he spent practically the whole of 1915 touring and acquainting himself, the wilderness that India was.

Some 150 years after the crippling impact of British colonialism, India lay prostrate—her economy in shambles, her people shattered. She had been the pivot of modern imperialist expansion and domination. 'For two centuries', wrote Dutt, in 1936, 'the history of Europe has been built up to a greater extent than is always recognised, on the basis of the domination of India.'<sup>2</sup> This building of Europe was accompanied by a simultaneous under-development and destruction of the Indian economy. Britain had begun her Indian adventure by proclaiming 'trade and not territory' as their objective. But soon territorial ambition overwhelmed her India policy. Once stoked at Plassey, her territorial appetite got satiated only when she had established her direct territorial rule over most of India.

In 1915, India presented a spectacle of squalid poverty and misery of the mass of the people which was perhaps without an equal in the world. The population of India in 1901, as estimated by Daves, was 285 million.<sup>3</sup> A population which was largely discontented and lacked remunerative employment. The distribution of wealth was

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<sup>1</sup> The parting comment by General Smuts, 'The saint has left our shore', was not the only comment which saw in Gandhi traits of saintliness. In India, as Kripalani writes, he was seen more as religious reformer than as political leader. (Kripalani, J.B., *Gandhi, His Life and Thought*, p.56.) Nanda writes, 'The fact is that the image of Gandhi in his home land was that of a high-souled reformer rather than of a political leader'. (Nanda, B.R., *In Gandhi's Footstep: The life and times of Jannalal Bajaj*, 1990, p.29.) Margaret Chatterjee quotes C.F. Andrews, as having written to Rabindranath Tagore of his impression from the first meeting with Gandhi in January 1915 as Gandhi being 'a saint of action rather than contemplation'. (Chatterjee, Margaret, *Gandhi's Religious Thought*, 1983, p.1.)

<sup>2</sup> Dutt, R. Palme, *India Today*, 1992, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Dharma Kumar (ed.) *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, vol. II, c.1757-c 1970, 1984, p.466.

brutally uneven.<sup>4</sup> The per capita national income, for the year 1868, as noted by Naoroji in 1876, was Rs. 20.<sup>5</sup> These figures are important to give a preliminary conception of the depth of Indian poverty. In living conditions these figures meant what Indian economists, Shah and Khambata, described as follows: 'The average Indian income is just enough either to feed two men in every three of the population, or give them all two in place of every three meals they need[sic], on condition that they all consent to go naked, live out of doors all the year round, have no amusement or recreation, and want nothing else but food, and that the lowest, the coarsest, the least nutritious.'<sup>6</sup>

This disparity brought to the fore that horrible and recurring phenomenon of the precarious Indian economy, the famine. It extracted a terrific human toll. The figures about life expectancy presented a horrendous reality. According to the official returns of the 1921 Census Commissioners, the Indian life expectancy, in 1911, was 22.59 for males and 23.31 for females. Whilst infant mortality in the country was high, the mortality during the prime of manhood, i.e., between the ages of 30 and 40, was heart rending.<sup>7</sup> Out of one lakh of males born alive, the survivors between the ages of 30 and 40 numbered between 35,831 and 27,136. India had 18,658 people, at the age of fifty, surviving out of a lakh born alive. Further, three deaths out of four fell under the category of 'diseases of poverty'.<sup>8</sup>

Politically, in 1915, India was beginning to show signs of renewed vigour. An attempt was being made to put aside the stupefying spell of Surat<sup>9</sup> which had

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<sup>4</sup> Statistics showed that 33.3% of the wealth of the country was in the hands of one percent of the population, the next 33.3% in the hands of one third of the population, and the balance in the hands of the rest. S. Daves, *Gandhiji and some of his thoughts*, 1948, p. xi.

<sup>5</sup> Dutt., op. cit., p. 31.

<sup>6</sup> Shah and Khambata, *The Wealth and Taxable Capacity of India*, 1924, p. 253.

Daves, S., op. cit., p. xi.

<sup>7</sup> Anstey, V., *The Economic Development of India*, 1936, p.69.

<sup>8</sup> At Surat, in 1907, the Congress, splintered in two camps: the Extremists and the Moderates. The split

splintered the nationalist platform and dampened the national upsurge. Tilak had been released, and with the Surat sentiment on the wane, he naturally became the focus of a revitalised Indian polity. His re-entry into the Congress was facilitated not just by the demise of his most vociferous critic, Sir Pheroze Shah Mehta but also by the aggressive campaigning done on his behalf by Madame Annie Besant. She, in recognition of her contribution to India, was chosen to preside over the annual Congress session of 1916, at Lucknow. Later, she and Tilak founded their respective Home Rule Leagues to expedite India's march to self rule.<sup>10</sup>

While, at Lucknow the politically established leaders were involved in hammering out a Hindu - Muslim Pact, Gandhi had been in the background, garnering support for the Indians settled in South Africa. He cajoled the daisful of leaders to allow him to put before the august Congress, a resolution on the system of indenture. He demanded stoppage of emigration, as it was an 'evil which cannot be mended but only be ended'. Most of the leaders present hardly took notice of his plea. One man, an illiterate villager, named Rajkumar Shukla, however, saw, in him, a potential which made him pester Gandhi till he agreed to accompany him to Champaran. 'Drawn more or less accidentally' to the arena of indigo, Gandhi looked upon it more as a humanitarian mission than as a political campaign.<sup>11</sup> Success here was easy. Soon, however, he found himself embroiled in a labour strike at Ahmedabad.<sup>12</sup>

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effectively capped the national movement. The affect of split lingered on till 1916, when Tilak rejoined the Congress.

<sup>10</sup> Besant's follower in the League such as Omar Sohiani and Shankarlal Banker later became close adherents of Gandhi.

<sup>11</sup> Champaran, a deeply rural district in north Bihar, was characterised by the presence of large estates and was dominated by landlords rather than peasant proprietors. Most of the large landlords had rented out their land to temporary tenure-holders, a substantial number of whom were European planters and they in turn either cultivated the land directly or rent it out to peasant tenants. The plantations were of indigo which was ceasing to be a paying proposition as German manufactured synthetic indigo began to undercut the natural dye on world markets. The planters proceeded to transfer their losses on to their tenants. The result was a 'planter raj' causing considerable discontent perturbing even Government officials.

<sup>12</sup> In Gandhi's Gujarat Satyagraha in 1918 the opponent was a group of Ahmedabad mill owners. The crisis in industrial relations was the result of the war when mill owners decided to withdraw the plague bonus as an austerity drive.

He exhorted the mill owners to bind their working force with 'silken thread of love'. The first serious conflict with the British authorities, however, was yet to take place and that happened at Kheda. 'Authority', he said while fighting for farmers' right, 'is blind and unjust'<sup>13</sup>. Although the gains at Kheda were insubstantial, the people acquired a spirit of fearlessness and a consciousness of their strength to employ satyagraha whenever necessary.<sup>14</sup>

'A baby of two years and a half in Indian politics'<sup>15</sup> was fast catching the imagination of young and impatient India. Still a 'loyalist', he undertook a strenuous recruiting campaign in Kheda district to facilitate the Empire's war efforts, with unhappy consequences for his health. This was his first serious and prolonged illness of life. He remained bedridden for more than a half year and had almost knocked at 'death's door'.<sup>16</sup> By the time a surgical intervention had pulled him back from the brink, a storm was already brewing over India. The Rowlatt Bills were introduced with the express purpose of shackling India's growing national sentiments. It had exactly an opposite effect. The Bills were seen as subversive of the principle of the liberty of the subject and destructive of the elementary rights of an individual.<sup>17</sup> A Satyagraha Sabha was constituted to oppose the Bills from becoming law. A call for nation-wide general hartal drew an aggressive response from the people. On 13<sup>th</sup> April 1919, at Jallianwala Bagh, a gory massacre of innocent people, was effected. This, when Punjab, reeling under the martial law administration, was out of bounds for the rest of the country. The massacre took a total toll of at least

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<sup>13</sup> 'Speech at Aklacha', April 1918. *CWAG*, Vol. XIV, p.323.

<sup>14</sup> As in Champaran, it was a local problem wherein Gandhi became involved in early 1918. Rising prices, a poor season and outbreaks of plague and cholera prompted Kaira's *patidars* to protest against the level of land revenue demand.

<sup>15</sup> Presiding over the Gujarat Political Conference on 3 November 1917. Gandhi describes himself as such *CWAG*, Vol. XIV, p. 48.

<sup>16</sup> Gandhi names a chapter (XXVIII) of his autobiography as 'Near Death's Door'

<sup>17</sup> 'Summary of Rowlatt Bills', Before 26 February 1919. *CWAG*, Vol. XV, p110

370 people,<sup>18</sup> whose collective crime was an innocent congregation. The nation was numbed. Politics gained primacy. At Amritsar Congress, held in December 1919, Gandhi achieved a visibility which would become hallmark of Indian politics in the years to come.<sup>19</sup>

Gandhi was rapidly getting sucked in the quagmire of Indian politics. This, when he was apprehensive of the work awaiting in India when he had departed from South Africa. 'I have been so often prevented from reaching India that it seems hardly real that I am sitting in a ship bound for India', an uncertain Gandhi had then written to Albert West. 'And having reached that, what shall I do with myself.'<sup>20</sup> Yet, he had returned to India with the ambition, as he put it in a letter to Lord Amphill, of taking his 'humble share in the national regeneration'.<sup>21</sup> Refraining from any political involvement, he went around the country to discover India first hand. Simultaneously, he had also begun his efforts to replicate the Phoenix experiment, first at Kochrab and then at the bank of Sabarmati, near Ahmedabad.<sup>22</sup>

Gandhi wandered the whole of the year 1915 scaling the length and breadth of the country. What he discovered was deeply depressing. India's poverty was deepening day by day. The prevailing situation had precluded any other possibilities. A country that exported its raw produce and imported it back as finished goods; a

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<sup>18</sup> Nanda, *op. cit.*, p.41

<sup>19</sup> Gandhi himself noted in his autobiography that his 'Congress Initiation' came at Amritsar. 'I must regard my participation in Congress proceedings at Amritsar as my real entrance into the Congress politics.' (*Autobiography*, Ch. XXXVIII)

<sup>20</sup> 'Letter to A.H. West', 20 November 1914, *CWAG*, Vol. XII, p. 556.

<sup>21</sup> 'Letter to Lord Amphill', 30 October 1909, *CWAG*, Vol. IX, p.509.

<sup>22</sup> Several provinces claimed Gandhi. Being a Gujarati, he chose Ahmedabad, the capital of Gujarat as the site of Satyagraha Ashram founded on 25<sup>th</sup> May, 1915. It was an ancient centre of hand loom weaving, and thus an appropriate location for his proposed scheme to revive hand-spinning and weaving. Ironically, the city was a great centre of mill-made cloth, and industry introduced and financed by wealthy Indians on the British pattern which threatened to destroy all remnants of artisan spinning and weaving. It was likely to be the most favourable field for the revival of cottage industry. He thought he could influence the people most through his mother tongue, Gujarati. A no less important consideration was the monetary help offered. Ahmedabad being the richest trading centre in Gujarat. Gandhi thought its wealthy citizens could be easily induced to help a new activity. Tendulkar, D.G. *Mahatma, Life Of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi*, Vol. One, 1951, pp. 163-75



country which, though growing its own cotton, had to pay crores of rupees to import its clothes; a country whose most pampered officials spent their earnings outside, could not be otherwise than poor. 'Throughout my wanderings in India', Gandhi spoke at a political conference,<sup>23</sup> 'I have rarely seen a face exuding strength and joy'. The middle class groaned under the weight of awful distress. The lowest orders had nothing but the earth below and the sky above. This dire strait, Gandhi concluded, was self generated. India had ceased to be prosperous, despite possessing enormous resources, because it had violated the sanctity of Swadeshi. In utter disregard of its surroundings, it had begun to patronise the remote places.

In India's import, cloth formed an important element. India had been gradually transformed into an importer from its status as famed exporter of cloth. However, by the middle of the nineteenth century, textile mills had begun to sprout on Indian soil, mainly producing yarn for export. It was the end of the nineteenth century, that the appearance of cheap Japanese fabrics in the market of the Far-East and Southeast Asia changed the production content of the Indian mills. Their focus shifted on producing cotton fabrics, for the home market instead of yarn for export.

Between 1886 and 1905, the number of mills producing cotton cloth, the vast majority of which belonged to the Indians, increased from 95 to 197. Over the same period the number of spindles doubled and the number of looms tripled. In facing foreign competition the hand looms played a major role. There existed close interdependence between the cotton mills and the hand loom weavers who used the mill spun yarn and numbered over ten million at the beginning of the present century. In 1897 - 1901, textile mills annually used cotton yarn worth an average of 85 million pounds and hand loom weavers yarn worth a total of 200 million.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> 'Speech at Gujarat Political Conference-I. Godlira', 3 November 1917, *CHAAG*, Vol. XIV, p. 54

<sup>24</sup> Antonova, K., G. Bongard-Levin, G. Kotovsky, *A History of India*, Book Two, 1979, p.120

British industrialists, on the other hand, using the colonial organs of power, increased their imports of cotton fabrics into India. A 3.5 percent excise duty was clamped on Indian textiles, yet the share of the textile market secured by imported fabrics dropped from 63 percent to 57 percent between 1901 and 1906. Over the same period, the share of Indian fabrics produced in mills and by hand, grew from 12 percent to 15 percent and from 25 percent to 28 percent respectively.

At this stage Indian weavers had not yet felt the real thrust of competition from Indian mills. However, from this point on, the fabrics produced at local factories began to hold their own not only in competition with British goods but also in competition with local weavers. Between 1901 and 1911 close on half a million hand loom weavers were ruined or lost their livelihood. Between 1907 and 1914, the production level for hand-woven fabrics hardly changed, while the output of cotton fabrics from the mills tripled. However the main threat to Indian mill owners and hand loom weavers still remained Lancashire.<sup>25</sup> In 1918, India imported clothes worth Rs. 60 crores.

During this period, Gandhi, with wandering-born-wisdom, was in a belligerent mood. He spoke as if on an educating spree, without fear or favour. In a country dominated by giants of parliamentary debates, from Ranade to Mehta to Gokhle, his speeches, at various public gatherings, showed empathy, not eloquence. He preached politics of people away from the podium- the forte of the Moderates.

There was much to desire from the Indian political class. Speeches--content and language--utterly alien to the masses, spewed out from the high podium, somehow lacked mass appeal. Lost in the labyrinth of verbiage, resolutions passed at conferences, went into limbo even before the ink went dry. Bejewelled princes agonised over poverty around, in stark contrast to their lifestyle. Gandhi spoke

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

famously about these prevailing inconsistencies at Banaras Hindu University, in February 1916, and, while students applauded, princes led by Annie Besant, emptied the hall.<sup>26</sup>

At the first-ever Gujarat Political Conference held in November 1917, Gandhi found a most suitable platform to express his extra-ordinary range of thoughts. He spoke at length. He was dabbling in politics so as to enable him to do his religious and social work<sup>27</sup>. Notwithstanding his misgivings about the wisdom of shaping Swaraj round the Western conception, Gandhi said, he joined the Swaraj movement as India was governed by a modern system. Swaraj is needed to banish India's enforced idleness which leads to its growing poverty. Swaraj, to him, meant 'the freedom to err and the power to correct errors'. This freedom, however, could not be attained through an appeal to the British democracy, the British people. Moreover, as events of past had shown, 'loyalty is no merit'. If Swaraj was to be attained, then appeal must be targeted to the Indian people. 'When the peasantry of India understands what Swaraj is, the demand will become irresistible.'<sup>28</sup> If Swaraj was the destination then Swadeshi was one golden path to reach there.

Gandhi, given awareness of India's poverty and the ameliorative potential of Swadeshi, saw Swadeshi as a method of import substitution. Once Swadeshi was adopted, he thought, not only would India's traditional industry witness a turnaround in its fortune, but British hold over India would also become untenable, discouraged by the slump in the demand, they would not be able to dump their manufactures here.

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<sup>26</sup> Mrs. Besant first asked Gandhi: 'Please stop it', while he was in the midst of his speech. With cries of 'Go on' supporting Gandhi and with the consent of the Chairman, Gandhi went along with his speech. Unable to bear, Mrs. Besant left the hall, followed by the princes. 'Speech at BHU', 6 February 1916. *CWJG*, Vol. XVIII, pp. 210-6.

<sup>27</sup> 'I am in it [politics] because I can not do my religious and social work.' 'Letter to C. F. Andrews', 6 July 1918. *CWJG*, Vol. XIV, p. 478.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 'Speech at Gujarat Political Conference - I', 3 November, 1917, p.55.

As yet, Swadeshi lacked the precision that later came to be attached to it. Presently, its meaning was all-encompassing. 'Swadeshi is that spirit in us which restricts us to the use and service of our immediate surroundings to the exclusion of the more remote'<sup>29</sup>. Swadeshi in religion, therefore, meant respecting one's own and not get swayed by missionaries' criticism or temptation. In the case of polity, it meant adopting indigenous institutions rather than trying to supplant alien on an unwilling soil. In economics, it required one to use things produced in one's own surroundings, even if it meant substandard goods and services.

The broadness of the meaning of Swadeshi was evident in Gandhi's speeches, delivered during his nation-wide tours. Gandhi raised vital questions with respect to nation's attitude towards Swadeshi. There was a resolution on Swadeshi in the Congress programme. Yet English was used as a medium of address in its meetings. As Gandhi said, 'If you kill the vernaculars and raise the English language on the tomb of the vernaculars, then you are not favouring Swadeshi in the right sense of the word.'<sup>30</sup>

Much before Gandhi, in 1870s, Swadeshi, as a term, had found itself in vogue, in the writings of Gopal Hari Deshmukh, a Maharashtrian reformer, known by his pen name of 'Lokhitwadi'. Then, during the anti-partition agitation in Bengal, it made its appearance as a political slogan. The real credit, however, for making Swadeshi a part of the political agenda goes to Gandhi. He, by his writings and speeches, invested it with religious, political, and economic meanings. He exhorted 'every man, woman and, child', 'from the Viceroy down to the sweeper', to realise that it is through Swadeshi that India would get Swaraj.

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<sup>29</sup> 'Speech on Swadeshi at Missionary Conference, Madras', 14 February 1916, *CMMG*, Vol. XIII, p. 219

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 'Speech at Reception at Mayavaram', 1 May 1915, p. 70.

Convinced that only Swadeshi could bring salvation of Indian poverty, he conceived it 'as a religious principle to be followed by all'<sup>31</sup>. Simultaneously he also framed the Swadeshi vows to fortify the religious resolve. In Gandhi's conception vows were necessary as a man was under so strong a temptation to fall, and Nature herself had made it so very easy for him to indulge in self-deception, that even a vigilant person, if he was weak, or if his abstinence lacked the genuine spirit of renunciation, was sure to fall. To his countrymen, therefore, he extolled, 'Anything less than inflexible determination can not be called a vow.'<sup>32</sup>The Swadeshi vow was designed to impart 'stability, ballast and firmness to one's character.'<sup>33</sup> Framing of vows were the product of Gandhi's unique understanding of the Indian condition.

He believed that India, contrary to the material West, was a country swathed with religious fervour. 'India alone is the land of karma and the rest is the land of *bhoga*.'<sup>34</sup> Properly channelled, religious fervour could bring about positive and constructive turnaround of the Indian condition. 'Be that as it may, this is the maxim of life which I have accepted, namely, that no work done by any man, no matter how great he is, will really prosper unless he has religious backing.'<sup>35</sup> In his conception, religion and politics led a symbiotic existence. 'The latter divorced from religion is like a corpse only fit to be buried'. Religion, that he constantly referred to, was not that which fomented sectarianism, neither did it spring from the scriptural readings. 'It is a thing which is not alien to us, but it is a thing which has to be evolved out of us. It is always within us, with some consciously so; with others, quite unconsciously. But it is there; and whether we wake up this religious instinct in us through outside assistance or by inward growth, no matter how it is done, it has got to be done if we

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<sup>31</sup> 'Speech at Gujarat Political Conference-I', 3 November 1917, *CHMG*, Vol. XIV, pp. 48-66.

<sup>32</sup> 'The Swadeshi Vow-I', 8 April 1919, *The Bombay Chronicle*, *CHMG*, Vol. XV, p. 195.

<sup>33</sup> 'The Efficacy of Vows', *Young India*, 22 August 1929, *CHMG*, Vol. XXI, p. 272.

<sup>34</sup> 'Speech at Gujarat Political Conference-I', 3 November 1917, *CHMG*, Vol. XIV, p. 48.

<sup>35</sup> 'Speech on "Ashram Vows" at Y.M.C.A., Madras', 16 February 1916, *CHMG*, Vol. XIII, p. 226.

want to do anything in the right manner and anything that is going to persist.<sup>36</sup> Once this religious sense gets awakened, people's thoughts undergo instant revolution. Vows are embodiment of awakened religious sense. If religion act as reservoir of strength then vows help in fortifying the resolve.

Vows, product of his deep and abiding religiosity, unbounded by scriptural dogma, had been an important aspect of his growing up. 'A vow is nothing but a fixed resolution to do or abstain from doing a particular thing', Gandhi explained, from his sickbed in Bombay, to Esther Faering, on 25 January 1919.<sup>37</sup> For more than six months now, Gandhi had been lying incapacitated. He had earlier vowed, saddened by the ill-treatment of cows and buffaloes, not to partake milk.<sup>38</sup> During the illness, it became a source of deep consternation and agony among his friends and family members. Esther Faering wrote,<sup>39</sup> asking for deeper meaning, 'Do we take a vow in order to help and strengthen our character? Does God require us to take any kind of vows? Can a vow not become fatal?... (If God is a father, and if God is perfect love, does it not then cause suffering to Him when His children take burden upon them, which they are not asked to carry?'. Gandhi replied,<sup>40</sup> bringing out the dichotomy between the body and soul. 'Body is matter, soul is spirit, and there is eternal conflict between the matter and spirit. Triumph of matter over the spirit means destruction of the latter'. Body is merely an instrument for uplifting of the soul. As soul is imperishable living in a body, which is perishable and transitory, for body to yield in the service of the soul it is to be controlled through the mechanism of the vows.

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> 'Letter to Esther Faering', 25 January 1919, *CWMG*, Vol. XV, p.76.

<sup>38</sup> In a letter to a friend, Gandhi wrote, 'From religious point of view what I said about milk still stands. But from the point of view of health and under Indian conditions, giving up of milk seems an impossibility. It is many years since I gave up milk and I am under a vow never to take it in this life. But I can not advice others to give up milk so long as I have not a substitute having the qualities of milk' 'Letter To A Friend', 9 August 1919, *CWMG*, Vol. XV, p.12

<sup>39</sup> Footnote 4 in 'Letter To Esther Faering', *CWMG*, Vol. XV, p. 76

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p.77.

In May 1915, Gandhi had circulated among his friends, for their comments, the Draft Constitution for the ashram at Ahmedabad. In it, he had formulated number of vows to be strictly observed by the residents. The vow of Swadeshi was one among them. It required that the residents refrain from using mill-made products, whether Indian or foreign, as they 'conceivably involve violation of truth in their manufacture or on the part of their manufacturers.'<sup>41</sup> The framing of such a vow was possibly the result of Gandhi's well known abhorrence of machinery. It is evident from the added rationale that he provided in support of his contention. The generation of tremendous heat, the Draft reads, caused enormous destruction of life, therefore, mill manufactures should be tabooed.

Later, on 6<sup>th</sup> April 1919, at the mammoth meeting at the sea sand of Chowpatty in Bombay, Gandhi gave public expression to the Swadeshi vow. The meeting was called to observe the day of national mourning at the passage of the hated Rowlatt Bills into law. The day for taking the vow was fixed on 9<sup>th</sup>, the Ramnavmi Day. After deep deliberation, Gandhi said in a message released on the day, he had pruned the vow of Swadeshi to hold only in respect of clothing, whether made of cotton, silk or wool. He further added that the Indians had committed a deep sin by patronising foreign cloth in the recent past of around a century. Swadeshi vow was a penance for their sin.

The first Swadeshi vow that Gandhi framed had following words: With God as my witness I solemnly declare that from today I shall confine myself for my personal requirements to the use of cloth manufactured in India from Indian cotton, silk and wool and I shall altogether abstain from using foreign cloth, and I shall destroy all foreign cloth in my possession.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> 'Draft Constitution for the Ashram', Before 20 May 1915, *CIMG*, Vol. XIII, p 93

<sup>42</sup> 'The Swadeshi Vow-II', 8 April 1919, *CIMG*, Vol. XV, p 198

Although, for the proper observance of the pledge, he made the use of hand woven cloth made out of hand spun yarn necessary, he was aware of certain limitations. Such clothes were hard to be found. Most of the fine yarn was made of the foreign cotton spun abroad. Weavers were using such yarn. The requirements of the pledge, therefore, was taken to be met if one used cloth spun and woven from Indian cotton by means of imported machinery. He disallowed clothes made out of imported yarn spun out of Indian cotton. Also disallowed was the clothes made in English-owned mills in India which did not admit Indian shareholders.<sup>13</sup>

Later, vows contained greater clarity. It got divided into two parts. One, 'pure' vow, required the vow takers to wear clothes made in India out of Indian cotton, silk or wool spun in India. The other, 'mixed' Swadeshi vow, meant wearing clothes woven in India whether made out of foreign or Indian yarn cotton, silk or wool. It was however explained that true Swadeshi meant wearing hand spun hand woven cloth. Later, a third vow was added for the convenience of those who, having foreign clothes, were reluctant to part with them. All the three vows thus designed recognised the use of mill-made clothes. His endeavour, however, was to re-establish hand spinning so as to make available to the vow-takers with hand-spun and hand-woven cloth, known as khadi. This khadi was what he considered to be true Swadeshi.

Why did Gandhi, the question arises, confine the Swadeshi vows only to clothing? The answer lay in Gandhi's analysis of the earlier Swadeshi movement during the Bengal Partition agitation of 1905. During the partition agitation, Swadeshi had spread itself too thin. 'It is plain enough', Gandhi spoke at Ahmedabad while on a propaganda tour, 'that we cannot have everything Swadeshi all at once.' It would be impractical and non-implementable. What is a vow, after all, if it can not be kept for want of resources? India's manufacturing base then was too thin to provide for

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.199



everything that India needed. But there were other important reasons too that went as inputs in his deliberation that restricted the principle of Swadeshi to clothing alone.

A century ago India was a famed exporter of high quality textile. Even presently, a tradition of cloth making existed in the country, despite the flooding of cheap mill manufactured clothes. While spinning was a non caste occupation and every home spun its own yarn, weaving was a caste occupation and every village had one or more weaver families devoted to its need. Despite destruction, it was possible to revive spinning and weaving. Moreover, next to food, it was the most important basic need of human beings. Just as agriculture satisfied food wants, spinning could satisfy clothing needs. As a result, people could easily be induced to revive the lost tradition. With ancillary or supplementary crafts getting crippled, the dependence on agriculture had increased, resulting in recurring famines. Self spinning could re-establish the balance and provide much needed respite to the people. All these could combine to make the Swadeshi vow in respect of clothing acceptable to maximum number of the people. Then, there was the meaning of Swaraj which Gandhi valued. It was India's poverty that constantly rankled in his heart. He was convinced, as he later wrote in his autobiography, that anything that helped India to get rid of the grinding poverty of her masses would in the same process also establish Swaraj. As early as 1909, he had seen spinning as tool for restraining the growing pauperisation of India.

Objections, however, abounded. Wasn't Swadeshi a most selfish doctrine without any warrant in the civilised code of morality?-A throwback to barbarism? To such criticism Gandhi responded by asserting that it was a doctrine consistent with the laws of humility and love. 'It is arrogance to think of launching out to serve the whole of India when I am hardly able to serve even my own family.'<sup>41</sup> He refused to accept that in seeking to serve India in exclusion of every other country he was

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<sup>41</sup> Speech at Missionary Conference, Madras, 14 February 1916. *CWJG*, Vol. XIII, p.224

harming any other country. India could not live for Lancashire or any other country before she be able to live for herself.<sup>45</sup> 'My patriotism is both exclusive and inclusive. It is exclusive in the sense that in all humility I confine my attention to the land of my birth, but it is inclusive in the sense that my service is not of a competitive or antagonistic nature.'<sup>46</sup>

How was the problem of the acute shortage of indigenous clothes to be handled in the context of the demand for Swadeshi? There was little possibility, an unperturbed Gandhi said, that the whole of the country would be veered around Swadeshi, so soon. 'A hardened optimist dare not expect more than few lakhs and I anticipate no difficulty in providing them with Swadeshi cloth'. Further, the general climate of India required very little clothing. Lastly, when Swadeshi was adopted there was bound to be unimagined spurt in spinning and weaving. Weavers were merely awaiting encouragement.<sup>47</sup>

Sections of the Indian intelligentsia were sceptical about Gandhi's views on machinery and modern civilisation. They saw the Swadeshi propaganda as an attempt to turn back the tide of time. Wasn't it seeking solution of an economic question in a sentimental way? Would railways be dismantled just because a hundred years ago Indians traversed long distances by primitive bullock-carts? Gandhi sought to clear such misgivings. He had no intention to include his views on machinery in the Swadeshi propaganda. His simple contention was that farmers who sit idle for four months of a year in the absence of any occupation need to be provided with some occupation during the agriculturally lean periods. 'I propose to utilise this spare time of the nation', he wrote to Paranjapye, 'even as a hydraulic engineer utilises enormous waterfalls.'<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> 'The Swadeshi Vow-II', 8 April 1919, *CWAG*, Vol. XV, p.222

<sup>46</sup> See fn. 43

<sup>47</sup> 'The Swadeshi Vow-I', 8 April 1919, *CWAG*, Vol. XV, p.196.

<sup>48</sup> 'Letter to R.P.Paranjapye', 14 July 1919, *CWAG*, Vol. XV, p. 459.

Whatever his public pronouncements, Gandhi, to his close confidants, conceded his abhorrence of machinery. 'The more experience I gain', to Maganlal he wrote, 'the more I realise that machinery will keep us in permanent slavery, and I find that what I said about it in *Hindswaraj*, is literally true'.<sup>49</sup>

To the outside world of sceptics, he presented the practical problems of machinery. After a discussion with a famous mill-owner of Bombay, Sir Fazalbai Karimbhai, Gandhi realised that Swadeshi was mainly a matter of production.<sup>50</sup> Dinshaw Wacha<sup>51</sup> had estimated that per capita consumption of cloth in India was rapidly declining. In 1919, it had declined to 9 yards of cloth per head from that of 13 yards four years ago. But mills could not come to the rescue. According to the estimates of Sir Fazalbai, for mills to satisfy India's clothing needs, it would require another fifty years.<sup>52</sup> Mills required machinery and for this, one had to be dependent on foreign countries. Obtaining and installing such machinery, besides a long gestation period, entailed other related problems. Hand spinning and weaving, on the other hand, was easy to learn and operate. There was no question of lagging behind in world competition. This was a question, rather, of the economic freedom of peasants and of the poor.<sup>53</sup>

By constant redefinition and adjustments, the substance of Swadeshi was determined. Gandhi, thereafter, with an unending arsenal of arguments, launched a massive campaign. His propaganda would be passionate. Untiringly he would travel from one place to another coaxing and cajoling people. The content of his

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 'Letter to Maganlal Gandhi', 1 July 1919, p.340.

<sup>50</sup> Banker, Shankarlal, *Gandhiji Aur Rashtriya Parvritiyan*, 1969, p.67.

<sup>51</sup> Sir Dinshaw Edulji Wacha (1844-1936), a prominent Indian Parsi politician was the President of the Indian National Congress in 1901.

<sup>52</sup> 'Speech at Gujarati Bandhu Sabha, Poona', 8 August 1919, *CHANGI*, Vol. XVI, p.20.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p.21

speeches would remain the same but language would be moulded according to the character of his audience. The analogies would differ. To the educated and urbane, he would painstakingly paint poverty, almost always giving a first hand account.<sup>54</sup> But, sometimes he would quote established names. For example, Dr. Harold Mann's<sup>55</sup> description of about four months of idleness prevalent in Deccan villages owing to absence of work, was often cited by Gandhi. Quoting authorities such as Hunter<sup>56</sup> he would hammer into his educated audience the need to adopt Swadeshi. His plea would be, when 'classes' adopt the masses follow. Following the dictum Gandhi had even sent the text of the Swadeshi vow to the Viceroy for his consideration. 'What a great thing it would be if the Viceroy would take the vow', Gandhi had written.<sup>57</sup> It behoved upon the learned men to use their discretion in favour of Swadeshi. He was not asking the city dwellers and well to do middle class, as some alleged, to adopt spinning as their sole occupation. He was asking them to devote some time to spinning so that others, at poorer level, could take inspiration from them. Their spinning would help provide pure Swadeshi cloth, khadi, to greater number of people especially at a time when production was low and disorganised. If not spin, they could at least wear Swadeshi clothes, more specifically, khadi, however coarse and costly it might be. He would talk of the artistic design of handmade cloth against the mill made cloth.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> 'Speech on Swadeshi at Fergusson College, Poona', 12 July 1919, *CWAG*, Vol. XV, p.451.

<sup>55</sup> Dr. Harold Mann of the Poona Agricultural College, author of *Land and Labour in a Deccan Village*, had surveyed the conditions in a village near Poona and he had observed that large part of the population was without work for a large part of the year and had to depend on daily labour e.g., carrying milk to Poona, working in the Ammunition Factory, etc. and for the most part it was the males only who found work in this direction

<sup>56</sup> Sir William Hunter (1840-1900) was a member of the British Committee of the Indian National Congress, London. An historian and an authority on Indian affairs, he served in India for 25 years and was sympathetic to Indian aspirations. He was the author of *Indian Empire*. Sir Hunter had categorically said in 1880 that three crores in India got only one meal a day and that too consisting of no more than plain bread and salt. 'Speech at Gujarati Bandhu Sabha, Poona', 8 August 1919, *CWAG*, Vol. XVI, p.19.

<sup>57</sup> 'Letter to J. L. Maffey', 5 May 1919, *CWAG* Vol. XV, p.275.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 'Speech on Swadeshi at Citizens Meeting, Poona', 12 July 1919, p. 453.

Gandhi was keen on introducing improvement in the spinning wheel. The success of the Swadeshi movement was dependent in a large measure on producing simple but quick working machines for ginning cotton, or making the process of carding easy and effecting possible improvements in the spinning wheel and the loom. A widespread notion that in Gandhi's movement there was no scope for improvisation of tools was prevalent. Gandhi was keen to counter such impressions. His only requirement as far as machines were concerned was that the machine must not overwhelm man, or displace them from their work.

It was evident that, if the spinning wheel could be so improved as to make it double the work it did, the movement would gather more speed and the spinners' income would increase. There was absolutely no doubt that there was vast scope for improvement in the then spinning wheel. Already at a scattered level artisans had been working to improve the spinning wheel in order to improve its productivity. To stimulate such efforts an announcement was made in the Navjivan of 5-10-1919 regarding the institution of an award of Rs 5000 offered by Mr. Rameshwar Jagjivan Mehta. The prize was offered to anyone inventing a portable spinning wheel made of indigenous components, as far as possible and which could take on ten spindles at a time. The model was to reach the Satyagraha Ashram before January 1, 1920.<sup>59</sup> The last date was later extended.

The one machine about which Gandhi got most excited about was made by Mr. Ganesh Bhaskar Kale of Dharwar. Gandhi himself reached Ahmedabad to meet Kale who had come from Dharwar. Later after a week Gandhi wrote to Maganlal 'I am simply in love with the spinning wheel and Kale'. In the Young India of dated 21-7-20, Gandhi wrote, 'In a short time India will possess a renovated spinning wheel- a wonderful invention of a patient Deccan artisan. It is made out of simple materials. There is no great complication about it. It will be cheap and capable of being easily

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<sup>59</sup> 'Notes on Spinning Wheel', Navjivan, 5 October 1919, *CWAG*, Vol. XVI, p. 217.

mended. It will give more yarn than the ordinary wheel and is capable of being worked by a five year old boy or girl'<sup>60</sup>. But all this excitement was soon muted as Navjivan of 10-10-1920 stated that the model was found unsatisfactory in some ways.

The Swadeshi movement had succeeded in eliciting the attention of a part of the intelligentsia. Lala Lajpat Rai wrote to Gandhi from New York on 20 June 1919, 'Circumstances beyond my control have prevented my taking part in the great movement that you are leading for the uplift of our common motherland'. He expressed 'substantial agreement' with the 'general spirit' of Swadeshi propaganda. 'I may be unable to sign the full pledge of a Satyagrahi but if and when I return to India I shall sign the 'pure Swadeshi spirit.'<sup>61</sup> Pundit Madan Mohan Malviya hoped to persuade royalty of India to return to the ancient calling of weaving and spinning which Aurangzeb and Kabir had done in the past.<sup>62</sup>

In Punjab amongst women Sarla Devi Choudhrani was doing a great job in propagating the values of Swadeshi. Punjab was strategically placed as far as Swadeshi propagation was concerned. It grew splendid cotton. The practice of spinning among woman was alive. Sarla Devi was involved intensely, as is evident from Gandhi's writings on her.<sup>63</sup> 'Her Khaddar Saris continue to preach true Swadeshi more eloquently than her tongue.'<sup>64</sup>

<sup>60</sup> 'The Music of the Spinning Wheel', Young India, 21 July 1920, (WAG, Vol. XVIII, p.72.

<sup>61</sup> 'Letter from Lala Lajpat Rai, from New York, 20 June 1919', Young India, 13 August 1919, (WAG, Vol. XVI, Appendix III, p.533.

<sup>62</sup> 'The Music of the Spinning Wheel', Young India, 21 July 1920, (WAG, Vol. XVIII, p.70.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 'Swadeshi in the Punjab', Young India, 7 July 1920, p.20. Sarla Devi, wife of Pt. Rambhuj Dutt Chaudhry, and grand-niece of Rabindra Nath Tagore, became the follower of Gandhi in 1919 and sent her son to be educated at Sabarmati.

<sup>64</sup> 'The Music of the Spinning Wheel', Young India, 21 July 1920, (WAG, Vol. XVIII, p.71.

Why would Gandhi focus on Swadeshi; truncated, specifically defined, and focused only to mean hand made khadi? Of course, the situation prevailing at the time warranted such a response. But, why Gandhi? And, Why not the rest? What, therefore, was the background of Gandhi that made such a response possible? What were the influences that he had imbibed to reach to this state as to embody such a response? To go into these questions would require a probing of his mentality and a peep into his past. That could begin from his adolescence to the South African sojourn. Although much has already been published on the subject such an analysis is not within the scope of this work, however, an attempt would be made to indicate certain pointers.

'Read *Hindswaraj*', Mahadevan<sup>65</sup> writes in his preface, 'if you love the human family and this earth which is our home. Read it if you wish to do your little bit to halt man's mad race towards self-extinction.' Variousy described,<sup>66</sup> John Middleton Murry characterises it as 'the greatest book that has been written in modern times', *Hindswaraj* was the culmination of Gandhi's multifarious concern. For the rest of Gandhi's eventful life, this 1909 publication remained a contentious philosophical discourse but was a constant reminder, to his friends and foes alike, of what Gandhi stood for.

In 1909 while in England, Gandhi read Edward Carpenter's *Civilization: Its Cause and Cure*. It so thrilled him-'one is always thrilled when others are seen to be thinking along more or less the same lines as oneself!<sup>67</sup>- that instantly he wrote to Polak, 'A very illuminating work'. 'His analysis of the civilisation that we know is very good. His condemnation, though severe, is, in my opinion, entirely deserved. The cure suggested by him is good, but I note that he is afraid of his own logic, naturally

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<sup>65</sup> Mahadevan, T.K., *op. cit.*, Preface.

<sup>66</sup> Rajmohan Gandhi calls *Hindswaraj* as 'A text for its times, not a text for all time'. Gandhi, Rajmohan, *The Good Boatman*, 1995, p. 139.

<sup>67</sup> Mahadevan, *op. cit.*, p.109.

because he is not certain of his ground. *No man, in my opinion, will be able to give an accurate forecast of the future and describe a proper cure unless he has seen the heart of India* (emphasis added). Now you know in what direction my thoughts are driving me.<sup>68</sup>

At the same time as his reading of Carpenter, Gandhi was called to deliver a speech at Hampstead in London. The topic of the speech was 'East and West'. This speech was important from the viewpoint that it contained what would later be found in *Hindswaraj*. 'It seems to me that the chief characteristics of modern civilization is that it worships the body more than the spirit. It gives everything for the glorification of the body. Take, for example, railways, telegraphs and telephones. Do these tend to help you forward to a moral elevation? When I cast my eyes upon India, what do I find represented there today under British rule? It is modern civilization that is ruling India. And what has it done? I hope I will not shock my hearers when I say that this civilization has done no good to India.'<sup>69</sup>

In 1915 Gandhi returned to India after spending 21 years in South Africa, honing his skills for his ultimate battle in India. It was more to be a battle for the human emancipation than for the freedom of the Indian nation. India was an apt nation for his battle bugle. From here the message would reach across the world.

'Bombay', Gandhi wrote to Maganlal Gandhi, two days after his arrival in India, on January 11, 1915, 'looks as if it were the scum of London. I see here all the shortcomings of London but find none of its amenities; this is also one of the benefits of living in India. It would seem that Lady India had resolved to exhibit nothing but the scum of London lest we should be thrown off our balance by the amenities.'<sup>70</sup> He had landed with his views about national affairs fully formed, though in deference to Gokhale's wish, he did not express them publicly for one year.

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<sup>68</sup> Mahadevan, *op. cit.*, p.130

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p.115.

<sup>70</sup> 'Letter to Maganlal Gandhi', 11 January 1915, *CWAG*, Vol. XIII, p.4.



Explaining in the first issue of *Navjivan* (7-9-1919) the aims of the journal, he said: 'Despite these limitations of mine, I clearly see that I have something to give to India which no one else has in equal measure. With much striving, I have formulated some principles for my life and put them into practice....It is my sincere aspiration to place these principles before India and share my happiness with her.'<sup>71</sup>

*Hindswaraj* contained these principles. From the perspective of this paper it is necessary to glean from the booklet what is apt. *Hindswaraj* argued two important but contrasting points: a) Modern civilisation is the code for destruction b) Indian civilisation nurtured life in its bosom and was superior to that of the west; salvation, therefore, lies in adopting the spirituality of India.

In *Hindswaraj*, Gandhi was more concerned with what India was to do after the British withdrawal than with the withdrawal itself. His meaning of *Swaraj* is what he expounds. *Swaraj* is not merely driving out the British out of India. When confronted with a scenario where India, after she had won her political liberation, would retain all things initiated by the British, Gandhi said, he was not interested in such a *Swaraj*. Retaining all that the British had introduced would effectively mean 'English rule without the Englishman'. 'You want the tiger's nature, but not the tiger; that is to say, you would make India English. And when it becomes English, it will be called not Hindustan but *Englistan*. This is not the *Swaraj* that I want'.<sup>72</sup>

England, that India is interested in copying as an ideal *Swaraj*, was itself in 'pitiable' condition. Intoxicated by modern civilisation, the west takes cognisance neither of morality nor of religion. The harshest criticism that Gandhi laid at the door of modern civilisation was that 'people living in it make bodily welfare the object of

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<sup>71</sup> 'Our Aim', *Navjivan*, 7 September 1919, *CWAG*, Vol. XVI, p.92.

<sup>72</sup> Iyer, Raghavan, *The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, 1986, Vol.2, p.208.

life'. 'Formerly, men were made slaves under physical compulsion. Now they are enslaved by temptation of money and of the luxuries that money can buy'.<sup>73</sup>

Gandhi wanted India to protect herself from the affliction of this disease of the modern civilisation. It is just a matter of time when this civilisation would be self-destructed. While all around her civilisations tumbled to destruction, Indian civilisation stood the test of the time. India's reluctance to change, which makes westerners regard her as 'uncivilised, ignorant and stolid', is, in fact, her merit. 'What we have tested and found true on the anvil of experience, we dare not change. Many thrust their advice upon India, and she remains steady. This is her beauty: it is the sheet anchor of our hope'.<sup>74</sup>

Gandhi makes a virtue out of India's technological backwardness in the face of galloping race, in the West, for increasing mechanisation, a process that was inaugurated by the industrial revolution. Defining civilisation as that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty, Gandhi argues for the mastery over mind and passions.

We notice that the mind is a restless bird; the more it gets the more it wants, and still remains unsatisfied...Our ancestors, therefore, set a limit to our indulgences. They saw that the happiness was largely a mental condition...Observing all this, our ancestors dissuaded us from luxuries and pleasures. We have managed with same kind of plough as existed thousands of years ago. We have had no system of life corroding competition. Each followed his own occupation or trade and charged a regulation wage.

It was not that we did not know how to invent machinery, but our forefathers knew that, if we set our hearts after such things, we would become slaves and lose our moral fibre. They therefore after due deliberation decided that we should only do what we could with our hands and feet. They saw that our real happiness and health consisted in a proper use of our hands and feet....They were satisfied with small villages....A nation with a constitution like this is fitter to teach others

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p.213.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p.231.

than to learn from others. This nation had courts, lawyers and doctors, but they were all within bounds. The tendency of the Indian civilisation is to elevate the moral being, that of the Western civilisation is to propagate immorality.<sup>75</sup>

His complaint was that India too was turning irreligious under the pernicious influence of modern civilisation. India had lost herself as she had fallen under the temptation. But there was hope for India, as vast tracts of India remained untouched by the 'cursed modern civilisation'.

What Carpenter could merely postulate, Gandhi had resolved to do. While the West would grope in wilderness, India would spill the light of wisdom. It was not a matter of self-gratification. It was only that providence had destined so. With that determination, Gandhi had departed from South Africa. But, alas, the determination would soon melt into compromises, unable to withstand the heat generated by the real politic.

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<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*, p.232.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE IDEOLOGY OF **PASSION**

THE HIKE 1920-25

*Khadi, pushed relentlessly by Gandhi, would achieve the pinnacle of power and nation-wide attention, but.....*

While presenting the contents of the Swadeshi vow to the nation on April 8, 1919, Gandhi had made a distinction between Swadeshi and Boycott. While Swadeshi was a religious conception, boycott, he said, was a 'purely worldly and political weapon'. The Swadeshi vow was not derived from any extraneous happening.<sup>1</sup> It was an 'eternal principle' whose neglect had brought untold grief to mankind. It meant production and distribution of articles manufactured within one's own national boundary.<sup>2</sup> Gandhi had confined Swadeshi, in its narrow and contemporary form, to mean only self sufficiency in cloth, that too through hand made khadi. It meant, therefore, saving the exchequer the amount spent on importing cloth and providing a much needed supplementary industry in the countryside.<sup>3</sup>

Boycott of British goods, on the other hand was rooted in ill-will and a desire for punishment. It was a temporary, makeshift policy resorted to compel the hands of the British people by deliberately making an attempt to inflict a monetary loss upon them. It operated as an undue influence brought in to secure one's purpose. On the practical side, to be effective, boycott had to be universal. Since boycott was a punishment and as no punishment could be a duty, boycott unless it produced its effect was a wasted energy. 'I can see nothing but harm', Gandhi wrote, 'in the end for a nation which resorts to boycott'.<sup>4</sup> A satyagrahi, according to Gandhi, would never participate in any boycott movement and a perpetual satyagraha was not possible without Swadeshi. He did not favour the idea of resorting to boycott till the Rowlatt legislation was withdrawn. In such a boycott scheme, according to Gandhi, it was only British goods that were excluded and not other foreign goods. 'If I must

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<sup>1</sup> 'The Swadeshi Vow-I', 8 April 1919, *CWAG*, Vol. XV, p.197.

'I think of Swadeshi not as a boycott movement undertaken by way of revenge. I conceive it as a religious principle to be followed by all.' 'Speech at Missionary Conference, Madras', 14 February 1916, *CWAG*, Vol. XIII, p.222.

<sup>2</sup> 'Is Boycott Swadeshi?', *Young India*, 14 January 1920, *CWAG*, Vol. XVI, p.480

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> 'The Swadeshi Vow-I', 8 April 1919, *CWAG*, Vol. XV, p. 197.

use foreign goods, having political relations with England, I would only take English goods and consider such conduct to be proper'.<sup>5</sup> Fearing a surge of ill will against the Europeans he, later, had abandoned the suggestion for the destruction of foreign cloth in the possession of the signatories to the pledge.<sup>6</sup> This was as late as May 1919, one month after that great catharsis of Indian national movement, Jallianwala Bagh massacre. Even in January 1920, Gandhi, showing his utmost disapproval of the boycott agenda. He argued that his fundamental opposition to it was based on his spiritual conception. But he disagreed that it was impractical. 'Spirituality is nothing if it is not eminently practical'.<sup>7</sup>

All these changed, once the Hunter Commission Report (instituted in the aftermath of the massacre to measure the magnitude of the Punjab atrocities and published in May 1920) absolved those who had mercilessly mowed the people. The nation's innocence was ripped apart. With his faith sheared and his innocence injured, Gandhi raised the banner of revolt, which for its vehemence of attack was unprecedented. Gandhi had cherished his faith in the British Government for so long that when the revulsion came it expressed itself in a language which was unmistakably strong. Already to the Muslims, in November 1919, he had suggested the adoption of non-co-operation as their response to the breach of faith committed by the Allies regarding the Ottoman empire. The absolving of the perpetrators of Punjab crime and the insensitive handling of it by the English people residing in India, provided the proverbial last straw. He began ceaselessly rallying people around his agenda of non-co-operation. Boycott was now at the centre of this Agenda. Boycott of law-courts, of schools, of Legislative Councils, of titles, of every thing that even remotely smacked of the government connection. 'Non-co-operation with the government for more co-operation with the people', became the war cry.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 'The Swadeshi Vow', 13 May 1919, p.308.

<sup>7</sup> 'Is Boycott Swadeshi?', *Young India*, 14 January 1920, *CWAG*, Vol. XVI, p.482.

<sup>8</sup> 'Notes-The Wheel to the Rescue', *Young India*, 5 June 1924, *CWAG*, Vol. XXIV, p.183.

At the Amritsar Congress of December 1919, Gandhi's method of warfare, Satyagraha, had already been unveiled.<sup>9</sup> The Non-co-operation movement was launched as both the Indian and Imperial Government had failed in their duty towards the grievances of Khilafat and Punjab. The Indian National Congress was to adopt the Non-co-operation at its specially convened session at Calcutta in September 1920. Here, Gandhi almost forced the acceptance of his agenda of Non-co-operation on the Congress. He had done enough ground work for this inevitability. The Central Khilafat Committee had already accepted it as its mode of agitation. It had fixed 1<sup>st</sup> August 1920 as the launch date of Non-co-operation. The resolution passed by the Committee had included the agenda of Swadeshi. Gandhi had then hesitated. The Swadeshi movement was intended to be a permanent one. Swadeshi was an evolutionary process gaining strength constantly and was independent of the justice or injustice of the ruler or the British people. It was the Khilafat leader, Maulana Hasrat Mohani, whose sheer insistence, had made Gandhi agree to its inclusion. Mohani was, as most Muslims were,<sup>10</sup> a proponent of boycott of British goods. Having failed in enthusing his people, he had accepted Swadeshi as the lesser good.<sup>11</sup> But Gandhi's acquiescence for its inclusion had a different rationale. He was of the opinion that the Khilafat agitation would benefit the cause of the Swadeshi. He had insisted on its pursuance without waiting for the launch date of the movement.<sup>12</sup>

The Non-co-operation movement was conceived as discipline in self-sacrifice. As a measure of discipline and self-sacrifice, the resolution asked the people to adopt

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<sup>9</sup> Pt. Motilal Nehru's Presidential address: A new force was introduced in our politics, a force with the most tremendous potentialities. India's masses were suddenly awakened and the message of Satyagraha entered the humblest home.

<sup>10</sup> 'For them [Muslims] Swadeshi means boycott. I have stated my view that boycott will not serve our purpose: even then, to the extent that boycott implies Swadeshi, it is bound to produce some good.' 'Uses of Khadi', *Navjivan*, 25 April 1920, *CWJMG*, Vol. XVII, p.338.

<sup>11</sup> 'Khilafat and Swadeshi', *Young India*, 25 August 1920, *CWJMG*, Vol. XVIII, p. 196.

<sup>12</sup> 'Statement by Non-co-operation Committee', Before 7 July 1920, *CWJMG*, Vol. XVIII, p.13

Swadeshi clothes. And as the indigenous mills were not in a position to provide the national demand, the Resolution advised the people to contribute to indigenous manufacture by hand spinning. *'If crores of people will refuse to wear or use foreign cloth and be satisfied with the simple cloth that we can produce in our homes, it will be the proof of our organising ability, energy, co-operation and self-sacrifice that will enable us to secure all we need. It will be a striking demonstration of national solidarity'*.<sup>13</sup> The rejection of foreign cloth could be achieved by new method of production and a judicious distribution. Production meant millions of people spinning in their home. It required earnest men to be engaged in honestly distributing carded cotton and collecting yarn and paying for it. It meant manufacturing of thousands of spinning wheels. It meant inducing the hereditary weavers to return to their noble calling and distributing home-spun yarn amongst them and setting their manufactures. It was as this energising agent, that Swadeshi was included as a plank in non-co-operation.<sup>14</sup>

Most disconcerting element of the resolution, for Gandhi, was the clause for the boycott of foreign goods.<sup>15</sup> It was an anomaly for which, he confessed, he was not 'originally responsible'.<sup>16</sup> A complete boycott of foreign goods, Gandhi held, was 'a practical impossibility',<sup>17</sup> as India's reliance on imported goods was immense. Swadeshi had meant a permanent boycott of foreign goods. Boycott of foreign cloth was included in it. The clause-an 'unfortunate interpolation'-therefore, according to

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<sup>13</sup> 'Khilafat and Swadeshi', YI, 25 August 1920, *CWAG*, Vol. XVIII, p.197.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> 'The Non-Co-Operation Resolution', 5 September 1920, *CWAG*, Vol. XVIII, p.231.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 'Speech on Non-co-operation Resolution', Calcutta Congress, 8 September 1920, p. 248.

<sup>17</sup> 'Speech Replying on non-co-operation Resolution, Calcutta', 8 September 1920, *CWAG*, Vol. XVIII, p. 250. In an article Gandhi again reiterated his happiness at the inclusion of the clause in the Resolution. 'The Congress', *Young India*, 15 September 1920, *CWAG*, Vol. XVIII, p. 262.



Gandhi, marred the 'musical harmony of the programme'.<sup>18</sup> In his conception one who had understood the idea of Swadeshi would never use foreign goods.<sup>19</sup>

From the beginning Gandhi had not put much faith on the wisdom of adopting a total boycott of foreign goods. He regarded it impractical. It was against the ethics on which the non-co-operation movement was conceived. It was conceived in a spirit of self sacrifice and was a matter of sacred duty. The boycott of foreign goods was imbued with a motive of inflicting punishment, a path tangential to the spirit of the movement. It was a sign of weakness and would have retarded the process of regeneration.<sup>20</sup> Gandhi, however, made a distinction between the boycott of all foreign goods and that of foreign clothes. While the implementation of the former was impossible, the latter, according to him, contained solutions for India's ills.

At Calcutta Congress, Gandhi announced that if there was sufficient response to his programme of non-co-operation, Swaraj would be attained in one year. Swadeshi was a way to it. It formed 'the biggest, the safest, and the surest part'<sup>21</sup> of the non-co-operation. The principle of Swadeshi did not involve hatreds against and exclusion all things foreign. Boycott of foreign goods meant no more and no less than boycott of foreign cloth. In a letter to Englishmen Gandhi allayed their fears, 'you will not mistake this for a movement of general boycott of foreign goods. India does not wish to shut herself out of international commerce. Things other than cloth which can be better made outside India she must gratefully receive upon terms advantageous to the contracting parties. Nothing can be forced upon her'.<sup>22</sup> If its meaning got

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<sup>18</sup> 'Speech on Non-co-operation Resolution', Calcutta Congress, 8 September 1920, *CWAG*, Vol. XVIII, pp. 248-9.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 'Speech on Boycott at Gujarat Political Conference', 29 August 1920, p. 215. V.J. Patel's note on Draft Instructions, contrary to Gandhi, read, 'I can not endorse the view that Boycott of foreign goods is an unfortunate interpolation due to a misapprehension'.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 'Boycott of Goods v non-co-operation programme, *Young India*, 25 August 1920, p.198

<sup>21</sup> 'The Mists', *Young India*, 20 April 1921, *CWAG*, Vol. XX, p.15.

<sup>22</sup> 'An Open letter to every Englishman in India', *Young India*, 13 July 1921, *CWAG*, Vol. XX, p. 368.

confined only to cloth, it was not for any extraneous reasons. Swadeshi therefore was an attempt to provide India with an occupation which could be easily taken up by its people and which was rooted in its soil. As long as India could not provide her famished population with a source of income it was sin to import cloth.

The country had lost its freedom when a circumstantial conspiracy had forced her to abandon the Swadeshi cloth. The loss of supplementary industry, vital for an agricultural society, had sapped India's vitality and made famines an ever-recurring phenomenon. India could regain her freedom, her vitality, if it reverted to hand spinning and hand weaving her cloth. This needed an awakening of faith in people. The Bezwada programme was a calculated step in the direction. It was the most concrete programme ever placed before the nation. The AICC at its Bezwada meeting in the last week of March 1921 adopted three resolutions a) collection of Tilak Memorial Swaraj Fund of one crore rupees; b) enrolment of one crore congress members; and c) distribution of two million Charkha. All to be achieved by the 30<sup>th</sup> June.<sup>23</sup> Mere collection of targeted money or recruitment of a crore of Congress members would not have won India her Swaraj. But the mere exercise to attain the target would have signalled India's resolve. It was to be an exercise in faith building.

The programme charted out at Bezwada, except for the collection of one crore of rupees, remained unfulfilled on its D. Day. Even the completion of monetary target was made possible by the contribution from rich friends of Congress. Till the first week of June a mere twenty lakh had been collected. In the last three weeks, before the end of deadline, rest of the amount was scrambled through.<sup>24</sup> This was significant. Gandhi's promise of Swaraj in one year, voiced at Calcutta Congress, would not be possible as long as the message had percolated down to populace.

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<sup>23</sup> 'Resolution at A.I.C.C. Meeting, Bezwada', 31 March 1921, *CWAG*, Vol. XIX, p. 496

<sup>24</sup> 'Notes-The need of the hour', *Young India*, 8 June 1921, *CWAG*, Vol. XX, p. 178.

The adoption of non-co-operation by Congress brought its own share of criticisms. Gandhi could not absolve himself from being charged of fomenting hatred. In reply to Sarla Devi, who had regretted Gandhi's involvement in Non-co-operation as it was, in her opinion, based on hatred, Gandhi wrote that the movement was a matter of religion with him. He was engaged in gathering 'the forces of hate and directing them in a proper channel'.<sup>25</sup> To Ronaldshay<sup>26</sup>, he was more forthright. It was a mockery, Gandhi wrote, to ask India not to hate when in the same breath, India's most sacred feelings were contemptuously brushed aside.<sup>27</sup>

Rabindra Nath Tagore, in three successive letters, all published in March 1921, interpreted India's message to the world.<sup>28</sup> In that message, non-co-operation had no place. 'The ideal of India is against the intense consciousness of the separateness of one's own people from others, and which inevitably leads to ceaseless conflicts. The non-co-operation was an attempt at 'spiritual suicide'. It was 'a doctrine of separation, exclusiveness, narrowness, and negation'.<sup>29</sup> But, which India's message Tagore wanted to disseminate to the world. An India which largely went un-fed and unclothed for want of an occupation. An India of famine and nakedness. Tagore's was a typical response of a poet. A caged, famished, and prostrate India could give no message to the world, however lofty it might be in the poet's conception. To make the world hear India's message she first had to say no to her tutelage. Non-co-operation was designed as India's message as she had no choice save between non-

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<sup>25</sup> 'Letter to Sarla Devi Chowdharani', 17 December 1920, *CWAG*, Vol. XIX, p.137.

This was written in reply to a letter in which Sarla Devi had expressed her regret over Gandhi being engaged in non-co-operation which, in her opinion, was based upon hatred. She had stated that she could have loved him more if had got rid of hatred.

<sup>26</sup> Sir Ronaldshay (1844-1929) was a diplomat and author. He was the Governor of Bengal from 1917 to 1922.

<sup>27</sup> 'Notes- On the wrong track', *Young India*, 18 December 1920, *CWAG*, Vol. XIX, p.81.

<sup>28</sup> 'Tagore's criticism of non-co-operation', *CWAG*, Vol. XX, Appendix IV, pp. 539-44

<sup>29</sup> 'The Poet's Anxiety', *Young India*, 1 June 1921, *CWAG*, Vol. XX, p.161.

co-operation and violence. As far as imbued negativity of the movement was concerned, Gandhi said, the final word of the Upanishads was NOT(*neti*).<sup>30</sup>

The nation prepared to put its emphatic NO to her tutelage to Britain. On 31<sup>st</sup> July 1921, at a mammoth meeting held near the Elphinstone Mill of Sheth Yusuf Sobani, in Bombay, Gandhi inaugurated the boycott campaign with a bonfire of foreign cloth. It had been resolved to effect total boycott of foreign cloth by 30<sup>th</sup> September. Gandhi was optimistic of a positive response to his call. As a concession to the Muslim sentiment, the Provincial Congress Committee had left it optional to the cloth givers to choose between destruction and despatch to elsewhere.<sup>31</sup> Destruction, however, was deemed as the best method to deal with foreign cloth.

Critics overwhelmed Gandhi. 'The picture of you lighting that great pile, including beautiful fabrics', C. F. Andrews wrote<sup>32</sup> in a 'pathetic and beautiful' letter, 'shocked me intensely'. It was something 'violent, distorted, unnatural...' There was a subtle appeal to 'racial feeling' in that act which exemplified 'selfish nationalism'. The act, Andrews wrote, would go against the poor as price of cloth would be escalated beyond their reach. Repelled by destruction Andrews suggested, in his letter, distribution of discarded foreign clothes among the poor. Gandhi was not convinced. Had the emphasis been on all foreign goods, it would have been rightly termed as 'racial, parochial and wicked'.<sup>33</sup> The emphasis was on foreign cloth. To him, therefore, the restriction made the world of difference. Within 150 years of imperialist rule, India, through a deliberately planned destruction of the spinning and weaving industries, had been reduced to penury and privation. She had been forced to abandon her traditional calling. Tainted with shame and self degradation,

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 'The final word of the *Upanishads* is NOT. *Neti* was the best description the authors of the *Upanishads* were able to find for *Brahman*.' p.163.

<sup>31</sup> 'Notes-Why Burn?', *CWAG*, Vol. XX, p.432.

<sup>32</sup> Quoted in 'Ethics of Destruction'. *Young India*, 1 September 1921, *CWAG*, Vol. XXI, p.41.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

foreign cloth was a painful symbol of India's capitulation to temptation and persecution. This, therefore, was fit to be destroyed. He further added in his letter to Andrews, 'I am transferring the ill will from men to things'.<sup>34</sup>

The object of burning foreign cloth was to create greater aversion to it. 'The central point in burning is to create an utter disgust with ourselves that we have decked ourselves at the expense of the poor'.<sup>35</sup> It would be an affront to their sensibilities if now they were given discarded cloth. Further, won't the poor be precluded from participating in national struggle if wearing foreign cloth was regarded as national sin. Sending such clothes outside India was less objectionable as 'there are things which may be sinful, not always and everywhere, but only at a particular place'.<sup>36</sup> The contention that burning was unethical as it entailed destruction of human labour was untenable. Everything is destructible. 'God has ordained the destruction of even such an essential instrument as human body'.<sup>37</sup> Did not the burning of foreign cloth involve a breach of the pledge of non-violence? Gandhi was categorical in his answer. 'Cleansing of filth is not violence'.<sup>38</sup> 'Destruction is the quickest method of stimulating production. By one supreme effort and swift destruction, India has to be awakened from her torpor and enforced idleness', Gandhi wrote in 'Ethics of Destruction'.<sup>39</sup>

The aggressive espousal of the boycott was perhaps also to do with the reality of khadi. Although production of the khadi was rising its consumption had stagnated. The target consumer for khadi was urban Indian with an average income. If they

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> 'Letter to Manibehn Patel', 11 July 1921, *CWAG*, Vol. XX, p. 348.

<sup>36</sup> 'Discussion on Boycott at A.I.C.C. meeting, Bombay', On or after 28 July 1921, *CWAG*, Vol. XX, p.445. (The A.I.C.C. met from July 28 to 30, 1921)

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p.446.

<sup>39</sup> 'Ethics of destruction', *Young India*, 1 September 1921, *CWAG*, Vol. XXI, p.44.

had continued to possess their stock of foreign cloth then they would be reluctant to buy khadi. But if the destruction of their foreign cloth is turned into a national duty then a new market for the Swadeshi would be created. In this scenario, maximum benefit would accrue to khadi.

Foreign clothes constituted the largest drain from India. She had the ability to manufacture all her cloth. The mills did not and could not immediately manufacture all the cloth needed. The weavers wove more cloth than the mills. A successful boycott of foreign cloth, therefore, could be achieved by increasing the output of yarn and this could only be done by hand spinning. To bring about such a boycott, merchants had to stop all foreign imports. The mill owners would have regularise their profits and manufacture principally for the Indian market. The householder would have to revise his or her ideas of fashion. The consumers would have to refuse to buy any foreign cloth and to buy khadi wherever possible. They would have to wear only khadi cloth, mill cloth being retained for the poor. They would have to use (till Swaraj is established and khadi manufacture increased) just enough khadi for covering the body.<sup>40</sup>

Gandhi was aware of the fact that if boycott was successfully implemented, the nation would face a shortage of cloth. This would tempt Indian mill owners and cloth merchants to take advantage of the situation by raising the prices of their produce. He asked the well to do people to leave the mill cloth for the poor while they were to use only khadi. Any raising of prices in mill cloth would hit the poor most. This would go against the movement. Khadi production was not high enough, neither was it so organised that it could be increased rapidly.

Gandhi desired to meet the situation through three different ways. At first, he wrote open letters to mill owners and cloth merchants with a plea to instil national

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<sup>40</sup> 'How to boycott foreign goods'. The Bombay Chronicle, 4 July 1921, *CWAG*, Vol. XX, p.321

sentiments in their trading practices. Reminding them of their role during the 1905 movement when taking advantage of people's patriotism they had greatly increased the prices of their products, he asked them not to repeat the act again.<sup>41</sup> Second, he asked the people to do self-spinning so as to rely on home production for self consumption. Gandhi later saw the futility of appeal to the 'patriotism of those whose chief aim is to increase their own profits'.<sup>42</sup> 'I belong to a province which has a large number of textile mills and I have happy relations with mill owners. But I know that they have never stood by the country in the hour of its need. They plainly tell us that they are not patriots, that their sole aim is to make money'.<sup>43</sup>

But to appeal to the patriotism of the people, he did not think was futile. Yet, to change people's taste at the altar of patriotism proved to be quite difficult. Incongruities such as wearing khadi on public occasions and at the other times most fashionable suits, came to be reported frequently. Gandhi, however, was optimistic about heralding in a new khadi fashion.

Every national school and college, Gandhi declared, was to be turned into a factory for preparing cones of yarns for the nation. . Normal activities remain suspended in abnormal times. So in this abnormal time students all over India had to suspend their normal studies for one year and devote their time to the manufacture of yarn by hand-spinning. The only education that was to be imparted, both among children and adults, was to be spinning. Spinning and systematic production of yarn was to be introduced in every national school.<sup>44</sup> The slogan was to turn students into 'spinning addicts'.<sup>45</sup> It was thought that the students would restore hand spinning

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<sup>41</sup> 'An appeal to cotton mill owners', The Bombay Chronicle, 6 July 1921, *CWAG*, Vol. XX, p.331

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 'The message of the Charkha' Young India, 29 June 1921, p.295.

<sup>43</sup> 'Speech on Franchise Resolution, Subjects Committee Meeting, Kanpur', 24 December 1925, *CWAG*, Vol. XXIX, p.352.

<sup>44</sup> 'Duty of Spinning', Navjivan, 20 January 1921, *CWAG*, Vol. XIX, p.259

<sup>45</sup> 'My Notes' Navjivan, 8 May 1921, *CWAG*, Vol. XX, p.76

to its respectable status. They would hasten the process of making khaddar fashionable.<sup>46</sup> In any curriculum of the future, Gandhi claimed, spinning was to be a compulsory subject. Its introduction, he thought, could revolutionise ideas of financing education as students could fund their own education.

There were complaints that many used the khaddar dress as a cloak for their deceit. Some of the users were neither imbued with the spirit of non-co-operation nor with that of truth. These were inevitable pitfalls of a transitional stage. It would not be right to attribute all virtues to khadi. But such abuse of khadi, Gandhi warned, must not even unconsciously be allowed to be used as an argument against its use. 'The use of khaddar represents nothing more than a practical recognition of the greatest economic necessity of the country. Even a scoundrel may recognise this necessity, and has, therefore, a perfect right to wear it'.<sup>47</sup>

The slogan of Swadeshi comprised of two aspects. One was the boycott of foreign cloth and the other was production of the indigenous cloth to replace the boycotted segment. Indigenous production could mean production through textile mills and hand spinning and hand weaving. If India was to achieve self sufficiency in clothing, hand loom sector could make a valuable contribution. A correspondent of Gandhi contended that if the total amount of twist and yarn that was being produced in India, without the use of the Charkha were converted into cloth, it would suffice for India's needs. As a matter of fact, about 143 million pounds of twist and yarn made in India were being exported every year from India. Therefore, India's clothing needs could be taken care of if there were sufficient power or hand looms. Increasing power looms could be a difficult proposition, as it required foreign machinery which was a financial drain and was hard to get. The correspondent alleged that in the high pitch propaganda for hand spinning, hand loom had been left to fend for itself.

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<sup>46</sup> 'Speech to students of Gujarat Mahavidyalaya, Ahmedabad', 13 January 1921, *CWAG*, Vol. XIX pp.225-30.

<sup>47</sup> Notes: 'Abusing the khaddar' *Young India*, 19 February 1921, *CWAG*, Vol. XIX, p.337.



The solution, Gandhi's correspondents wrote, lay in doubling the existing number of hand looms.<sup>48</sup>

Gandhi was not interested, as suggested, in imploring the mill owners from refraining to export the yarn. It was not because of a pro-capitalist tilt in Gandhi, as some would infer. To convince the mill owners, who exported their yarn, to forego their profits was an impossible proposition. But, even if that would have been possible, utilising mill yarn for hand loom weaving was not to serve his purpose. Even if it gave cloth self-sufficiency to India and benefited the caste of weavers, it accumulated wealth in the pockets of a few mill owners.<sup>49</sup>

Gandhi's emphasis on hand spinning was due to its capacity to provide employment. India was bearing an annual drain of wealth owing to its import of foreign cloth. It was also losing its manpower owing to the absence of remunerative occupation. Surveys had shown that owing to the absence of supplementary income, India's rural population went work-less for more than four months in a year during the agriculturally lean periods. Dependent as it was on the vagaries of monsoon for its agriculture, the occurrence of drought was not something new for Indian economy. But, earlier it had a supplementary occupation to subsist on.

An agricultural society to subsist needed a supplementary occupation. In spinning, India, a hundred years ago, had such an occupation That was why, it was designed not as an occupation but as a duty to be borne by all those who inhabited the society, irrespective of caste and class. India had remained an agricultural society but aggrandising imperialist economic policy had robbed Indians off of that

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<sup>48</sup> 'Greater Use of Hand looms', *Young India*, 11 May 1921, *CWAG*, Vol. XX, pp.91-3.

<sup>49</sup> 'I am not boycotting Indian mills as such, because that is unnecessary. But if the people fall back upon Indian mills, only then I will boycott Indian mills also because they will not solve the ultimate problem.... I am against concentrating the manufacture of cloth in the hands of few just as I would be concentrating the cooking of our food in hotels.' Interview to "Daily Express", Madras, 15 September 1921, *CWAG*, Vol. XXI, p.107

supplementary occupation. While the traditional rural occupation was wiped out, no attempt was made to re-industrialise India with modern industries. Romesh Dutt, reading whom Gandhi had wept, has succinctly described this process.<sup>50</sup> Result was the widespread loss of employment to rural population, bringing in its wake hunger, deprivation, and death. That was why famine and poverty was pervasive in India.

Self-sufficiency in cloth was a target to be achieved but in a way that, it also provided much needed supplementary occupation to rural India. Increasing the textile mills would have restricted the outflow of Indian wealth. But it was no easy task. The machinery for the mills was to be imported, entailing further drain. Further, the mills could not be increased overnight. Not just its installation was difficult, but it carried long gestation period. Moreover it was Gandhi's firm conviction that if the mills alone produced all the needed clothes then India would not be able to win Swaraj, or having won it would not be able to keep it. Only way out, therefore, was to increase the production of hand spun hand woven cloth.<sup>51</sup>

His purpose was to revive the hand spinning so as to re-distribute the wealth to the maximum number of the people. Gandhi's idea was that by adopting hand spinning, the country would not only achieve self sufficiency in clothing by import substitution, but such wealth as gained from import curtailment would be distributed among the poor. Hand spinning had an advantage of distributing wealth to the poor which hand loom weaving by foreign or Indian mill yarn could never achieve.<sup>52</sup> When self sufficiency in cloth was achieved- cloth formed the largest chunk of Indian import during the period- then the country could tackle other segments of import.

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<sup>50</sup> Dutt, R.C., *The Economic History of India since the Advent of the East India Company*. Vol. 1&2. 1901,1903.

<sup>51</sup> 'Speech at Santa Cruz, Bombay', 24 July 1921, *CWAG*, Vol. XX, p. 424.

<sup>52</sup> 'Greater Use of Hand looms', *Young India*, 11 May 1921, *CWAG*, Vol. XX, pp.91-3

Gandhi's insistence on making spinning universal was not easily understood by the intelligentsia. To many of them both, Gandhi and Charkha, eluded comprehension. They saw in his insistence an attempt to foist *Hindswaraj* as a manifesto of development on India. Utterly uncomfortable with the *Hindswaraj* ideas, they ridiculed Gandhi's attempt to relate spinning to fulfilment of Swaraj.

'To me' recalled Nirad C Chaudhri of his view of Gandhi in 1921, 'all these demands of Mahatma Gandhi seemed not only extreme, but even crude and irrational. It appeared to me that his entire ideology was driven by a resolve to abandon civilised life and revert to a primitive existence.'<sup>53</sup> Chaudhri was not alone in characterising Gandhi as backward and primitive.

Aurobindo Ghose, the rebel recluse, was another such person who would never reconcile to Gandhi's method.<sup>54</sup> Ghose had fled to Pondicherry, unable to bear the heat of British prosecution for his militant activities during the anti-partition agitation of 1905-8, and had taken the mantle of spirituality. Jinnah saw in Gandhi's insistence on winning Swaraj through spinning wheel the same such streak.<sup>55</sup> Charkha was a butt of jokes among his opponents. But even among his close comrades, such as Jawaharlal Nehru, it remained an irritating element (more on this later).

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<sup>53</sup> Cited in Dalton, Dennis, *Mahatma Gandhi- Non-violent Power in Action*, 1993, p.63.

<sup>54</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *India's Rebirth*, 1994. Aurobindo has many a times been extremely critical of Gandhi's views on charkha as is obvious from the following extracts:

'He made charkha a religious article of faith and excluded all people from Congress membership who could not spin. How many even among his own followers believe in this gospel of Charkha? Such a tremendous waste of energy just for the sake of few annals is most unreasonable.' , 27 December 1938, p.207.

'He is for going back to the old system of civilisation, and so he comes in with his magical formula "Spin, spin, spin"...It is all a fetish.' , 27 December 1938, p. 208.

'What a tremendous generalizer Gandhi is ! Passive resistance, Charkha and Celibacy for all ! One can't be a member of the Congress without oneself spinning !, 16 January 1939, p. 211.

'Will he face an army with his Charkha?', 5 May 1940, p.216.

<sup>55</sup> Roy Chowdhury, P.C., *Gandhi and his Contemporaries*, 1986.

Tagore, as has been noted above, was critical of the non-co-operation movement. Fraught in it, Tagore wrote, was the pernicious gospel of narrow nationalism. Gandhi had extolled the ideal of universal harmony but he had not singled out Indian nationalism as the threat to that ideal. His criticism was rather reserved for the western nation state system. Tagore asserted that in principle there was no distinction: 'Nationalism is a great menace', he declared, and with this generalisation Gandhi may have agreed. But Tagore added: 'It is the particular thing which for years has been at the bottom of India's troubles'.<sup>56</sup>

What Tagore meant by the above statement that for years nationalism has put other, more important and urgent, issues on sidelines. The greatest disservice nationalism had rendered India, Tagore argued, was to have directed the country's attention away from its primary needs. 'Our real problem in India', contended Tagore, 'is not political. It is social'.<sup>57</sup> The nationalist clamour leads to a pursuit of political goals to the neglect of pressing social problems. The Extremist's attempt, Tagore wrote, during the earlier movement at fostering the nationalism came cropper as they were inspired by the West and lacked any sympathy for the particular Indian problems. 'They did not recognise the patent fact that there were causes in our social organisation which made the Indian incapable of coping with the alien'.<sup>58</sup> Nationalism could not prompt a social and moral reform of the nature that was needed; rather it would only whet the popular appetite for increased political warfare. The real task before India is building a good society, and 'society is the expression of those moral and spiritual aspirations of man which belong to his higher nature'.<sup>59</sup> If India pursues political independence to the exclusion of all else, she may attain a sovereign state; it will be one, however, in which old social and moral maladies are not purged.

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<sup>56</sup> Dalton. *op. cit.*, p.68.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p.69.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p.70

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

These were ideas which were profoundly similar to those of Gandhi's. They ultimately agreed on the primary need for social reform in India, as well as on the essential meaning of Swaraj. 'I have always felt', Tagore once wrote, 'and said accordingly, that the great gift of freedom can never come to a people through a charity. We must win it before we can own it. And India's opportunity for winning it will come to her when she can prove that she is morally superior to the people who rule her by right of conquest'.<sup>60</sup> Something remarkably similar is said by Gandhi in the beginning of his Indian career, which he repeated number without count and brilliantly brought into practice throughout his political career.<sup>61</sup>

On August 29, Tagore gave an address entitled 'The call of Truth'.<sup>62</sup> A remarkable commentary, it offered both a trenchant criticism of Gandhi's leadership and an eloquent defence of individual freedom with which Gandhi, more than all Indian leaders of the time, had identified himself. While abroad, Tagore says, he had heard nothing but high praise of the non-co-operation movement. Then, in a chilling paragraph, he tells of what he found on his return to India: '...But what I have seen and felt troubles me. Something seems to be weighing on the people's spirit; a stern pressure is at work; it makes everyone talk in the same voice and make the same gestures.'

This climate of opinion, Tagore believed, was a manifestation of nationalism at its worst. 'Slave mentality' of this nature rather than alien rule, is 'our real enemy and through its defeat alone can Swaraj within and without come to us.' Gandhi's directives, which urged among other things the manual spinning of yarn and burning of foreign cloth, were not being weighed by critical minds; rather, they had

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p.72.

<sup>61</sup> 'Swaraj is not to be attained through an appeal to the British democracy, the British people. They can not appreciate such an appeal.... We have to demand Swaraj by our own people. Our appeal must be to them. When the peasantry of India understands what Swaraj is, the demand will become irresistible.' 'Speech at Gujarat Political Conference -I', 3 November 1917, *CWAG*, Vol. XIV, p. 55.

<sup>62</sup> Tagore, Rabindranath, 'The Call of Truth', *The Modern Review*, October 1921.

been accepted as dogma. And, 'As dogma takes the place of reason, freedom will give way to some kind of despotism'.<sup>63</sup> Tagore himself remained highly critical of Gandhi's directives. He found Gandhi's dicta on spinning and cloth burning negative and destructive. 'Swaraj is not a matter of mere self sufficiency in the production of cloth. Its real place is with in us, the mind with its diverse power goes on building Swaraj for itself'.<sup>64</sup> Gandhi's tenets of Swaraj and Swadeshi struck Tagore as medieval in their compulsive desire for simplicity; they closed doors to economic advance. 'There are many who assert and some who believe that Swaraj can be attained by the Charkha. But I have yet to meet a person who has clear idea of the process'.<sup>65</sup> In their rabid advocacy of narrow form of Swadeshi they cramped Indian attitudes into a restrictive provincial mould, inhibiting the mind's 'diverse power' to go on 'building Swaraj for itself'. Gandhi's approach to social reform, Tagore contended, would not stimulate the 'mind unfoldment', but rather restrict its development and lead to its atrophy. On national level this approach would result in a deplorable attitude of isolationism and hostility toward the rest of the world.

The Gandhi-Tagore controversy thus focused on two aspects of the meaning of Swaraj. Tagore argued, first, that on a domestic level, Indians had placed themselves in bondage through their unthinking acceptance of dogma. They idolized a leader who, however, saintly, had harnessed their blind allegiance to a gospel of retardation rather than growth. A second and related feature of Gandhi's teaching was its implication on an international level. Gandhi's ideas, Tagore argued, had fostered, for the most part, an unhealthy sense of separateness that foolishly spurned the knowledge and advances of the Western world. Each of these attitudes inhibited India's growth and thus restricted her freedom.

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<sup>63</sup> Dalton, *op. cit.*, p.74.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Tagore, Rabindranath, 'The Cult of Charkha'. *The Modern Review*, September 1925, pp 263-270.

Gandhi responded to the first of Tagore's charges that he did not wish to produce a 'deathlike sameness in the nation',<sup>66</sup> but rather to use the spinning wheel to 'realize the essential and living oneness of interest among India's myriad.' 'Hunger is the argument that is driving India to the spinning wheel'. Spinning was not intended to replace all other forms of activity, but rather to symbolise 'sacrifice for the whole nation'.<sup>67</sup>

'If the poet span half an hour daily his poetry would gain in richness. For it would then represent the poor man's wants and woes in a more forcible manner than now'.<sup>68</sup> Spinning for Gandhi, then, was a symbolic form of identification with the masses. Tagore, however remained suspicious of any such abstract appeal and tended to identify this symbolism with aspects of Indian nationalism. Moreover when Tagore accused Gandhi of narrow provincialism, the latter replied, 'I hope I am as great a believer in free air as the great poet. I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any'.<sup>69</sup> And when Tagore warned him of the inevitable danger inherent in his nationalism, Gandhi argued, 'My patriotism is not exclusive; it is calculated not only not to hurt any other nation but to benefit all in the true sense of the word. India's freedom as conceived by me can never be a menace to the world.' 'India must learn to live before she can aspire to die for humanity'.<sup>70</sup>

What were the strengths and weaknesses of Tagore's critique of Gandhi? Tagore's invaluable contribution came with his clear exposition of Swaraj as meaning more than political independence, as demanding basic social change and self-realisation.

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p.75.

<sup>67</sup> 'The Great Sentinel', *Young India*, 13 October 1921, *CWAG*, Vol. XXI, p.289.

<sup>68</sup> Dalton, *op. cit.*, p.75.

<sup>69</sup> 'Notes', *Young India*, 1 June 1921, *CWAG*, Vol. XX, p.159

<sup>70</sup> 'The Great Sentinel', *Young India*, 13 October 1921, *CWAG*, Vol. XXI, p.291

Gandhi had of course recognised this but Tagore drove the point home. He had courageously denounced Gandhi's doctrine. Yet, both his theory and practice fell short of enumerating a method of political and social change. He, in his time, remained a powerful critic. To him it might have seemed, that he was championing the cause of personal freedom but to others, voicing such dissent at such a juncture of the national movement seemed nothing but high treason. He, however, was not alone in expressing such dissenting voice, there were many. But while Gandhi could ignore others, Tagore, India's poet laureate, he had to take into account.

Gandhi believed, contrary to Tagore, that those factors which made India subservient to an alien power, could only be routed by first unshackling the yoke. The Non-co-operation movement, therefore, if, on one plane, it was launched to demand corrective measures from an insensitive government for the Punjab and Khilafat wrongs, on the other plane, it was a movement for self discipline and self sacrifice. Satyagraha by its nature was not externally directed. It was a weapon to keep oneself abreast with one's conscience. The greatest evidence that can be offered in support of the contention that Gandhi's movement was more a measure in self discipline than desire for national vendetta emerged from his response to the event at Chauri Chaura. The moment self discipline slackened, he called off the movement, without waiting for the fulfilment of the demands that was set in the beginning. The plethora of accusations that Gandhi faced for unilaterally calling off the movement is a history in itself.

'The crime of Chauri Chaura' was said to embody a 'divine warning' to Gandhi. Heeding this warning, he called off, what George Lloyd later called a 'colossal experiment in world's history'.<sup>71</sup> While comrades and lukewarm(to Gandhi) Moderates fumed and fretted, Gandhi got arrested. In his famous trial he proclaimed himself to be weaver by occupation. The judge awarded him, at the age of 54, a

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<sup>71</sup> 'Drew Pearson's Interview with Sir George Lloyd'. *CHANG*, Vol. XXIII, p.557



prison term of six years. By getting jailed not only was Gandhi removed from the stage but it effectively put a lid over the national movement.

For all practical purposes thereafter, the movement rescinded backwards. The lawyers moved back to law-courts, students to the government schools. Within the Congress a deep ideological division erupted bringing back the memory of Surat. Writes a biographer of C.R.Das, 'With the incarceration of Mr Gandhi, in March,1922, the Charkha movement received a great set-back and these whilom [sic] symbol of Indian independence and prosperity were relegated to the scrap-heap.... Chitta Ranjan had never pinned his faith to the cult of the Charkha, and this led to the formation of the Swaraj Party in 1922, to carry on the non-co-operation campaign more effectively from within the council'.<sup>72</sup> The Party made council entry its sole political agenda thus effectively putting a seal over Non-co-operation.

The non-co-operation movement failed to take into account the logic of the relationship between destruction and construction. It asked people to withdraw from the law courts in favour of indigenous arbitration bodies; asked students to boycott the government aided or controlled educational institutions in favour of national schools and universities. But the pace of establishment of substitute national bodies were far behind the rapidity of destruction that it demanded from the people.

The non-co-operation movement asked, and rightly so, the people to make sacrifices. National calamities such as war entails withdrawal from the normal activity. A nation that wins the war is the nation that makes the biggest sacrifice. But a war, violent in design, requires heavy and swift sacrifice from a limited number of people and sometime, if at all, from all the national citizens, but they are always of short duration. Gandhi's non-violent, non-co-operation war required sacrifices which

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<sup>72</sup> Ray, Prithwis Chandra, *Life and Times of C.R. Das: The Story of Bengal's Self Expression*, 1927.

were light but spread over a long duration and required a level of sacrifice from all the national citizens. Violent warfare required sacrifices which often were externally directed. Gandhi's non-violent warfare required an internal discipline and a sacrifice which were internally directed. Former is always a lot easier than the latter.

Immediately after the suspension of the movement, students returned to their former discarded institutions as the construction of national schools could not keep pace with the rate of withdrawal from the government schools. Similar predicament was faced by those who accepted the Khadi as a national duty. The propaganda had made its importance clear. But the required level of infrastructure had not been built to meet the stimulated demand. Result was the 'moral and not material'<sup>73</sup> progress of the Khadi movement. The result of the propaganda had been spurt in the prices of yarn and cloth without a corresponding increase in their production. Opening of Swadeshi stores and formulation of the Swadeshi vows had helped in raising the demand. But production remained stagnant. Charkha manufacture was centred at ashram. As the demand got increasingly posted to ashram it was realised that the message had not reached correctly. Gandhi's idea was to use local carpenter to manufacture the Charkha. But as the demands poured in, it was clear that work among the artisan class had not yet begun. Neither had the movement been able to make Gandhi a more comprehensible commodity among his educated compatriots.

Gandhi's sole emphasis on boycotting foreign clothes, as to stimulate his Charkha movement, could not be comprehended by his critics as well as comrades in arms.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> 'Swadeshi'. Young India, 8 September 1920, *CWAG*, Vol. XVIII, p.239.

<sup>74</sup> 'My very efficient English nurse, whom I loved to call 'tyrant' because she insisted in all loving ways on my taking more food and more sleep than I did, with a smile curling around her lips and insidious twinkle in her eyes, gently remarked after I was safely removed to a private ward, escorted by the house surgeon and herself: "As I was shading you with my umbrella I could not help smiling that you, a fierce boycotter[sic] of everything British, probably owed your life to the skill of a British surgeon, handling British surgical instruments, administering British drugs, and to the ministrations of a British nurse. Do you know that as we brought you here, the umbrella that shaded you was of British make?" The gentle nurse, as she finished the last triumphant sentence, evidently expected my complete collapse under her loving sermon. But happily, I was able to confound her self assurance by

If freedom was the aim of national struggle then it would climax into termination of British hegemony. If that was the case then that aim could be best achieved by crippling the British Interest in India. What could be the best means than the total boycott of empire goods?

In 1924, after Gandhi was released and when it was largely perceived that non-cooperation had failed to attain its set target, the question of boycott of British goods was re-opened. In response Gandhi pointed the folly of resorting to the boycott of British goods. Besides the ethical soundings that Gandhi made against the boycott of the empire goods, his opposition was also on the ground of wasteful dissipation of national energy. Gandhi argued that the effect was maximum when forces impact were concentrated. 'If there are many reforms that have to be brought about, we should find out the principal ones and concentrate on them', Gandhi wrote to Vasumati Pandit. 'The others would follow automatically.'<sup>75</sup>

There were many who took Gandhi's insistence on Charkha as a setback for India's mill industry. There were other criticisms too. Wrote in a correspondent: 'Your activity is useless... I suggest... Substitute hand spinning with machine spinning. Erect a spinning wheel in every Taluka. Nationalise the profits. Only patriots should work the mills not for gain, but for love of the country. Distribute the yarn to the local weavers only. The cloth woven should be confined to the respective Talukas. You thus save waste of time and freight. To start with, organise one Taluka in this manner and you will render great service'.<sup>76</sup>

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saying: "When will you people begin to know things as they are? Do you know that I do not boycott anything merely because it is British? I simply boycott all foreign cloth because the dumping down of foreign cloth in India has reduced millions of my people to pauperism." I was even able to interest her in the Khaddar movement. Probably she became a convert to it. Anyway, she understood the propriety, the necessity and the utility of Khaddar. But she could only laugh (and rightly) against the wholly ineffective and meaningless boycott of British goods' *CHMG* Vol. XXIV, p.54.

<sup>75</sup> 'Letter to Vasumati Pandit', 23 June 1924, *CHMG*, Vol. XXIV, p.283

<sup>76</sup> 'Notes-Machine Spinning v. Hand-Spinning', *Young India*, 26 June 1924, *CHMG*, Vol. XXIV, p.303.

The 'central truth' about the Charkha movement, Gandhi pointed, was that the wheel furnished an occupation and a small income to the millions on the margin of starvation. 'A loom in every village, a Charkha in every home is the formula'.<sup>77</sup> Installing a spinning mill in every Taluka would result in 'nationalising the exploitation of the many by the few'. 'Mills can not grow up like mushrooms, as charkhas can. The failure of a Charkha is felt by nobody; the failure of a Taluka mill will mean consternation among the people of the Taluka concerned'.<sup>78</sup>

It was further argued, 'while you [Gandhi] hope to bring prosperity to a very large number of lower orders who know no respectability and can in any way make both ends meet, you will doubtless be bringing ruin to an equally large or at least a very considerable number of high-and middle-class men'.<sup>79</sup> Gandhi termed the letter a 'heartless performance' and wished that the correspondent's fear about the impending collapse of mills came true. "He will discover then that India will be pulsating with new life... (But) Is he sure that 'lower orders know no respectability'? ...And may I inform the correspondent that the 'lower orders' not only do not 'make the two ends meet', but the majority of them living in a state of semi-starvation? If the middle class people voluntarily suffer losses for the sake of the 'lower classes', it would be but tardy reparation for their participation in their exploitation".<sup>80</sup>

In fact, Gandhi was not opposed to Indian mills producing cloth, as some like above quoted correspondents alleged. He offered no competition to mills through his khadi propaganda as Indian mills alone were not in position to produce enough to satisfy the indigenous cloth demand. But if mills came 'in conflict with the interest of

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> See fn. 82.

<sup>79</sup> 'A Plea for Mills', *Young India*, 17 July 1924, *CWJG*, Vol. XXIV, p.405.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p.406.

the masses', Gandhi was categorical, he would not hesitate in raising the gauntlet even against them.<sup>81</sup>

In early 1924 Gandhi was released from incarceration. Motilal Nehru and Chitranjan Das, the leading lights of the Swaraj Party, met a convalescing Gandhi at Juhu, Bombay, to acquaint Gandhi of their work in the council, and also to ask for his support for their work. The difference between them was, as Gandhi later said in a statement released to the press, 'honest and fundamental'.<sup>82</sup> The negotiation remained inconclusive, or better, collapsed under the weight of fundamental contradiction between the interlocutors. The Council-entry was inconsistent with the spirit of Non-co-operation.

The stalemate continued. The Swarajists had veered around the Council programme as in their view the non-co-operation had failed and the contention that Swadeshi would lead to Swaraj had exposed its limitation. To Gandhi, the prognostication that non-co-operation was dead, seemed wrongly presumed.<sup>83</sup> The critics saw nothing, he bemoaned, in the slow and unexciting khadi programme. A movement could not be run solely on negative agenda. 'Nature abhors vacuum'. Construction must be apace with destruction. The khadi programme was an integral part of Non-co-operation in its positive aspect. But to many of his political comrades khadi remained the area of incomprehensibility. Even those who understood the economic implications of the Charkha movement failed to understand its linkage with Swaraj.<sup>84</sup> 'I often wonder whether it is sufficiently realised that our movement is not one for mere change of personnel but for change of the system and the methods'.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p.407.

<sup>82</sup> 'Statement to Associated Press of India', 22 May 1924. *CWAG*. Vol. XXIV, p.109.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 'Is it Non-co-operation?', *Young India*, 8 May 1924, p 14.

<sup>84</sup> The Government however understood the implication of khadi propaganda for the stability of the Raj much better, as is evident from its efforts to put a ban on its employees on wearing the khadi cap. It also came out with pamphlets decrying khadi propaganda.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p.13.

Khadi was an indispensable preparation for civil disobedience.<sup>86</sup> A complete implementation of khadi programme entailed full Swaraj. It would demonstrate India's capacity for self-government. But in the battle for political supremacy between the No-Changers and the Pro-Changers it was this constructive part of the agenda that would suffer most.

The Pro-Changers, who later came to form their own Swaraj Party, never a believer in khadi's efficacy, had thrown khadi in disuse. Even among the No-Changers, the ideologically close comrades of Gandhi, khadi had remained a mere ceremonial dress, for other purposes they unhesitatingly used mill cloth.<sup>87</sup> Gandhi was distressed by those who used khadi only to please him and wear it on ceremonial occasion. 'The wearing of khaddar to patronize me is worse than useless and wearing of it on ceremonial occasions only is hypocritical. Do you not agree with me that both patronage and hypocrisy should be banished from our midst? If you believe in the potency of khaddar, you will take it up, not because I advocate it, but because it has become part of your life'.<sup>88</sup>

To the middle class Gandhi had recommended spinning as a daily practice for the sake of self-training, for the sake of producing a Charkha atmosphere and for the sake of making it possible to give higher wages to those who spun for hire.<sup>89</sup> Unable to take them along, he began contemplating transforming Congress into an

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p.14.

<sup>87</sup> 'It distressed me to find that several Swarajists had said final good-bye to khaddar and that the material of which their was made was foreign. A few have threaten that, if I persecute them in the manner I am doing, they would give up khaddar and the charkha altogether. I am told that many No-Changers are not much better. Khaddar with them still remains a ceremonial dress, but for household wear they do not hesitate to wear *videshi* or mill-cloth. 'Open Letter to A.I.C.C. Members,' Young India, 26 June 1924, *CWAGI*, Vol. XXIV, p.287.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 'A Heart Searcher', Young India, 8 May 1924, p.12.

exclusively khadi-producing and khadi-propaganda organisation till the attainment of Swaraj.<sup>90</sup>

Conceding the council entry programme of the Swaraj party as a settled fact, Gandhi adopted an attitude of complete neutrality to the Swaraj Party. He however sought to put the Congress under the executive control of those who believed in devoting the energies and resources of the organisation exclusively to the constructive programmes.<sup>91</sup> With this aim in view he gave notice of certain resolution which he proposed to move at the meeting of the AICC scheduled to be held at Ahmedabad at the end of June 1924. The effect of these resolution would be to exclude members of the Swaraj Party from the representative and executive organs of the Congress. Gandhi's aim was not merely to introduce homogeneity in these bodies, but to ensure vigorous prosecution of the constructive programme. His proposal therefore were intended to ensure 'that appearance corresponded with reality'.<sup>92</sup>

From 27 to 30 June 1924 the All India Congress Committee (AICC) met at Ahmedabad. In an earlier issue of *Young India*(19-6-1924), through a signed article, Gandhi had provided the text of four resolutions that he intended to propose to the AICC. The first resolution was to make it compulsory for all the members of the various representative Congress organisations to regularly spin for at least half an hour every day. The yarn thus spun was to reach the secretary of the All India Khadi Board(AIKB) every month. This would make the Congress a truly mass organisation by requiring its active members to identify themselves with the economic distress in the country. The resolution provided a penalty clause by which any member failing to send the prescribed quantity of 2,000 yards would be deemed to have vacated his office. Other resolutions attempted to make transgressing the above Congress resolutions an offence, and reiterated faith in the Congress creed of non-violence.

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<sup>90</sup> 'The Realities', *Young India*, 11 September 1925, *CWAG*, Vol XXV, p.123

<sup>91</sup> Preface to *CWAG*, Vol. XXIV, p.vi.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

While arguing in defence of the resolutions Gandhi said they were pre-conditions for his acceptance of the national leadership.<sup>93</sup> At Belgaum in December 1924 Gandhi was to take the presidentship of Congress for the ensuing year.

In an open letter to AICC members, before the resolutions were passed, Gandhi explained his belief in the potency of khadi to herald Swaraj. It embodied two facets. One, terrible and another, benign. In its terrible aspect it was calculated to bring about the only boycott that India required for its independent existence. In its benign aspect, it was hope for India's multitude who went un-fed and unclothed due to absence of any remunerative occupation.<sup>94</sup>

The resolutions were hotly debated. An earlier resolution of AICC imploring Congress representatives to at least learn the art of spinning was barely adhered to. The bare fact was that Congressmen generally lacked the kind of faith in khadi that Gandhi demanded. C.R.Das, never comfortable with the khadi programme, raised the issue of infringement of Congress constitution. He said under Article 31 of the Congress constitution, this resolution, making spinning obligatory on the part of Congress representatives, could not be valid; for it infringed the fundamental right of electors to choose their own representatives. Gandhi in response said his resolutions did not restrict the rights of the electors, but only advised the electors to do the needful. The matter about the constitutional violation was put to vote in the Working Committee that met on June 26. Except for Bengal, most of the other provinces favoured Gandhi's resolution and thus Das' position was defeated.<sup>95</sup>

On June 28, the spinning resolution was put before the AICC for its approval. Gandhi was aware of the magnitude of opposition to his resolutions. When the spinning resolution was put to vote, it were the Swarajists who, by abstaining,

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<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 'The Acid Test', Young India, 16 June 1924, p.267.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 'Open Letter to A.I.C.C. Members', Before 26 June 1924, p.286.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 'Speech at AICC meeting, Ahmedabad', 28 June 1924, p.308.



bailed him out from facing an acute embarrassment. The spinning resolution passed into the annals of history carried only by 67 against 37 votes.<sup>96</sup> If the votes of the Swarajists, who had left the meeting without voting, were added Gandhi would have got a certain defeat.<sup>97</sup> Aware of the positions Gandhi advised the meeting to rescind the penal clause, which was then duly rescinded.

These resolutions were, as mentioned earlier, Gandhi's terms for resuming leadership of the national movement. 'All the four resolutions then constitute my application for employment as general and lay down my qualifications and limitations'.<sup>98</sup> But the outcome of the deliberations at the AICC meeting made him pause and think.<sup>99</sup> 'Though on all the four resolutions I had the honour of moving, I had the majority in their favour, I must own that, according to my conception, I was defeated. The proceedings have been an eye opener to me and I am now occupied in a diligent search from within.'<sup>100</sup> His anguish is evident from his confession: 'It takes much to make me weep. I tried to suppress tears even when there is occasion for them. But, in spite of all my efforts to be brave, I broke down utterly.'<sup>101</sup>

Though 'Defeated and humbled',<sup>102</sup> Gandhi strove to find a method of working in harmony, if not, in co-operation, with the Swarajists. He was disturbed by the

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<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 'Speech and Resolution on Penal Clause', 28 June 1924, p.312.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 'The All India Congress Committee', Young India, 3 July 1924, p.341.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 'The Acid Test', Young India, 19 June 1924, p.269.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, In the AICC meeting Gandhi encountered a series of defeats, the first being his backing out of penal clause in the spinning resolution. But most painful of his defeat was that Gopinath resolution which was carried by bare majority of eight votes in favour of Gandhi. Defeat here meant all these years of ploughing on making Congress accept non-violence as its creed or even as its policy had been futile. Congress had not understood Gandhi, it had proved him by its response to all the four resolutions that Gandhi introduced. 'The All India Congress Committee', Young India, 3 July 1924, p.341.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 'Interview to Associated Press of India', 1 July 1924, p.332.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 'Defeated and Humbled', Young India, 3 July 1924, p.334

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, Title of an article written in Young India, 3 July 1924, pp.334-40.

squabbling among the no-Changers and the Swarajists. He pleaded with the No-Changers to surrender control of the Congress executive bodies to the Swarajists, wherever necessary, to avoid bitter fighting in the Congress and advised them to concentrate their energies on propagation of Khadi.<sup>103</sup>

Gandhi himself took every opportunity in his journals to exhort readers to take up spinning, and gave detailed publicity to the Khadi work being done in different parts of the country. He proposed spinning as a full time employment even for prisoners. Addressing teachers and students of National Schools, on several occasions he urged them to give more and more of their time to Khadi work, and suggested that spinning should be introduced as a compulsory activity in national schools.<sup>104</sup>

Why did Gandhi stake all on the spinning resolution? One of the reasons concerned the economics of khadi. During his Punjab tour in 1919, the women had lovingly thrown balls of hand spun cotton yarn to him which he had collected and sent them to the Satyagraha Ashram. This had enabled him to sell khadi manufactured at the ashram at a cheaper rate.<sup>105</sup> Moreover if thousands spin for love, it was possible to give higher wages for spinning even if price of khadi was kept stable. With a similar view in mind Gandhi started a practice of asking people to give him garlands made of hand spun yarn instead of flower. He urged the intelligentsia to adopt spinning not as an occupation, as was often wrongly understood, but as a national duty. The idea was to induce the intelligentsia to adopt spinning as a contribution to the nation so that the enormous amount of yarn thus produced would take care of the economics of khadi. The introduction of the spinning resolution at the AICC was an

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<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 'The Lokmanya Anniversary', Young India, 31 July 1924, pp.471-3.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 'Inaugural Address at Gujarat Vidyapith', 10 June 1924, p.217. Also see preface to *CHIC* Vol XXIV, p. vii.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 'Boycott Foreign Cloth', Young India, 22 May 1924, p.102.

attempt to institutionalise this free flow of hand spun yarn to take care of the high cost of khadi and increase the wages of the spinners.

There was another factor too in his exhorting the intelligentsia to take to spinning. Gandhi was convinced in the efficacy of khadi to provide relief to the 'starving skeletons stalking the street'. The famine that he witnessed in Orissa had rattled him to the core. The essence of the resolution adopted by the AICC was that, inspired by the example of the delegates, the people would contribute their labour for half an hour every day as a matter of sacrifice.<sup>106</sup> This sacrifice was necessary as India lacked self government which meant that Indian textiles could not be protected against foreign competition. Voluntary sacrifice for a time by the middle class was to do what a national government would have done naturally. As Gandhi wrote, the very purpose of asking people for voluntary sacrifice was that :

Khadi could be made cheaper; people instead of idling away their time, could spend it in the service of the country; the rich could establish a direct link with the poor and think of them everyday; everyone may help in bringing about the boycott of foreign cloth; the middle class which lived on the toil of the poor and willingly gave nothing in return could now give something; the middle class could, by its example of spinning, show to the poor who had lost faith in life itself the means of recovering that faith.<sup>107</sup>

The spinning resolution was the first step towards shaping the Congress in the khadi mould. In Gandhi's programme the Congress had to progressively represent the masses. In 1924, not only the national movement was at its lowest ebb, but the Congress, as Gandhi was aware, was organisationally weak. It had a dearth of 'sufficient honest and able workers'.<sup>108</sup> In its organisational history the Congress never, even at the peak of the non-co-operation movement, had a membership of a crore. In 1924, its nominal roll did not exceed 'two lakhs for all India'.<sup>109</sup> Gujarat,

<sup>106</sup> 'First Test', Navjivan, 24 August 1924, CWAIG, Vol. XXV, p.32.

<sup>107</sup> 'Spinners Association', Navjivan, 24 August 1924, CWAIG, Vol. XXVIII, p.289.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 'The Realities', Young India, 11 September 1924, p.123

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

which had the largest number of members on its roll, had less than 20,000 members.<sup>110</sup> Moreover, these members would get activated on only two occasions. 'Once while collecting four anna and next while seeking their votes'.<sup>111</sup>

At Ahmedabad, in July 1924, Gandhi was accused of fomenting divisions in the Congress with his insistence on spinning resolution. Still he had gone ahead and carried the resolution. The spinning resolution required the Congress representative to spin 2000 yards of yarn a month. It, however, was not compulsory, as the penalty clause, in deference to the Swarajists, had been rescinded. Although the dilution had not satisfied Gandhi,<sup>112</sup> he had expected, in his characteristic optimism, an overwhelming response. The result however belied his expectation.

For the month of August, the first month when spinning resolution was brought in effect following its approval at the Ahmedabad A.I.C.C meeting, the figures of yarn return exposed the reality (See Table 1). The percentage of members complying with the resolution was only 14 percent of the names on the register. The non-members to send their yarn were over 67 percent. In Gujarat, which in compliance with Gandhi's wishes had restored the penalty clause while ratifying the spinning resolution at its Provincial Conference, the compliance percentage was 42%-the highest. Gujarat had the best organisation and facilities for learning and practising the art of spinning. Bengal stood next to Gujarat. Bengal's success was again due to its organisation. In appreciation of Bengal, Gandhi wrote, 'Bengal was the home of the finest spinners the world has produced. Bengal felt the full force of the cruel hand of the East India Company. Nothing therefore can be appropriate than that Bengal should lead the way in giving India the largest number of volunteer spinners.'<sup>113</sup> Gandhi, through an article in Navjivan, asked, those representatives who had failed to comply, to

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<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 'Causes of failure', Navjivan, 14 September 1924, p.142

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> 'First test', Navjivan, 24 August 1924, *CMG*, Vol. XXV, p.32.

<sup>113</sup> 'A Study in Figures', Young India, 28-8-1924.

resign from their positions in the Congress hierarchy. 'A resignation devoid of bitterness or hatred is a welcome act. I think it is right for a man to resign if he has no faith in the spinning wheel'. Such resignation would make the Congress 'a purer and a stronger organisation'.<sup>114</sup>

**Table 1: Yarn Returns for the first month of August, 1924**

Name of Province	No. of Representative	Member Spinner	Non-member Spinners	Total Spinners
Andra	1653	302	127	429
Assam	250	34	2	36
Ajmer	57	9	6	15
Bombay	242	64	21	85
Burma	36	1	1	2
Bihar	1074	174	34	208
Bengal	1549	401	43	444
Berar	255	1	0	1
C.P.Murathi	942	44	23	67
C.P.Hindi	1324	66	5	71
Delhi	185	6	6	12
Gujarat	408	177	668	845
Karnatak	163	23	18	41
Kerala	53	2	0	2
Maharashtra	674	137	25	162
Punjab	255	23	0	23
Sindh	262	36	12	48
Tamilnad	826	79	11	90
United Provinces	1581	135	27	162
Utkal	413	32	5	37
TOTAL	12202	1746	1034	2780

(Source: Young India, 28-08-1924)

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

The low return figures only made Gandhi more determined in his resolve to transform the Congress. The next step was to bring about a change in the Congress constitution to fructify his desire. The aim remained much the same. The method, however, underwent little alteration. As the Swarajists were unmoved on the desirability of their Council programme, Gandhi now was prepared to accept their position and compromise and win them over.

The success of a non-violent person lies in his defeat. An advocate of non-violence never fights for power; he even propagates his creed not on the strength of a majority but through spiritual power. If his non-violence was true, he believes that ultimate victory would be his even when he is alone, that is to say, the creed would win in the end if he sticks to it in the face of death. The creed will have to adopt a human form in order to propagate itself among human beings. It means that someone must die for the sake of the creed.<sup>115</sup>

Gandhi, in his single minded pursuit of transforming the Congress, was prepared to relinquish the political arena in favour of Swaraj Party. In three successive letters, all written in August 1924, Gandhi lay bare his plan to Motilal Nehru.<sup>116</sup> 'I wanted to say', Gandhi wrote in the first of these letters, written on August 9, 'that I was prepared to facilitate your securing the Congress machinery, actually assisting you to do so.' He was, however, reluctant to be recognised as siding with Swarajists while at the same time he was ready to relinquish the Congress. In the last of these letters, dated August 30, Gandhi wanted, a resolution to be introduced at the Calcutta AICC meet. The text of the resolution spelled his future intention.

It reiterated the Congress belief in the principle and policy of full non-co-operation including the boycott of legislative bodies. But at the same time advocated suspension of them all save that of foreign cloth up to the end of 1925. By this it provided a respectable loophole to the Swarajists to pursue their Council

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 'Causes of failure'. Navjivan, 14 September 1924, p.140.

<sup>116</sup> Letter to Motilal Nehru, 9.15.30, August 1924. (CWG), Volumes: XXIV(p.537 &578 respectively) and XXV, p. 53.

programme. Desirous as Gandhi was to end all 'domestic wrangling', it invited all, Liberals and Independents included, to join Congress, so as to forge a national front. It asked for Congress activity to be confined solely to the spread of hand spinning and hand spun khaddar, Hindu-Muslim unity, and for Hindus the removal of untouchability.

But the most important change it demanded was alteration in the Congress franchise. It sought to abolish four *anna* franchise that Gandhi himself had introduced, in 1920, during the first major overhaul of the Congress constitution. The four *anna* franchise was the minimum qualification required to become the Congress member and thus acquire a voting right. This minimum was introduced so as to expand its mass base. Gandhi now asked for its substitution by a spinning qualification. The proposed franchise provisioned a membership qualification that required every member to spin for half an hour per day. The yarn, at least 2,000 yards, was to be delivered to the Congress from month to month. It also provided for the supply of cotton to members who were too poor to afford it.<sup>117</sup>

Despite pursuing different programmes the Gandhi formula promoted peace between the factions. But more important than anything, it provided a chance to Gandhi to concentrate his effort on khadi. The ostensible purpose for these changes, as Gandhi wrote, was to subside 'domestic wrangling'. The real intent, however, was to keep the Congress free purely for internal development for full one year.<sup>118</sup> The year 1925 was to be his as the president of the Congress; he wanted to mould it according to his vision of the constructive programme.

Khadi had moved a substantial distance from the days of Swadeshi pledges. In the beginning, these pledges, both mixed and pure, recognised the need of mill cloth.

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<sup>117</sup> 'Spinning Resolution', *Young India*, 10 July 1924, *CJMG*, Vol. XXIV, p.371.

<sup>118</sup> 'The Realities', *Young India*, 11 September 1924, *CJMG*, Vol. XXV, p.124.

Then slowly, as the Swadeshi movement gained momentum, the focus shifted primarily to the propagation of khadi, without, however, advocating the ban on mill cloth. Later it was not just sufficient to use khadi. As the shortage of khadi was felt acutely, the people were asked to spin their own yarn as the religious duty. Khadi was made compulsory for the Congress volunteers. Next step was to make it compulsory (although, the penalty clause was deleted later) for the Congress representatives to spin a fixed quantity of yarn to be sent to AIKB. Now, Gandhi desired to introduce spinning as a qualification for franchise i.e., for even being a member of the Congress.

And it was here that Gandhi faced a sceptical opposition from his Congress colleagues. At first minor issues were raised. The scheme raised the pecuniary qualification, the argument went. It would disfranchise thousands of the Congress workers, it was contended. For the first objection Gandhi had offered to provide free supply of cotton to those who could not afford it. For the second, he termed it 'chimerical'. A voter is one who has a stake in the organisation.

The substance of objection, as Gandhi wrote, was, 'Spinning as a voluntary sacrifice is all right, but as a qualification for franchise it is galling'.<sup>119</sup> Gandhi found it surprising. 'If a monetary qualification, that is, restriction, may be imposed, why not a working qualification?', he asked. His appeal had targeted those who believed in voluntary spinning as an absolute necessity for the country. He likened the spinning condition for franchise with the situation in France where compulsory military training was a must for its citizenry. An organisation had the right to require its members to fulfil certain obligations. It had to have a direction of purpose.

In recommending spinning, Gandhi's sole idea had been to present a programme, which would easily appeal to the common mind and also be a uniting force. A

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<sup>119</sup> 'Spinning Franchise'. Young India, 16 October 1924. *CIMG*, Vol. XXV, p.237.



protracted negotiation culminated in the Calcutta Agreement between Swarajists and Gandhi in November, 1924. Gandhi credited the Swarajists for yielding to the 'bitterest pill', the spinning franchise.<sup>120</sup> The Agreement signed by Gandhi and the Swarajists, Das and Nehru, accepted Gandhi's proposal with important modifications which substantially diluted Gandhi's programme.

On spinning franchise the agreement was reached that persons desiring to become the Congress member but prevented by 'illness, unwillingness or any such cause' to contribute 2000 yards of self spun yarn could fulfil the franchise qualification by sending a like quantity of yarn spun by any other person. Instead of making khadi wearing a compulsory act, as Gandhi had desired, the Calcutta agreement watered it down to mean wearing khadi 'at political and Congress functions or while engaged in Congress business' only.<sup>121</sup> The Agreement was later ratified at Belgaum, where the Congress met for its annual stock taking under the auspices of Gandhi.

Gandhi, through his insistence on the spinning franchise, had desired to sensitise the educated Indians of India's poverty. But the measure also promoted a certain amount of political hypocrisy. It turned khadi, as alleged by the No-Changers, into a kind of ritual. Gandhi, in order to buy peace with the Swarajists, had diluted his programme, retaining the 'spiritual content'.<sup>122</sup> The dilution was the outcome of his abhorrence of factional struggle. Also, Gandhi was warned that the khadi programme was doomed to fail. Vithalbhai Patel told Gandhi that he was taking a fatal step by asking for the spinning franchise. Patel argued that ninety percent of the Congressmen were against the proposed change in the franchise. He said that there was hardly any Swarajist who favoured a change in the franchise, and there

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<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 'The Agreement', *Young India*, 13 November 1924, p.310-14

<sup>121</sup> 'Joint Statement with Swaraj party Leaders', Calcutta, 6 November 1924, *CWAGI*, Vol. XXVIII, pp.288-89.

<sup>122</sup> 'Discussion with No-Changers', Calcutta, 7 November, *CWAGI*, Vol. XXV, pp.292-6.

was a large body of opinion even among the No-Changers against the change.<sup>123</sup> Patel however was overruled by Das, who assured that the Swarajists fully backed Gandhi.<sup>124</sup> In a speech at the AICC on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1924 at Bombay, Gandhi had spoken for the acceptance of the Agreement arrived at Calcutta.

What we have got from the Swaraj Party is the maximum we could get ... a number of Swarajists is against khaddar....The No-Changers believe in the possibility, in the ability, in the capacity of khaddar. I do believe in the capacity of khaddar. I can not help myself in so believing. In my dream, in my sleep, while eating, I think of the spinning wheel. The spinning wheel is my sword. To me it is symbol of India's liberty. I can not help feeling like that. Such is not however the idea of the Swarajists. Many of them have sentimental objection. That being so I had to make a concession...I do not believe that the spinning wheel will give anything substantial to India. But is it a sin to spin?....Accept it even for the sake of discipline... I do not want to appeal to your heart. I want to appeal to your cold reason...<sup>125</sup>

But soon, however, it was clear that it was the force of his personality rather than any conviction on the part of the delegates, which carried the spinning franchise resolution at Belgaum. The diluted resolution was clear evidence of the fact. Perceptibly nothing had changed in the franchise. In its practical terms, the spinning franchise meant two categories of Congress members. First category was of those who spun themselves. Second category comprised of those who got their yarn spun by hire. It meant, a member having no faith in the spinning programme could still retain the franchise, taking the benefit of the 'unwillingness' condition. A member unwilling to indulge in self spinning so as to retain the Congress membership could get his yarn spun by someone else or by paying. Later, even this much effort was often not made. The fear of No-Changers that with the introduction of the spinning franchise, the rich would dominate Congress membership, never came true.<sup>126</sup> The members just dropped out of the Congress. In both categories membership touched its lowest ebb.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 'Speech at Subjects Committee Meeting', Belgaum, 23 December 1924, p 451.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 'Speech at AICC Meeting', Bombay, 23 November 1924, pp.344-54.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 'Discussion with No-Changers', Navjivan, 16 November 1924, pp. 292-96.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE IDEOLOGY OF **PASSION**

THE SLIDE 1925-30

**....ultimately a disillusioned Gandhi would go into political hibernation...with educated India refusing to accept his khadi programme**

The year 1925, was Gandhi's year as the Congress President. He had chalked out his programme for the unfolding year. It was the programme for generating internal strength, without which, in his view, the Swaraj Party's work in the legislatures would be ineffective. 'I must apply myself', Gandhi Wrote in Young India on April 16, 'to preparing efficient, non-violent, self-sacrificing workers with a living faith in hand-spinning and khaddar...For the current year at any rate, this is the national programme and no other.'<sup>1</sup> Spinning was the sole national programme for the year to come.<sup>2</sup>

The year 1925 was to witness an extensive, year long India-wide tour by Gandhi, during which politics was voiced only in an undertone. The constant refrain in his speeches was spinning. The impressions of khadi work gained during the tours were mixed. 'The discarding of khaddar is most noticeable', Gandhi wrote in May 1925.<sup>3</sup> All along his tours he witnessed the demonstration of the fact. On his southern tour, he found the farce that spinning franchise had been reduced to. The Congress organisations there 'almost universally' accepted money in lieu of yarn for membership<sup>4</sup>. This was in clear violation of the Congress constitution. The idea behind the yarn being treated as subscription was to acquaint the Congress members with the hand-spun yarn. But it was obvious from the response that the members would not take even the trouble of buying the yarn and instead would pay the money. Further, there were members who persisted in attending Congress meetings without being fully clad in khadi, contrary to the Congress constitution.

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<sup>1</sup> 'My Position', Young India, 16 April 1925, CWMG, Vol. XXVI, p.512.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.513.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 'Illuminating Documents', Young India, 7 May 1925, p.576.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 'Two Questions', Young India, 2 April 1925, p.445.

At Nagpur, Gandhi was given a report to acquaint himself with the Congress work in the Central Province.<sup>5</sup> In March 1925, the report read, the Provincial Congress Committee of the Central Province had a membership of 204 of which 114 were self-spinners and 90 gave yarn spun by others. In April, the membership fell to 132, self-spinners being 80 and others 52. Thus, there was big drop among both the classes in one month. The report further stated of the Congress activities in the city of Nagpur. In August 1924, there were 1,133 members. In March 1925, the figures were<sup>6</sup>

Table I showing the membership figures in the city of Nagpur in the two Months of 1925.

**In March 1925**

A	B	TOTAL
37	70	107

**In April 1925**

A	B	TOTAL
29	30	59

After stating the facts related to the spinning franchise, the report ended its statement with an 'extraordinarily brief and truthful' analysis:

'The ... figures in Congress membership fairly show the future of the spinning franchise. The self-spinning members come mostly from the No-change section of the congress. The B-class members are mainly from the Swaraj Party. Not a single Swarajist is a self-spinner. Out of the five members from this Nagar who hold seats on the AICC, only one is self-spinner; one has regularly paid his quota of purchased yarn; two are defaulters and one has failed to pay his quota for March and is no longer a member of the Congress. Some of those who hold seats on the P.C.C. are also found to be in defaulters list and some of them hold responsible positions in the P.C.C. This will show how far the franchise is workable. The No-Change section, which has faith in spinning and khaddar, is gradually weakening and is, at present, limited to individuals. The Swarajists of Nagpur are anxious to throw off the franchise and so is the centrist or the Independent party which at present holds the P.C.C.'<sup>7</sup>

The report put the blame for the slackening of the franchise on the lack of organisation and sympathy for the cause among the big leaders. More importantly, it administered a mild rebuke to Gandhi by observing that there

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 'Illuminating...'

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

was 'the infirmness of the originator of the franchise to maintain it against all odds'. An impression had gained ground that franchise would be repealed by the year end. Gandhi would not take sides, as that, according to him, would further vitiate the already charged atmosphere of the nation. Although personally Gandhi would adhere to the spinning franchise, he would not impose it upon an unwilling Congress. It was clear case of back tracking on the spinning franchise. For such a response to come from Gandhi, there were enough ingredients and not just his 'democratic spirit'. Now, the heady days of non-cooperation, when khadi had been turned into a national dress looked like a thing of the past. The Congress membership had touched an all time low (see Table I).

**Table-II, Comparative Details of the Congress Membership  
Between the Months of April and May, 1925.**

PROVINCE	APRIL, 1925		MAY, 1925		TOTAL
	A	B	A	B	
Ajmer	2	15	..	..	17
Andhra	..	..	..	..	1,965
Assam	113	1	..	..	114
Bihar	718	261	..	..	979
Bengal	354	1,919	..	..	2,273
Berar	..	..	6	20	26
Burma	42	28	33	28	61
C.P(Hindi)	..	..	..	..	500
C.P(Marathi)	80	52	..	..	132
Bombay	231	133	242	201	443
Delhi	83	62	243	647	890
Gujarat	2,095	101	..	..	2,196
Karnatak	376	344	..	..	720
Kerala	..	..	..	..	..
Maharashtra	408	292	..	..	700
Punjab	50	574	50	754	804
Sind	73	192	107	234	341
Tamilnad	..	..	..	..	1,400
U.P.	237	467	..	..	1,484
Utkal	..	..	..	..	310
TOTAL	4,862	4,441	681	1,884	15,355

(Source: Young India, 28-05-1925)

The above figures of yarn returns as in compliance with the condition for the Congress membership showed the abysmal picture of the Congress membership. The Congress, in April 1925 had a total of 4,862 members who fulfilled the franchise condition by self-spinning(Category A). In the same month, it had 4,441 members who sent their yarn by buying or getting spun by others(Category B). But just in succeeding month of May in the first category the total membership fell to 681 while in the second category it fell to 1,884. The total membership of the Congress (including both categories) fell with in month from 9,303 in April to 2,565 in May. The Table also offers data on comparative performances of different provinces. Kerala was a newly created province. It not only did not send any figures but refused to offer any explanation to the A.I.C.C. The figure sent by the C.P.(Hindi) was suspect, as it gave no classification but merely sent a stationary return in round figure. Andhra's figures was witness to its internal dissension that fettered its growth. Same was the case with Tamilnad, involved as it was in the Brahmin-non-Brahmin controversy. The discouraging figures did not daunt Gandhi. 'I am a hardened criminal, slow to reform', Gandhi wrote pointing that the figures were a reason 'not for altering the franchise, but adhering to it; not for watering it down, but for strengthening its main purpose'.<sup>8</sup>

The general public too had spurned the khadi. Gandhi had a painful demonstration of this truth at the Nagpur station on his way to Calcutta in May 1925. A large crowd had collected on the platform to have his *darshan*. 'That it was having with delirious joy. Its joy was my pain. My name on the lips and black caps on the heads,- what a terrible contrast ! What a lie! I could not fight the battle of Swaraj with that crowd.'<sup>9</sup> The experience saddened, but did not

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<sup>8</sup> 'Notes-Latest Returns', *Yong India*, 28 May 1925. CWMG, Vol. XXVII, pp. 156-8

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p.575.

dishearten him. 'My faith in khaddar rises as I find this indifference to if not revolt against khaddar,'<sup>10</sup> Gandhi wrote.

He was not overtly worried about the declining trend in the Congress membership. In his thinking what even few Spinner members could achieve, million of 'paper soldiers' could barely achieve. But it certainly dampened his optimism.

On the beginning of his Bengal tour, at Calcutta on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1925, a desperate Gandhi made a pathetic plea to his countrymen. Its words were heart rending. All around he was claiming khadi to be the base of his political faith. And here was a people who put him to the pedestal of Mahatmahood but without an iota of faith in his philosophy. 'There is no use of glorifying me. If you really wish to please me, follow my advice' the message read in its first line. 'I beg all people, ladies and gentlemen, to buy khaddar as much as your purse can permit.' And then, it ended with, 'A few coppers may not mean much to you, but they mean everything to these poor villagers'.<sup>11</sup> Gandhi had reasons to sound desperate. He knew, as he had written to Mahadev Desai, 'Everyone is there to exhort people to do the spinning, but none to do it himself. Such is our plight'.<sup>12</sup>

Gandhi's tour of Bengal began on a note of despondency and ended on a similar note with the death of Das. His refrain to the people remained unchanged. 'Give me the spinning wheel and I will spin Swaraj for India.' He pleaded with C.R.Das to 'learn the thing and spin religiously for half an hour for the sake of the millions and in the name of God'.<sup>13</sup> He wished for charkha a larger place in Santiniketan. 'I did not ask you to give up your poetry, literature or music. All I

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p574.

<sup>11</sup> 'Message to the People', Amrita Bazaar Patrika. 1May 1925, CWMG, Vol. XXVII, p.1.

<sup>12</sup> 'Letter to Mahadev Desai', 25 September 1921, CWMG, Vol. XXI, p.207.

<sup>13</sup> 'Letter to CR Das', Before 13 June 1925, CWMG, Vol. XXVII, p.229.



ask is that, side by side with these pursuits, you give half an hour every day to the charkha', he said in a public meeting at the institute.<sup>14</sup> Bengal would, however, give him some encouraging sight. Here he did not find 'a climate of opposition to khadi'. Khadi Pratisthan, founded by Dr. P.C.Ray and Satish Chandra Dasgupta, and the Abhoy Ashram, were the two khadi producing centres which gave him hope. On 16<sup>th</sup> June 1925, when Gandhi was in Bengal, CR Das died. Das was a hardened sceptic of the khadi programme. But Gandhi claimed that towards the end he had altered his views on the efficacy of charkha.<sup>15</sup> Thus he inaugurated an All India memorial in the name of Deshbandhu Das. The money collected for the memorial was to be spent on the khadi propagation.

On spinning franchise, however, Gandhi had begun a clear re-thinking. It had given rise to 'hypocrisy and even dishonesty'.<sup>16</sup> The speech by Lord Birkenhead at the House of Commons, ridiculing the national movement, and the untimely demise of Das brought Gandhi to the viewpoint that politics was to be given primacy. The pact that Gandhi had signed with Swarajists at Calcutta previous September meant that the Swarajists would carry the work in the Council unhampered but that would not carry the name of the Congress. Under the pact the Congress activity was restricted solely to the constructive activity. In a letter to Motilal, on July 19, 1925, Gandhi now desired to absolve the Swarajists of any obligation under the pact. Congress would no longer be a predominantly spinning organisation involved in constructive work. 'I propose to place...the whole machinery of the Congress at your disposal so as to enable you to bring before that body such political resolutions as you may consider in the interest of

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 'Speech at Santiniketan', Navjivan, 18 June 1925, p.181.

<sup>15</sup> 'My Notes-All India Deshbandhu Memorial', Navjivan, 2 August 1925, CWMG, Vol. XXVIII, p.13.

<sup>16</sup> 'The Spinning Franchise', Young India, 23 July 1925, CWMG, Vol. XXVII, p.405.

the country.<sup>17</sup> Swarajists would now be turned into the Congress, instead of they being its chief and only political agent. The AICC was to meet in September at Patna, where it was decided to alter the constitution and also to form a body solely to propagate spinning.

The AICC met at Patna in September 1925 to discuss two questions of revising the franchise and of revoking the Pact entered into the previous year between Gandhi and the Swarajists. In the discussion that followed, R.K. Sidhwa from Sind, objected that the AICC was not competent to initiate any change in the constitution. Motilal Nehru held that the AICC possessed much competence. S. Srinivasa Iyengar believed that nothing was sacrosanct and they should favour a change for the better conditions in the country. J.M. Sengupta complained that the existing franchise prevented functioning, while Madan Mohan Malviya wanted elections on the basis of a new franchise. On Gandhi's putting the resolution to vote, 93 supported a change in the constitution while 7 opposed it. Motilal Nehru then moved the 'New Franchise' resolution. The new franchise had spinning as an alternative franchise while four anna franchise was also re-established.

The AICC also decided to establish an All India Spinners Association (AISA) which would not be controlled by the Congress but would use its prestige. The AISA was intended to be a purely commercial body to look after the economic side of khaddar<sup>18</sup>. It was to be a permanent organisation, unaffected and uncontrolled by politics, political changes or political bodies. It was to be an integral part of the Congress organisation, but with an independent existence and powers. It had an Executive Council which was to be responsible for all its

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<sup>17</sup> 'Letter to Motilal Nehru', 19 July 1925, CWMG, Vol. XXVII, p.398.

<sup>18</sup> 'Speech at AICC meeting, Patna', 22 September 1925, CWMG, Vol. XXVIII, p.211.

decisions. The members of the Executive Council were: Mahatma Gandhi, Maulana Shaukat Ali, Rajendra Prasad, Satis Chandra Dasgupta, Maganlal.K. Gandhi, Jamnalal Bajaj (Treasurer), Shuaib Qureshi, Shankarlal Banker, Jawaharlal Nehru (Last three were the Secretaries). The sole qualification of Maulana Shaukat Ali's inclusion into the Executive Council of the AISA was that he was a Mussalman.<sup>19</sup> There was to be two classes of its members, A and B:

- The A class was to consist of persons habitually wearing khadi and depositing monthly 1000 yards of self-spun yarn to the Association.
- The B class was to consist of the persons habitually wearing khadi and who paid an annual subscription of 2000 yards of self-spun yarn.<sup>20</sup>

At the inauguration meeting of the Association, 200 people forwarded their names to enrol as AISA members.<sup>21</sup> Shaukat Ali promised Gandhi to give him 3000 A class Mussalman members of the AISA within this year.<sup>22</sup>

The AISA was established to focus solely on the khadi's economic aspect. Gandhi's attempt at transforming the Congress into a spinning organisation having failed he wanted to keep AISA away from politics. The Association had nothing to do with political non-co-operation. The preamble precluded politics. It was a commercial or economic association with philanthropic motives. It would conduct commerce in khaddar not for the benefits of its members but of the nation. The members instead of receiving dividends were to give yearly subscription.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> 'All India Spinners' Association', Young India, 1 October 1925, CWMG, Vol. XXVIII, p.265.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 'The constitution of the AISA'. It was finalised on 24 September 1925 at the AICC meeting at Patna, p.228.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 'To Voluntary Spinners', Young India, 1 October 1925, p.263

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 'Speech at Marwari Agarwal Sabha, Baghalpur', 1 October 1925, p.27.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 'Fate of Non-co-operators', Young India, 8 October 1925, p.302

If hand spinning was to become universal and successful in the country, its non-political and purely economical side had to be now fully developed. The political importance of khaddar consisted in its economic capacity. 'Its moral and economic effect is immediate and tangible, its political effect is distant and derivable from the first two, not independent of the two.'

AISA was established not just with the realisation that khadi to become successful needed an organisation free from the Congress. Its establishment was also facilitated with the realisation dawning upon Gandhi that his emphasis on the religiosity of Indians did not pay. The communal cleavage that India had witnessed after the suspension of the Non-co-operation had clearly disillusioned him.

In September 1924, at Kohat in North- Western Frontier Province, in a communal riot, was hacked Gandhi's cherished dream of utilising the glue of religion to forge Hindu-Muslim unity. His whole conception of action rested on the premise that India was a country where people were fundamentally religious. This, as far as Gandhi could see, was India's positive legacy derived from her past. Material West faced a threat of extinction because it had left the path of religion. It befell upon India and Gandhi, the design of history had inadvertently made it possible for both, as the conviction went, therefore, to rekindle the path of religion. At India's bidding world would come calling. It was with these premises that Gandhi, in 1919, had taken to Khilafat question. <sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Gandhi had a brilliant knack for choosing symbols for his movement which could be identified by maximum number of people. Throughout his career, in South Africa or India, Gandhi displayed this quality of him with a brilliant and enviable success rate. Khilafat wrongs at the hand of Allies was such a symbol. In Khilafat, he saw a God sent opportunity to bind together the Hindu and Muslim population. Although in the beginning it really fetched handsome political dividends, soon it exposed its limitation bringing the castle crashing down. However much religious underpinnings it might be having, the question of Khalifa, for the majority of the Muslim India, was of fleeting interest. It concerned, strangely enough, only those at 'modern' Aligarh Muslim University and 'orthodox' Deoband, with sprinkling from here and there. Majority of the Muslim India, inhabiting on the margin of starvation, was too much

Kohat, therefore, was a tragedy. A tragedy not in the sense that the town was caught in the melee of mutual massacre. It was the tragedy in the sense that it put the final nail on Gandhi's attempt to draw religious backing to his action agenda. It brought to an end an unprecedented political comradeship that Gandhi had forged with Ali brothers. Gandhi had an inkling of its coming. Never, never again, Gandhi would show same intensity as he had shown in last six years on the question of Hindu-Muslim Unity. His desperate concern for partition riots was impelled by his humanitarian concern rather than a desire for the communal unity.

But, it remains to be said, to the credit of Gandhi, that his religion was beyond the scriptural dogma. Neither was his God the creation of the dogmatic religion.<sup>25</sup> Scriptures were unimportant when it came to human reason.<sup>26</sup> His countrymen, however, continued to look at him as religious but within the narrow boundaries of the scripture. This was the lacunae in the perception which brought his effort towards fraternal unity to nought. He confessed, 'I put

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engrossed eking out its living to get fired by wrongs to Khalifa. Moreover, as later events in Turkey showed, the issue was not that fiery as it was made out to be in India. Attempt to forge fraternal fissure with alien adhesive naturally failed. Kohat was not the first chink that had appeared in the armour of Hindu-Muslim unity. Earlier, murderous Moplas had exposed its limitations mercilessly.

<sup>25</sup> 'To me God is truth and love; God is ethics and morality; God is fearlessness. God is the source of Light and Life and yet He is above and beyond all these. God is conscience.' 'God and Congress', Young India, 5 March 1925, CWMG, Vol. XXVI, p.224.

<sup>26</sup> Two incident brought out this aspect vividly. Disturbed that two Ahmadiya Muslims were stoned to death in Afghanistan as penalty for apostasy, Gandhi questioned the 'morality of the method'. He wrote, '....Every formula of every religion has in this age of reason, to submit to the acid test of reason and universal justice if it is ask for universal assent. Error can claim no exemption even if it can be supported by the scriptures of the world.' 'You have shaken the belief of millions of your admirers in your capacity to lead them', came an angry response. In reply, with uncompromising directness Gandhi declared that 'even the teachings themselves of the Koran cannot be exempt from the criticism'. 'My Crime', Young India, 5 March 1925

This radical step to provide primacy to reason over the faith was also evidenced by his response to the question of untouchability.

away in my cupboard this Hindu-Muslim tangle....I can not persuade either the Hindus or the Mussalmans to accept my solution’.

This digression would not have been needed had there been no ramifications of it for khadi. A firm believer in man’s capacity to transcend limitations, Gandhi’s technique of social change was through the transformation of human heart. In an open letter to every Englishmen in India, Gandhi boasted of being ‘a fairly accurate student of human nature and vivisector(*sic*) of my own failings’. He claimed to have discovered that man is superior to the system that he propounds.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, to G. D. Birla, a textile mill magnate, Gandhi sent a charkha, ‘specially made for you’.<sup>28</sup> Khadi was to be propagated by instilling in Indians a sense of responsibility towards their poor countrymen. In a letter to Harilal, his estranged son, Gandhi wrote, ‘In a country where injustice prevails, there is no dignity except in poverty. It is impossible, in the prevailing condition, to amass wealth without being a party, directly or indirectly, to injustice’.<sup>29</sup> To convince his countrymen Gandhi left no ‘stone unturned’ to practice what he preached. When he asked people to discard their foreign cloth, he knew that millions were too poor to buy khaddar as replacement. He, therefore, advised them to be satisfied with mere loin-cloth. To show what he meant, Gandhi decided to discard his vest and content himself with ‘only a loin-cloth and a *chaddar* whenever necessary for the protection of the body’<sup>30</sup>. Earlier, on August

<sup>27</sup> ‘To Every Englishman In India’, Young India, 13 July 1921, CWMG, Vol. XX, p.366.

<sup>28</sup> ‘Letter to GD Birla’, 28 February 1925, CWMG, Vol. XXVI, p.210.

<sup>29</sup> ‘Letter to Harilal Gandhi’, 5 May 1919, CWMG, Vol. XV, p.278.

<sup>30</sup> Gandhi explains that change came out of conviction and was gradual in coming. It was at Madura, in September 1921, that he brought such a ‘radical alteration’ in his dress. But before that, twice he had come close to adopt loin-cloth, each time he had restrained himself. First was when he was shaken by famine-stricken Khulna. The second occasion was when Mohammed Ali was arrested. During his Madras tour he was told about the scarcity in khadi availability and lack of people’s purchasing power. He discussed among his co-workers such as Maulana Azad Sobhani, Rajagopalachariar, Doctor Rajan and others before taking the decision. CWMG, Vol. XXI, p.181.

31, 1920, he had taken the vow for life to purchase only khadi cloth hand made of hand spun yarn, 'cap or head-dress and socks excepted'.<sup>31</sup>

The prevailing communal distrust and disharmony caused Gandhi distress bordering on agony. He saw his own helplessness in bridging the widening gulf between the two major communities. 'Anything I say at present', He wrote, 'Will just be a cry in the wilderness'.<sup>32</sup> The schism in the country was manifested even within the Congress body.<sup>33</sup> 'The tallest among us distrust one another...'<sup>34</sup> A disillusioned Gandhi, immediately after his tenure ended in December 1925, went into hibernation within the confines of his ashram.

It was not unnatural therefore that , in the face of so much that was frustrating and disheartening, Gandhi turned to his constructive programme with ever increasing zest. The spinning wheel as a remedy for Indian poverty was the persistent theme of his writings in *Navjivan* and *Young India*. Deep in his heart was the conviction reflected in his reply to different co-workers - 'One true man is enough for any reform, no matter how impossible it may appear in the beginning. Ridicule, contempt and death may be, and often is, the reward of such a man, but though he may die, the reforms survive and prosper.'<sup>35</sup>

What was the shape of Swaraj that India was fighting for? Despite Gandhi's constant reiteration of attaining 'Swaraj in terms of the hungry millions'<sup>36</sup> it was a word of much national confusion. Gandhi had written, in an *Young India*,

<sup>31</sup> 'Speech at Khilafat Conference, Patna', 22 September 1925, CWMG, Vol. XVIII, p.215.

<sup>32</sup> 'Letter to GD Birla', 27 April 1926, CWMG, Vol. XXX, p.372.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 'Letter to Srinivasa Iyengar', 27 April 1926, p.371.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 'Letter to Maulana Abul Kalam Azad', 8 May 1926, p.419.

<sup>35</sup> 'Not Quantity but Quality', *Young India*, 29 April 1926, CWMG, Vol. XXX, p.378.

<sup>36</sup> 'Speech at Public Meeting, Calcutta', *Young India*, 14 March 1929, CWMG, Vol. XL, p.78

(dated 17 April 1924) article titled, 'Schoolmasters and Lawyers': 'But it is a difficulty which we have to face boldly, even heroically, if our desire is to establish swaraj for the people, not a substitute one class rule by another, which may be even worse.' And again: 'If under swaraj we shall have to make the town life correspond to the village life, we shall be bound to simplify the town mode of life.' The appearance of vital *ifs* implied that there was a floating concept of swaraj, without any definition or specification of any kind. Some like Bhagwan Das of Kashi Vidyapith thought that these unsolved *ifs* were at the root of national confusion.<sup>37</sup> Earlier too Gandhi had faced some probing on the question of swaraj. His booklet *Hindswaraj* had complicated the question further. The booklet was a severe critic of modern civilisation, as Gandhi had himself noted. It brutally pilloried modern institutions such as parliamentary democracy and media, and professions, such as law, medical, and modes of transport, such as railways. Swaraj, the booklet meant, was simplicity, as none of these magnificent obsession of modern civilisation had helped even an inch in growth of human being.<sup>38</sup> His critics did not take kindly to it.

Lord Ronaldshay, Governor of Bengal, 1917-22, with a clear intent of embarrassing Gandhi and creating dissension in the nationalist ranks, said at a public meeting that if swaraj meant what Gandhi had depicted in *Hindswaraj* then the people would have none of it.<sup>39</sup> The Leader of Allahabad was another of those who never missed a chance to lash at Gandhi's booklet. In fact, the reception that *Hindswaraj* received was, least to say, discouraging. His political master, G. K. Gokhle, himself intent on 'spiritualizing politics', was not convinced of the ideas expressed therein.

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<sup>37</sup> 'Letter from Bhagwan Das', Young India, 8 May 1924. CWMG. Vol. XXIV. Appendix I. pp.583-5

<sup>38</sup> Iyer. op. cit., pp. 209-35.

<sup>39</sup> 'Notes-On the Wrong Track', Young India, 8 December 1920. CWMG. Vol. XIX . p. 79.



Gandhi wrote in a reply to Lord Ronaldsday, that Swaraj as described in *Hindswaraj* was different from that expressed in Congress resolutions. His conviction in the ideas expressed in the booklet was 'deeper than ever'. Writing in *Young India* he warned the readers against thinking that he was engaged in creating a Swaraj as described in the booklet. India, he wrote was not ripe for it. 'I am individually working for the self-rule pictured therein. But today my corporate activity is undoubtedly devoted to the attainment of parliamentary Swaraj in accordance with the wishes of the people of India.'<sup>40</sup> He was not aiming for the destruction of the railways or hospitals or law courts or machinery and mills. 'It requires higher simplicity and renunciation than the people are today prepared for it.' The only programme that he was carrying out was non-violence, even that too lacked a copybook adoption.<sup>41</sup>

In an interview to *Times*,<sup>42</sup> Gandhi said his swaraj would be the parliamentary form of government in the modern sense. Swaraj was to be a parliament 'chosen by the people with the fullest power over the finance, the police, the military, the navy, the courts and the educational institutions'. He, however added that the Swaraj he dreamt would be possible only when the nation was free to make its choice of both of good and evil. Government over the self, he said, reiterating the crux of *Hindswaraj*, was the truest Swaraj. 'It was synonymous with salvation and I have seen nothing to alter the view that doctor, lawyers, and railways are no help, and are often hindrance to the one thing worth striving for. But I know that association with a satanic activity, such as the Government is engaged in, makes even an effort for such freedom a practical impossibility.'

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 'Hindswaraj or The Indian Home Rule', *Young India*, 26 January 1921, p.277.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> 'Interview to "The Times of India"', Before 29 December 1920, CWMG, Vol. XIX, p169.

The successful culmination of the peasant satyagraha at Bardoli laid the foundation of 'organic' or substantial swaraj. The Nehru Report, which was endorsed by the All parties Conference at Lucknow, in August, 1928, was to pave the way for the constitutional self-government. Unable to take the country along on the path of the constructive activities in order to revitalise the inner strength, Gandhi settled for this alchemy of two forms of Swaraj. Earlier in 1924, he had been confronted with the questions on the nature of Swaraj.<sup>43</sup>

At the Kanpur Congress in December 1925, confronted with opposition even to the introduction of spinning as an alternative franchise, Gandhi had said in a poignant tone, 'Today you may oppose me, but the time is near when all of you will say that Gandhi was right'.<sup>44</sup> After his tenure as president of the Congress came to an end at Kanpur, Gandhi had left politics and for more than a year confined himself to his Ashram at Sabarmati reading Gita more to find solace than to gain spirituality. Adopting the dictum of detached action might have given him personal happiness but it robbed vitality off the national movement. Increasingly, it was becoming plain that it was the momentum of the national movement which drew Gandhi rather than he willingly leading it. This fact would come to fore during his imprisonment at Yervada, following the launching of the civil disobedience movement in March 1930.

Having released an unprecedented flood of popular energy, which was still rising at the time of his arrest on May 5, 1930, he showed no further concern for the subsequent course of the movement and concentrated his thoughts on spinning. He felt that he had been slack outside jail in mastering the art and

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<sup>43</sup> 'Letter to B. G. Horniman', 28 August 1928, CWMG, Vol. XXXVII, p.212.

<sup>44</sup> 'Speech on Franchise Resolution, Subjects Committee Meeting, Kanpur', 24 December 1925, CWMG, Vol. XXIX, p.353

science of spinning, which he regarded as a 'daily *maha-yajna*',<sup>45</sup> a supreme collective effort at national regeneration through service of the poor. 'The charkha, the *takli* and the bow have become a fascination with me', he told Mirabehn.<sup>46</sup>

His intense political involvement had come to an end with the suspension of the non-co-operation movement in 1922. From then on it was his constructive activities that became his passion. In the beginning he had attempted taking Congress with him, what with his ambition of transforming the Congress into a spinning organisation. But 'defeated and humbled', he left the Congress at its fate and founded AISA, unconnected to and unaffected by politics, to work his spinning passion. The passion was to focus on constructive activity centring on the village regeneration of which khadi was the fulcrum.

The annual Congress in December 1928 was held at Calcutta. There it became clear that the wide and fundamental differences between him and influential sections in Congress had remained intractable. The Reception Committee of the session had planned an exhibition which would include mill cloth and selected items of machinery and it even asked the co-operation of the local government for obtaining the exhibits. This ran counter to the basic principles of non-co-operation and the constructive programme with khadi in the centre. Gandhi disapproved of the plan but wrote to Dr. B. C. Roy, Chairman of the Reception Committee: '...I would not like you, an esteemed co-worker, to give up your views or principles in order to please me....I assure you that I shall tender the same respect for your principles as I would crave from you and all for mine....'<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> 'Letter to Narandas Gandhi', 21 October 1930. CWMG. Vol. XLIV, p 241

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 'Letter to Mirabehn', 13 November 1930, p.299

<sup>47</sup> 'Letter to Dr. B.C.Roy', 3 November 1928, CWMG, Vol. XXXVIII, p 7&9.

The letter reflected Gandhi's new found dictum of detached action. Even one year ago, in December 1927, at the Madras Congress, Gandhi was his old passionate self. He had categorically denounced the Congress resolutions which according to him were 'hastily conceived and thoughtlessly passed'.<sup>48</sup> By passing resolutions on Independence and Boycott of the British goods, Congress, Gandhi had then written, made 'an exhibition of our impotence, bec[a]me the laughing stock of critics and invite[d] the contempt of the adversary'.<sup>49</sup> He deplored the sinking of the Congress to the level of the 'schoolboys debating society'. But what hurt him most now, and he gave passionate expression to his hurt, was the decision of the Reception Committee to arrange an exhibition with the help of government. On exhibition was little Swadeshi, lost in the melee of foreign and British goods.<sup>50</sup> It contained little of rural interest. It appeared that the textile court was designed to ridicule khadi. Khadi was relegated to another enclosure, outside the main All India court. Rumours circulated much to the consternation of Gandhi that the Madras government had desired so. One notice(all written in English) on the exhibition read:<sup>51</sup>

Feed the poor and work the able.  
Let the charkha spin the weft  
And the mill the warp.  
In this combination lies the solution

The author exposed his ignorance. It had been emphasised time and again that the charkha would have died a well deserved death if the policy of using charkha yarn for weft only had long continued. Another equally 'mischievous' poster read:<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> 'The National Congress', Young India, 5 January 1928, CWMG, Vol. XXXV, p.438.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid..

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p.439.

<sup>51</sup> 'The National Congress- The elephant and the ant'. Young India, 5 January 1928, CWMG, Vol. XXXV, pp.439-40

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

To force a weaver to use hand-spun warp yarn  
 Is like forcing him to fight a battleship with a knife.  
 To cut a weaver off from the best methods of work  
 Is like cutting off his thumbs.

This poster addressed Gandhi directly. Not just that it betrayed, as Gandhi noted, 'venomous prejudice against khadi', it also exemplified the failure of the khadi propaganda to make a dent amongst the educated class. This, when six years of intense propaganda for khadi had all ready taken place! This, in the name of and under the patronage of a Congress which had promulgated the gospel of swadeshi and which had on its programme a boycott of British goods!! This, when Congress still retained the khadi franchise and had lent its name to the activities of the AISA!!!<sup>53</sup>

In the interregnum of one year, between the Calcutta and the Lahore Congress, Gandhi occupied himself with khadi propaganda and organisation of foreign cloth boycott in preparation for the impending struggle for the Swaraj as envisaged by the Calcutta resolution. The programme of public bonfire of foreign cloth was revived.<sup>54</sup> On 4<sup>th</sup> March 1929, Gandhi himself lighted one such bonfire in disregard of a police notice declaring that the act would be an offence in the law. The incident did step up the political temperature and boosted the boycott movement, Gandhi however was not satisfied. He was conscious of the weakness of the country and the Congress and was convinced that without national regeneration swaraj was an impossibility.<sup>55</sup> Khadi was for him 'a symbol of soul force and of faith in it'.<sup>56</sup> On the part of the people, however, he

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> During the non-co-operation, pained at people's behaviour of consigning to fire other's foreign cloth while themselves being fully ~~attired~~ in them, it was suspended. 'Patriot's Wail, Young India, 4 February, 1926, CWMG, Vol. XXIX, p.365

<sup>55</sup> 'Letter to Satish Chandra Das Gupta', 21 February 1929, CWMG, Vol. XL, p.19.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 'H. E. The Viceroy's Ire'. Navjivan, 28 April 1929. P.271

found, in the course of his public education tours, an absence of 'a living faith' in khadi.<sup>57</sup> There was also a lack of sincerity on the part of the leaders in the khadi programme.

What were the causes for continued apathy towards khadi? One cause of public apathy to the khadi programme was the fact that .... Students of European economics, shaped according to the Government's model, could not appreciate the organisation's rural bias....could not make the necessary sacrifices and therefore left it'.<sup>58</sup> Another cause of the apathy was the total want of faith on the people's part in their ability to do anything and their acceptance of slavery as 'our natural condition'. This is a most debasing state for any one to be in', Gandhi commented.<sup>59</sup>

After 1929 Lahore Congress resolution declaring India's intent of complete independence, Gandhi firmly resumed active leadership of the movement after a gap of nearly eight years. With the Dandi March in March 1930 Civil Disobedience Movement was launched.

What distinguished the civil disobedience campaign this time from the non-cooperation movement of 1920-21 was the stress Gandhi laid on the present occasion on the economic grievances of the masses and the meaning of political freedom for them. 'I have', he claimed, 'endeavoured to give a new orientation to the national demand,' which consisted in 'in familiarising the nation with the contents of Independence'.<sup>60</sup> Whereas the non-cooperation movement was launched to secure redress of the Punjab and Khilafat wrongs, this time Gandhi

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 'The Bomb and the knife', Young India, 18 September 1929, p.260.

<sup>58</sup> 'Letter to Purushottam Thakurdas, 7 August 1929, CWMG, Vol. XLI, p.257.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 'Khadi and Boycott', YI, 20 June 1929, p.64

<sup>60</sup> 'New Orientation', 12 March 1930, CWMG, Vol. XLIII, p.58.

emphasised the economic, political, cultural and spiritual ruin of the country under British rule and pleaded for immediate relief to the masses from what he described as 'the killing weight' of an expensive, top heavy administration.<sup>61</sup> Unless, he argued, 'the motive that lies behind the craving for independence' was constantly kept in view, 'there is every danger of independence coming to us so changed as to be of no value to those toiling voiceless millions for whom it is sought and for whom it is worth taking.'<sup>62</sup> This seemed all the more necessary because, as Gandhi was aware, 'those who are engaged in the war of independence are not, it is obvious, moved by the economic wrong. *They do not feel it. They are moved solely by the moral and spiritual wrong which they feel in every fibre of their being.....In their impatience to break through the snaky coil they do not mind what they do so long as they do something, even though it may destroy them*'.<sup>63</sup>

Among the *they*, there were those who were closest to Gandhi and had worked with him. Here I would like to discuss at length two men, one very well known and another unknown. Jawaharlal Nehru was to be Gandhi's political heir and Independent India's future Prime minister. S. Ramanathan was little known khadi worker from Tamil Nadu who also had been the Secretary of AISA branch of Tamil Nadu. But first Nehru.

Gandhi's criticism of Independence resolution passed at Madras, in 1927, 'very much troubled' Nehru.<sup>64</sup> In response, Nehru reminded Gandhi of Congress discipline. 'May I remind you that you are a member of the working committee and it is an extra-ordinary thing on the morrow of the Congress to criticise, and

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 'Letter to Lord Irwin' 2 March 1930, pp. 4-5.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 'The four fold curse', 12 March 1930, p.54

<sup>64</sup> 'Letter from Jawaharlal Nehru', 11 January 1928, CWMG. Vol XXXV. Appendix-X, pp.540-44.

run down the Congress and its principle resolutions'. He disapproved of Gandhi's scornful attitude towards the boycott of British goods resolution. 'You must have read about the wonderful effectiveness of the boycott in China. There was nothing special in China which we have not got and there is no fundamental reason why we can not succeed where they succeeded. But granting it is not likely to succeed, is it such a laughing matter after all?' Nehru then touched the most sensitive chord of Gandhi. 'Has our boycott of foreign cloth by khaddar succeeded so remarkably? Has our spinning franchise succeeded? They have not but you do not hesitate to press them on the country and the Congress....' If Congress had been turn into a 'school boys debating society', as Gandhi had written, then, Nehru wrote, Gandhi was behaving like 'a school master who will not guide us or give us lessons but will only point out from time to time the error of our ways'. Nehru then came to another sensitive chord of Gandhi, *Hindswaraj*. Despite his disapproval of everything that Gandhi felt close to, Nehru said, he admired him. 'I have done so in spite of the fact that I hardly agreed that some of your previous publications - *Indian Home Rule*, etc., - contained'. 'I felt and feel', Nehru wrote indignantly, 'that you were and are infinitely greater than your little books'. Nehru accused Gandhi of changing his mind continuously since he came out of jail in 1924. 'That bewilderment has continued since then'.

'I have asked you many times what you expected to do in the future and your answers have been far from satisfying. All you have said has been that within a year or eighteen months you expected the khadi movement to spread rapidly and in a geometric ratio and then some direct action in the political field might be indulged in. Several years and eighteen months have passed since then and the miracle has not happened. It was difficult to believe that it would happen but faith in your amazing capacity to bring off the improbable kept us in an expectant mood. But such faith for an irreligious person like me is a poor reed to rely on and I am beginning to think if we are to wait for freedom till khadi becomes universal in India we shall have to wait till the Greek Kalends.



Khadi will grow slowly, and if war comes it will grow very fast, but I do not see how freedom is coming in its train. As I mentioned before you our khadi work is almost wholly divorced from politics and our khadi workers are developing a mentality which does not concern itself with anything outside their limited sphere of work. This may be good for the work they do but little can be expected from them in the political field.... You tell us that if the country will not even take to khadi how can we expect it to do anything more difficult or daring. I do not think the reasoning is correct'.<sup>65</sup>

Nehru in 1927 was a busy man. The Congress at Madras, in December 1927, was the culmination of a busy year-long schedule. In his ideological development a visit in this year to Europe proved to be of decisive importance. Experience of communal riots had already convinced him that 'religion in India will kill that country and its peoples if it is not subdued'.<sup>66</sup> In February he attended the International Congress Colonial Oppression And Imperialism, held at Brussels, and came into contact with communists and anti-colonial fighters from all over the world. Quoting S. Gopal who has emphasised that 'the turning point in Jawaharlal's mental development' came with active participation in the Brussels Congress, Sarkar writes<sup>67</sup> that it gave him a vision which he often did not live up to but never totally abandoned. The same year, he visited the Soviet Union and was deeply impressed by the new socialist society. On his return, he published a book on the Soviet Union, on whose title page, he wrote, Wordsworth's famous lines on French Revolution : 'Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive. But to be very young was very heaven'. Jawaharlal returned to India, in the words of his biographer S. Gopal, 'a self-conscious revolutionary radical'.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>66</sup> Sarkar, Sumit, Modern India-1885-1947, 1983, p 252.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., pp.252-3

<sup>68</sup> Chandra, Bipin, et al., India's Struggle for Independence, 1988, p.248.

With all his revolutionary enthusiasm the young Nehru returned to India. At Madras Congress, therefore, the Independence Resolution was the logical culmination. And when Gandhi wrote criticising the Independence Resolution as 'hastily conceived and thoughtlessly passed',<sup>69</sup> Nehru went through 'mental agitation' which made him write to Gandhi the letter quoted above.

In response, Gandhi wrote that Nehru's 'hasty step' in 'encouraging mischief makers and hooligans' made him to criticise the resolutions.<sup>70</sup> Nehru's letter, however, made Gandhi aware of the 'terrible extent' of the differences between them.<sup>71</sup> Instead of dwelling in the past what he was now concerned with was 'future action'. Nehru was a comrade 'so valiant, so faithful, so able and so honest'. The differences were so 'vast and radical' that Gandhi was now prepared to free him 'from the humble, unquestioning allegiance' that he had given him all these years but he asked Nehru to unfurl his banner.<sup>72</sup> 'If careful observation of the country in the light of your European experiences convinces you of the error of the current ways and means, by all means enforce your own views, but do please form a disciplined party'.<sup>73</sup>

However, it was not Nehru but Gandhi who would lead the impending struggle. The importance of Gandhi-Nehru controversy lay in Gandhi's troubled relationship with educated India. This India was impatient with Gandhi and saw his constructive programmes including khadi as painful distraction from the main task of attaining the political liberation. "The fateful 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1930 is approaching fast, but you are still harping on your incantatory[sic] formula of

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<sup>69</sup> 'The National Congress', YI, 5 January 1928. CWMG, Vol. XXXV, p.438.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 'Letter to Jawaharlal Nehru', 4 January 1928, p.433.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 'Letter to Jawaharlal Nehru', 17 January 1928, pp.469-70.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 'Letter to Jawaharlal Nehru', 4 January 1928, p.433.

‘khadi, khadi, again khadi’, and refuse to give any effective lead to the country. I for one have no stomach left for this ‘hand-spun’ war-cry of yours, and I believe it has begun to get on the nerves of the country too’, wrote in a correspondent.<sup>74</sup> Gandhi had been made aware of this impatience when this India would not even buy the requisite yarn to fulfil the requirement for being a Congress member. Gandhi was sorely unable to convince his people of the need to undertake constructive work if India was to achieve true independence. In the political arena his symbolism was a potent force. Educated India was full of scepticism when it came to Gandhi’s ‘inner voice’ determining the national agenda. It was his ‘inner voice’ which would transform salt into the epicentre of the national upsurge. It was not unscientific as people of Nehru’s denomination thought. It sprang from a knowledge base that had been acquired through wide and deep travel and sustained introspection. It was like data collected, inferences drawn and then posited against the unfolding situation. Conclusions thus drawn became the foundation of his political action. On the political front however, he could show the effectiveness of his symbolism and thus silence his critics. But on the constructive programmes he could not carry the conviction among his critics. It required long gestation period to show the substantial result and needed a dedicated band of workers; an extremely rare commodity.

Silence, as a result, gained prominence in his agenda for constructive works. Sevagram, founded in early 1930s, became the laboratory. Then on, he remained there experimenting with methods of village upliftment. More important than the experiments, it brought him face to face with the village realities. But before we discuss further we need to come back to another of Gandhi’s critics. Ramanathan’s critique is important because it repeats everything that had been

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<sup>74</sup> ‘Bitter as Poison’, *Young India*, 5 September 1929, CWMG, vol. XLI, p.275.

said before and also because it comes in 30s, more than a decade after the movement of khadi was started.

Ramanathan's was an insider's criticism. A close confidant of the father of the Self Respect Movement in Tamilnad, E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker (who himself had been the president of the Provincial Khadi Board in 1925) Ramanathan was, as he said, 'intimately connected with khadi since its very inception'. During the early days of the non-co-operation movement he had acted as salesman at the 'very first khadi sale depot' that was then established in Tamilnad. He had been the Secretary of the Provincial Board, and when the All India Spinners Association (AISA) was established, he was again appointed as its Secretary, a position which he continued in for the next three years. During these years, as he said, 'I wandered through the villages carrying the charkha on my head coaxing the women to take back the wheel which they were slowly discarding. I scoured the countryside in search of weavers who would tackle the coarse hand spun yarn which they had long since rejected in preference to the easy weaving mill twists. I toiled at improving the quality of khadi. I tried to rationalise the industry by controlling the prices, creating reserves and eliminating competition.'<sup>75</sup> After all these efforts he was, in 1931, a disillusioned man, so disillusioned that, now, he termed khadi a 'superstition of recent origin'<sup>76</sup> which was doubly dangerous as it donned a 'patriotic garb'.<sup>77</sup> 'After long and arduous practice', Ramanathan had discovered that khadi did not work, spinning wheel was dead, and was surviving on 'artificial respiration'<sup>78</sup>, provided by Mahatma Gandhi. Now, his task was to rid India of the 'superstition of khadi'. On 31<sup>st</sup> May

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<sup>75</sup> Ramanathan, S., Pattabhi Sitharanyya, N.S. Varadhachari. The Superstition of Khadi, A Discussion, 1931, p.3.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p.1.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p.2.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p.3.

1931, at a public meeting held at Lalgudi, Ramanathan gave vent to his feeling on khadi. It was hard hitting but rhetorical in tone.<sup>79</sup>

The theory on which khadi propaganda based itself, Ramanathan observed in his speech, that was published in 'Swarajya', was unsound. Its programme embodied 'primitive individualism' and was inversely proportional to the progress of machinery. 'Hand spinning implies in theory not merely the discarding of cotton mills but the rejection of all machinery.' It was a pull to primitive times. Civilisation is a march of human being from individualism to collectivisation of lives. 'Civilisation is but the process of transforming men who lead individual disconnected lives into a society of men who lead a collective life each toiling for the sake of others and each enjoying the fruits of labours of others.' He went so far as to say, 'The austere, self-sufficient, self-absorbent individualist is hardly a likeable being'. 'Human lives interdepend; they interpenetrate; hence their beauty, hence their joy.'<sup>80</sup>

Machinery, he said, was a necessary feature of his times. It was the fruit of the progress of science and science was the offshoot of human intelligence. Scientific discoveries pooled into a common heritage of all humanity.<sup>81</sup> Any attempt to

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., pp.4-5.

<sup>81</sup> By 1947 however Ramanathan had realised that scientific discoveries were not a common heritage of all humanity but business secrets which nations guarded jealously. In the preface to his book *Gandhi and the Youth*, published in February 1947 as second, much mellowed edition, Ramanathan wrote about the 'sinister attempt to deprive vast sections of humanity of economic and social equality which they justly lay claim to. Exploitation is sought to be carried on not merely by the might of the arms...but by a more sinister and ingenious method of secreting knowledge and science under the purdah'. But remedy he suggested was equally sinister and unethical. Continuing in the same vein he wrote: 'Discoveries of science have to be stolen so that they may be distributed to those who have been kept out of them. Comparatively backward nations like Japan in olden days and Russia to-day have instituted widespread system of espionage to steal knowledge from the archives with in the closed doors of science. That is the task which faces the Indian Youth if they would see their motherland enjoy equal rights with other nations'. Little wonder that even in its mellowed and refined version, if anything that was notable about the book, it was the intensity of vitriolic outpour on Gandhi and his ideologies

discard machinery would write India's obituary. The economic crisis is not due to 'overproduction but to unequal distribution'. It is the faulty use of the machinery and not its introduction which caused unemployment. Ramanathan provided an ingenious way to solve the displacement caused due to mechanisation. If the introduction of a particular machinery had potential to displace people then the solution lay not in shunning the machine but in reducing the work hour so as to accommodate all. 'If we reconstruct society so that machinery is made to function for the benefit of many and not for the profit of few, we shall find machinery to be a great blessing.' So he recommended mechanisation of agriculture. It was to be on the line of 'machine farming' as in America and 'collective farming aided by machine' as in Russia. Indian farming practice bore nothing but cruelty. 'The sight of bullocks being goaded by boys who are themselves knee-deep in the mire challenges description. Often the bullocks finding themselves unequal to the task, lie down, prostrate and perform satyagraha....The plough boys grow desperate, twist the tails of the animals and begin to bite them.' After graphically detailing the 'horrors' of Indian farming, he almost temptingly asked his audience would they not like if the same land could be 'ploughed by a machine like the motorcar driven by you with all the ease and comfort with which you drive the motor car'? India's salvation lay, Ramanathan said, in throwing the takli away and in adopting the tractor. Machinery had its danger. But 'Let us be masterful and learn to enslave the machine'.<sup>82</sup>

If khadi was theoretically untenable then, Ramanathan asserted, it was practically unviable too. Self-spinning with the purpose of making one's own cloth was tried and given up. The professional spinners had neither the inclination nor the means to wear khaddar. 'The outstanding fact about the

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<sup>82</sup> Ramanathan, S., (1931) op. cit., p.10.

khadi situation today is that those who spin do not wear khaddar and those that wear khaddar do not spin'.<sup>83</sup> The slogan of symbolic spinning - the classes to spin so as to induce masses to do the same - had made 'spinning a farce'. All efforts to make the Congressmen to spin had gone in vain. The All India Spinners Association was constituted on a spinning franchise but soon the paucity of voters was so acutely felt that the executive was made to consist of life members. Amongst the professional spinners, it was only the women - 'the sex that has been brought up in the tradition of suffering and servitude'. Again, the fertile regions of the country where agriculture was an economic proposition, Ramanathan contended, there were no tradition of spinning charkha. It was only in the parched up deserts where one would find charkha being plied. 'They do what they can do to escape from hunger. They are driven by despair. The charkha is an alternative to suicide. The beggar's bowl is another alternative to suicide. Their economics are identical. You feed the spinner out of sense of patriotism. You feed the beggar out of divine compassion. Shall we found a society of beggars to fight the unemployment problem? It requires only a slight alteration of the slogan and no change in the spirit, instead of "Be patriotic and buy" you have simply to say, "Be merciful and give"'.<sup>84</sup>

Khadi could show no improvement in its quality. 'The fault is not in the spinning but in the tools employed'. The right way to prevent exploitation and enforce boycott of foreign cloth, Ramanathan proposed, was to establish more mills. He even alleged that the figures purported by AISA were fudged.

Coming from a man of Ramanathan's stature and that too from Tamil Nadu, it required a response from the khadi establishment. Ramanathan had been

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p.11

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., pp12-3.

Secretary to Tamil Nadu branch of AISA for years. The province of Tamil Nadu at the time, as noted by the Khadi Guide of 1927, when Ramanathan had been at its helm, was foremost both in the Khadi production and sale. Out of the total production of Khadi in the country nearly half was produced in Tamil Nadu. The goods produced at the chief centre of this province viz. Tiruppur were in great demand in all parts of India. It was this province, more almost than any other, that was meeting the need of less developed provinces. About forty percent of production of this province, was exported to other provinces and overseas while sixty percent was consumed within the province itself. The quality and the prices of the cloth produced in Tiruppur compared very favourably with those produced in other parts of India. The superior cotton used by expert weavers gave the cloth produced a peculiar softness and added attractiveness not produced by clothes of other provinces. The AISA had direct investment of Rs. 318, 144 in the province. There were thirteen centres of production and nineteen centres of sale, run departmentally by the AISA. The sale *bhandars* were turning out very good sales compared with the sale of the *bhandars* in the other provinces. The *bhandars*, departmental as well as those recognised and certified, sold only Tamil Nadu Khadi. Tamil Nadu was ahead of other provinces in production and sale but there were resources still awaiting development. The production activities of all the centres run directly by the provincial branch of the AISA furnished work to 12,829 spinners and 1138 weavers. There were 63 workers in the Tamil Nadu branch of the Association, not counting the menial staff. Of this number, 14 were workers who gave up their practice of law or their studies in college during the non-co-operation movement and were doing Congress work during 1920-21 and in the years following.<sup>85</sup> *Would Ramanathan contend that the figures supplied by him in his*

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<sup>85</sup> All India Spinners' Association's Khadi Guide. 1927. pp. 70-9



capacity as Secretary of Tamil Nadu branch of AISA, based on which Khadi Guide of 1927 was published, were fudged?

His hard hitting critique of khadi movement succeeded in eliciting response from two well known khadi workers. Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya and N. S. Varadachari, both Secretary to their provincial branches of AISA in Andhra and Tamil Nadu respectively wrote their rejoinder to Ramanathan. The critique of Ramanathan contained no new points. During its tenure khadi had faced many such criticism and Gandhi had himself patiently answered all such criticisms., Pattabhi wrote in his rejoinder that a response to Ramanathan was necessitated not for the novelty of argument, if any, that his criticism contained but because it came from the horse's mouth.

Pattabhi's rejoinder<sup>86</sup> lacked the bite of Ramanathan. Although argumentative, it lacked lustre, perhaps emanating from the sentiment, as he wrote, that it was 'too late in the day to attack the cult of khaddar on fundamentals'. 'Khaddar is really the beaconfire that points the way to the vessels on the high seas straying for want of direction. It is the chart and compass that guides the mills and men to the haven of swadeshi and self-government.' Pattabhi defended khadi on the pretext of it being the handi-craft.

Machinery has its place in life but not to displace artistic crafts...Craft life is based upon the preservation of the home in fact, upon the promotion of a sense of ownership in the craftsmen, upon the perpetuation of his trained skill and artistic instinct in the of ages that he practices and above all upon the conserving of the sanctity of the home and its morals. It promotes creative energy and gives man the joy of making whole not parts, of being an artist, not a mechanic, of being a master not a coolie. Civilization as it is understood today is *City-l-zation* and is for that very reason alien to the spirit of 85% of people that live in villages.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>86</sup> Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayaa. 'A Reply to Mr. S Ramanathan'. in Ramanathan. S. (1931). op. cit., p.18

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid* . p.28.

Gandhi minced no word when it came to the question of mills. He had been constantly saying that his propaganda was not against mills as there was enough space for both, khadi and mill, to grow as long foreign cloths continued to be dumped in the country. He had even pleaded with the government to lift taxes on mill cloth. It was his concern for idleness in the villages that had him think of khadi. It was however not a permanent solution.

'If ever the time comes when the people of this country will have another, more honest occupation [other than spinning and weaving] and when the cotton can not be grown on the soil of this land, or when the cultivators themselves prefer to grow another, more profitable crop, then the vow of swadeshi cloth may serve no useful purpose. If future generations, reading the literature of this age, regard this vow as an immutable principle, and even at that time apply the principle of swadeshi to cloth, they will show themselves as foolish and will be acting like people who drown themselves in their ancestral well instead of swimming across it....My reason can not conceive of such a time ever coming. Whether it comes or not, there can be no two opinions that *in our present condition, khadi is the purest form of swadeshi....*'\*\*

What was India's condition then? The three-fourths of the population of India, mainly rural and agricultural, depended solely on agriculture without any other supplementary occupation. A glance at the occupational statistics, in 1927, shows how the population stood to the sources of living.<sup>89</sup>

Table I

Agriculture	70.9% with 45% workers and 55% dependents
Organised Industries	1%
Trade	6%
Transport	2%
Administration	2%

\*\* Nanda., op. cit., p. 56.

<sup>89</sup> Khadi Guide, 1927, p. 3.

The above shows that the organised industries on which so much store was laid had not absorbed more than 1% of the population and had not been able to fill up in the least the gap left by the general extinction of almost all the old indigenous industries. Agriculture was still the only source of living for three quarters of the population. And what was the condition of this industry which was the sole means of living for so large a portion of the population? It yielded even in normal seasons a poor and precarious living. The holdings were too small and very often scattered to make cultivation profitable. The total cultivated area in British India was estimated to be near 225 million acres. This hardly leaves an acre per head to the agricultural population. The average size of a holding in different provinces was stated to be as under:<sup>90</sup>

Table II

Province	Acres
Assam	2.96
Bengal	3.12
Bihar & Orissa	3.09
Bombay	12.15
Burma	5.65
C.P.&Behar	8.48
Madras	4.91
N.W.F.P	11.22
Punjab	9.18
U.P.	2.51

Pattabhi wrote in his 'On Khaddar' answering the allegation that spinning was not a paying proposition.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid .

It is not. It has never been claimed to be such. At best it can not fetch more than one anna eight pies a day but what is the average income of the Indian? It is one anna nine pies per day and that including the millions of the millionaire, the crores of the Koteswara and the lakhs of the Lakshdikari. They yield the average of one anna nine pies for this millions, and there must be millions of population indeed who are nothing. Is it wrong then for these millions who are earning nothing to be provided with an occupation which yields them as much as the average income in India without dislodging them from their homes and families? What India must take notice of is her immense manpower.<sup>91</sup>

Gandhi had understood the misconceived notion about the role of government that Indians nurtured. It was suggested that when Swaraj was won, the charkha could be popularised by the national government. For Gandhi, however, winning swaraj was dependent on the degree of acceptance of khadi among the people. To win swaraj India had to make a 'decent show' of khadi. Moreover, in Gandhi's conception a Government was ideal that governed the least.<sup>92</sup>

Gandhi did recognise the importance of the government enforcement to transmute the society for better. It became obvious from his call to legislate against the in-sanitary practices of villagers. Charkha had opened the village problem but it was yet to deliver substantial solution. In-sanitation was one such 'old habit' that could not be 'dealt without the State aid'. 'I regret to have to confess that ingrained bad habits handed down from generation to generation do not yield to persuasion.' Legislation seemed to be the only effective remedy.<sup>93</sup>

But the same method of adopting legislation did not apply to the charkha. On the contrary, charkha was the precursor of every reform. Only if nation could concentrate its energy on the charkha, it would pave the way for legislation

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<sup>91</sup> Sitharamayya, Pattabhi, *On Khaddar*, 1931, p.25

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p118.

<sup>93</sup> 'Hookworm and Charkha'. *Young India*, 27 August 1925. CWMG. Vol XXVIII. p.123.

where legislation was required. The bane of the country was not the drain of wealth, it was not even the poverty. It was the enforced idleness, which then became a habit, for the peasantry. Idleness was the root of all the ills. 'A nation that is starving has little hope or initiative left in it.' Only plying of charkha could result in the country's reinvigoration. The energy required could only come from people, and could not be enforced by the government.<sup>94</sup>

But it is strange that while Gandhi believed in khadi propaganda at the people's level, without any governmental involvement, he needed the active participation of the educated Indian in taking charkha to the real target, the poor.

Gandhi complained of his failure to convince the educated class as a body of the truth of charkha's essential position. There is obviously something wanting in the reform or the reformer if he does not get the members of the society to which he belongs to take up his reform. Imbuing the masses to non-co-operate with the foreign and mill spun cloth and establish closest co-operation with cloth of their own spinning and weaving, in Gandhi's conception, could not be done without the aid of the educated class. 'I gratefully and confess fully that if hundreds of educated man and women were not helping me in spreading the message of the spinning wheel and khaddar, it would not have made the progress it has, and if the progress is not as fast as it might be, it is because the educated class as a whole stands aside from the khaddar movement... Masses... lack the heart to do what their mind approves... If the strength was in my gift, the masses would have been transformed by now. But I know my helplessness in that direction'.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 'About Educated Classes', Young India, 15 October 1925, p.331

Despite his failure he would go relentlessly after the educated for the conversion of their heart. Referring to the Swarajists he said, 'I do not wish violently to wrest the Congress from the educated India.... After all, those who have led an active political life in the old fashion, can not possibly be expected to sit idle, whilst 'dreamers' like me expect to evolve an intensely active programme out of a 'harmless toy' like the spinning wheel. They brought the Congress into being, and I must wait for their conversion before the Congress can become a purely spinning association'.<sup>96</sup>

Gandhi maintained, 'If [the middle class take to khadi] people will take to khadi very soon. It is, therefore, the middle class which is to blame, whether for a serious lapse or for an adequate effort. If this class-the educated class-understands the importance of khadi it will not be difficult to spread its use; for then, we shall be able to lower the price of khadi as much as we wish'.<sup>97</sup>

The village regeneration was possible only when the prevailing state of ignorance in rural areas was replaced by the light of knowledge carried by the educated. The people there did not know the rules of healthy living. The educated classes should in a spirit of humble service, go into villages and study the condition of the people.<sup>98</sup>

The khadi movement however remained embroiled in intellectual controversy. Even ardent khadi workers doubted its efficacy. 'Can it work? Can it succeed? Can we now plant again the charkha in its old place of sanctity in every home? Is it not too late? ....And there is Bertrand Russell who says that industrialism is like a force of nature and India, too, will be submerged whether we want it or

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 'Why not surrender completely?', Young India, 20 August 1925, p 87.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p 271

<sup>98</sup> 'Entering Villages', Navjivan, 31May 1925,CWGMG, Vol. XXVII, p177

not. Can India even if she wants to, isolate herself and get out of the clutches of industrialism'.<sup>99</sup>

In November, 1926, during the Youth Week, at Ahmedabad, Mahadev Desai was giving a lecture-cum-demonstration on the *takli*.<sup>100</sup> 'But some youth got bored listening to it and they started a disturbance', Gandhi wrote criticising the youth for their lack of 'restraint, courtesy, humility and tolerance'.<sup>101</sup>

Showing repugnance against the *takli* is like marching an army against an ant. It has been shown in *Navjivan* by extracts from old books that *takli* is one of man's oldest tools. The *takli* is poor people's machine, it is their asylum. Just as the plough is the means of producing food, so is the *takli* the means of producing cloth. Huge mill might arise out of the *takli*. A spinning mill means a mill containing *taklis*. ...a spinning mill makes independent spinners dependent by getting within itself all the various *taklis*. Thus a *takli* is a symbol of freedom, a mill that of dependence. How then can one dislike such a thing as a means of support?<sup>102</sup>

It could be argued that on the technological scale the educated had moved higher even if the masses had remained encrusted in the same technological plane as that of the charkha. What could perhaps have been enthusiastically accepted by the villagers could breed only scepticism among the city bred middle class. For the educated therefore the charkha seemed an anachronism and the *takli*, doubly so.

Making the educated as the carrier of his idea was fine as long as people of this class could relate with the poor. Gandhi did achieve notable success in collecting

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<sup>99</sup> 'Snares of Satan', *Young India*, 6 August 1925, CWMG, Vol. XXVIII, p.30

<sup>100</sup> 'Culture', *Navjivan*, 5 December 1926, CWMG, vol. XXXII, pp.387-9.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

exceptional people who were, though city-bred and educated, magnificent in their dedication to the cause. But it tended to remain limited to more exceptional people.

As he made inroads into it, the problems of rural India began to unfold before Gandhi. Most glaring, besides poverty, was that of unequal distribution of agricultural land. In most parts of India the agriculturist was a mere tenant, at the mercy of the zamindar, and dragged on a miserable existence. 'Can't we solve the problem', asked a friend to Gandhi, 'by dispossessing these zamindars and distributing their land among the poor?'<sup>103</sup>. The question hit the most appropriate nail. Almost in similar vein Nehru too had complained as saying that remedy suggested by Gandhi for the poverty amelioration had not touched 'the fundamental causes of the poverty'. 'You do not say a word against the semi-feudal zamindari system which prevails in a great part of India or against the capitalist exploitation of both the workers and the consumers'.<sup>104</sup> Gandhi pointed at inability to do anything basic while the government was alien. He felt more important than the legislative reform was internal cleansing. It was possible only when volunteers took the village reform as their life mission. Nothing could be gained by forcibly dispossessing the landlords of their land. What was really required was the change of their heart. 'When that is done, and when they learn to melt at their tenants' woe, they will hold their lands in trust for them, will give them the major part of their produce, keeping only sufficient for themselves. Wishful thinking? Gandhi did not think so.<sup>105</sup>

Although appreciative of the sacrifices made for the Bolshevism, Gandhi did not agree with its methods. Bolshevism aimed at the abolition of the institution of

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<sup>103</sup> 'Patriot's wail', Young India, 4 February 1926. CWMG, Vol. XXIX, p. 362.

<sup>104</sup> 'Letter from Jawaharlal Nehru', 11 January 1928, CWMG, vol. XXXV, Appendix X, pp. 540-4

<sup>105</sup> 'Patriot's Wail.....', p. 363.



the private property. This, according to Gandhi, was only an 'application of the ethical ideal of non-possession in the realms of economics'. If this ideal could be made to be acceptable to the people by their own accord or by peaceful persuasion there would be nothing be like it. Bolshevism, however, not only supported the use of force but freely sanctioned it for the expropriation of private property and maintaining the collective State ownership of the same. Gandhi was of firm opinion that nothing enduring could be built on violence.<sup>116</sup> In his view those who talked of violent method to effect the land reform were 'vainly flattering themselves with hope of success'. Further, in their calculation, the agriculturists never figured, nor were they aware of ground realities. 'The oppressed need no other education, except in satyagraha and non-co-operation. A slave is slave because he consents to slavery. If training in physical resistance is possible, why should that in spiritual resistance be impossible?'<sup>117</sup>

Khadi was Gandhi's answer to land reform question. As the pressure on land had increased due to the population explosion and the destruction of allied rural industries, more and more people wanted to carve out a limited cake for themselves. Violence as a means to effect social change was farthest in his mind. And any attempt to rearrange land holdings in rural India through state sponsored violence or even through groups advocating violent method of social change would have meant a bloody India. This, he wanted to avoid at any cost. The alternative was to create a system by which pressure on land was eased. This could be possible only when alternative means of livelihood was created. India's traditional industry of spinning had been destroyed by imports from Britain. If people could be persuaded to boycott British cloth and to adopt khadi, then an occupation away from land could be provided to the people. Here use of

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<sup>116</sup> CWMG, vol. XXXVII, p380.

<sup>117</sup> 'Patriot's Wail...', p.363.

machinery could have reduced the utilisation of manpower - India's most important asset -but at the same time a power which without proper employment could detonate itself into senseless dissipation of energy - and thus population would have gone work less. Hence the Gandhian abhorrence of machinery - of which the most important emphasis was on the employment aspect.

Khadi was the product of that concern. It was always a difficult proposition to create an alternative structure than shooting off people in the name of equitable distribution of wealth. He chose the difficult proposition than the easy method of eliminating probable threats which does not just deceive but also keeps rising like a phoenix to haunt. Khadi was this alternative system. And to make it a viable proposition he went most methodically in erecting it. He created an organisation to take care of khadi research and development, its business dealings, its active army of believers. An organisation created by the political body but autonomous in all its dealings. The effort that went into the making of khadi was enormous, greater than killing a landlord or getting killed in the process. Later, Gandhi, with the deepening of his knowledge of rural India, would found All India Village Industries Association under the leadership of J. C. Kumarappa. Khadi in 1930's and thereafter would be the sun of the solar system, with other village industries as planets, for village regeneration.

## CHAPTER FIVE

# MOMENTS OF **PASSION**

1934, 1945

**Major changes effected but facts exposed inherent failure...**

The year 1934 witnessed a far reaching change in the trend and spirit of khadi work. Though the actual work of the year is not marked by striking outward difference, the seeds were planted during the year of what would eventually grow into a transformation of khadi from being primarily a relief work to an essentially uplift movement. The Harijan tour<sup>1</sup> in 1933 and the early part of 1934 gave Gandhi extensive opportunities of observing and studying the work of khadi production and distribution in its immediate environment. He was struck with a fact that the consumer of khadi in towns and cities had come to be, more or less, the central figure in the khadi organisation. Every effort was being made to supply to the consumer, wherever he happened to be, as much Khadi as he had the mind to consume, of whatever quality he might choose to ask for, at the lowest possible price. More than that there was noticed a constant endeavour to tempt the appetite of the urban user of khadi by offering him an ever widening variety of designs and by continuous improvement in the appearance and fineness of the texture. At the same time a progressive reduction in the price of khadi was effected to make it easier for him to take up a larger quantity of khadi than would otherwise have been possible. This activity had a two-fold aim. One object was to direct the patriotism of the dwellers in towns and cities to constructive channels, to rouse in them a sense of responsibility for the welfare of the masses in the villages and get them to sacrifice some of their comforts to relieve the distress of their semi-starved countrymen in the rural areas. The more important purpose was to develop Khadi on such line as to generate as large a volume of employment and relief in the villages as possible.

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<sup>1</sup> After the Poona Pact in 1932 Gandhi began a nationwide tour for campaign against the Untouchability.

While it must still remain the concern of AISA to satisfy the demand for khadi in the towns and cities, Gandhi laid stress on the fact that the true objective of the movement was not the sale of certain quantity of khadi at any price or simply the provision of a certain amount of relief to the rural population, but what it could do to help the villagers and the artisans to be self-reliant in the matter of their clothing requirements and make their lives generally richer, fuller and better.

This viewpoint led to a reorientation in the policy and work of the AISA to a considerable extent. The ideal of production for use rather than for the market, which is the true basis of the handicraft system of production had come into the foreground. Its immediate practical application was that those engaged in the production of khadi should use, in the first instance, for their requirements the khadi they had themselves produced. If anything was left over, it would be available for and consumed by the non-producers in the village. What the village had to spare might travel to other parts in the taluk which had need for it and then ultimately in the province. The province was a large enough unit to consume all that was produced within its limit. The ideal of progressive self-sufficiency should be realised in the use of khadi. The family as a social unit should produce all its needs in the way of clothing and in the same way the village up to the province should attain this condition of self-sufficiency in the matter of cloth. To this end, the work should be laid out so as to produce wholesome reactions in the personal lives of the villagers, raising their working capacity. Khadi workers should enter into and identify themselves with the lives of the villagers and help them in their efforts for betterment in all spheres.

I have found that the time has come for khadi workers to emphasise more than ever before the necessity of greater concentration on the observance of the laws of khadi

economics. Some of them are essentially different from those that govern the general economics. Thus, as a rule, articles manufactured in one place are sent, or attempted to be sent, to all parts of the world. Those who manufacture the articles need not use them at all. Not so with khadi. Its peculiarity is that it has to be used where it is produced and preferably by the spinners and weavers themselves.

It follows that we must not seek to send khadi for sale far away from its place of manufacture. The surplus khadi should be sold in the village where it is manufactured. If there is still a surplus, it should be sold in the district of its manufacture.

The foregoing does not mean a revolution in the immediate administration of the AISA. But it does mean a revolution in the thought world. The best mind of the khadi workers will concentrate itself upon the village khadi, upon its style and durability, to suit the taste of the villagers. There will thus have to be a better and more real bond between ginners, carders, spinners and weavers on the one hand, and the khadi workers on the other. There will be no feverish anxiety to increase the sales in town. These sales will be regulated according to the demand of the town dwellers and the propaganda conducted by khadi lovers, who will not or can not directly reach the villagers but who will not be satisfied till they have sold some khadi on behalf of the poor spinners and weavers.<sup>2</sup>

Another important change was the introduction of the minimum wage to spinners. The objective of khadi propaganda was to improve the lot of the spinners who were the lowest paid labourers. 'We shall certainly take orders from the city people who will want our khadi, and we shall get that khadi done by those who will get a wage per hour proportionate to their daily need. It is time we began to think in terms of their needs, their hours of work and leisure, and their standard of living'. The introduction of 'minimum subsistence wage'

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<sup>2</sup> 'Laws of khadi economics', *Haryana*, 27 April 1934

created the fear of fall in demand for khadi. Gandhi was undeterred. It was a right thing which could not be shunned for fear of the public demand falling. Gandhi asked the Association to remove, if need arose, from its list of spinners those who did not need the support of spinning for their food. The task before the Association workers was now to find who were the needy ones in terms of the Association scheme. The Association was now not to concern itself with those who eked out a living in some other way.

The Board of Spinners' Association met in solemn conclave to consider Gandhi's proposal for a new departure in their khadi policy. As one of the members said that this was the solemnest meeting during the last fifteen years. The proposal for a living wage for all the workers in khadi production was simple enough, as everyone of the members agreed and the principle at the back of it was unexceptionable. But the working of it seemed, to some of them, to be the most complex decision. The new departure had already been made in Maharashtra,<sup>5</sup> and some wanted to wait and profit by the experience in this province. Some were afraid that it was not possible to confine the sales to the provinces where khadi was manufactured, and that the workers would be confronted with difficulty in finding a market for khadi. When the sales were dwindling even under the prevailing conditions, they were bound to disappear under the obviously less favourable conditions. In a province like Andhra, where it was possible to get khadi of fine texture for a particular price, it would be impossible to sell khadi of a coarser texture for the same price under the new conditions. The administrative charges would not be lower but proportionately higher with the narrowing of the field of production for the new policy require better technical skill, more care, and more attention to detail. There was thus an

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<sup>5</sup> When the increase in the spinners wages was decided upon by the AISA, the Maharashtra branch was the foremost in giving enthusiastic support to the proposal. It had the direct guidance of Shri Vinoba Bhave.

inevitable loss involved in the very working of the new policy. Should this loss also be charged to the consumer, and khadi made dearer than the higher spinners' wage would render it?

Gandhi tried to meet all these objections and doubts and difficulties by further elucidating the principle. 'We must', he said, 'once for all dismiss the thought of competing with futile, soul killing economics'.

Do you know the insidious way in which Japanese fents are glutting the market? Whereas less than five years ago they were a few thousand yards, they amount to millions of yards today. How can you compete with these? No, we must no longer aim at reducing the prices in order to meet this competition. We have all these years thought of the consumer and done precious little for the spinner, forgetting that the Association was a spinners' association, not an association for consumers. We have to be true representatives of the spinners which we have ceased to be. The result is that we have simply jogged on and relied on the political upheavals and indulged in a kind of gamble. "What is the use of all the fancy advertisements that you have been giving?", I asked Jerajani. "We shall soon end in justifying the charge that we are maintaining the institution in order to provide work for the middle class unemployed." It is therefore that I suggest that we should no more incur losses in order to exploit the neediest of our fellow men. "In order to give a hundred women a satisfactory wage, you will run the risk of depriving thousands of them of employment.", is the question that was put to me. I say it is a crisis that it is necessary to produce in order to get rid of a remittent fever. I ask you to forget the cities and the consumers in the cities. Concentrate in making the thirty crores of our villagers produce and use their own khadi and the one crore or so city dwellers will automatically begin to wear khadi. Do not mind a temporary lull or a breakdown. If there is no demand do not produce the supply.<sup>4</sup>

The result of the discussion was a resolution which was unanimously adopted: 'This council is of opinion that the wages now paid for spinning are inadequate, and therefore resolves that they be raised and a suitable standard be fixed so that spinners may at least receive a minimum wage calculated on the basis of eight

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<sup>4</sup> Harijan, 19 October, 1935.



hours' efficient work, sufficient at least to procure clothing (20 yards per year) and maintenance in accordance with a scientifically prescribed scale of minimum food requirements. All concerned should try as circumstances permit, for a progressive rise in the wages scale, so as to reach a standard enabling each spinning family to be properly maintained out of the earnings of its working members.<sup>5</sup>

### 1944-45

This was the year of confessions and introspection. On September 1, 1944 AISA met at Sevagram, presided over by Gandhi himself. The AISA was meeting after the gap of more than two years. The world was still engrossed in the dangerous game of warfare, which had begun in the winter of 1939. India herself had undergone the upheaval of the last of the national struggle, the 'Quit India' movement. 'It seemed as though one age had succeeded another, bringing in the process trouble for whole of India. How could the Charkha Sangh have escaped it?'

The preceding National Struggle had taken a heavy toll. A large amount of the AISA property had either been destroyed or was in Government custody. Many of its workers, having taken part in the 'Quit India' movement, now languished in the jail. The scar caused by the government action daunted Gandhi. He discovered that the 'foundation of the AISA was so weak that the Association could be easily wiped out of existence'. The years of work had not made it take root in the life of the people. The Government could destroy it by imprisoning its leaders. On the other hand Marxian ideas had gripped the country. The literature on the subject abounded. The educated were veering towards it.

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<sup>5</sup> *Haryana*, 19 October, 1935.

Thus, was introduced what came to be known as *Charkha Sangh ka Navasankaran-* the reorientation in the work of AISA. On the basis of experience of a decade of khadi work 1935-44, during which wages for spinners were fixed in terms of the objective of a living wage, value of sales of khadi rose to Rs.1 crore (partly due to rise in price following fixation of spinners wages). The demand for khadi developed due to patriotic fervour and due to cloth shortage in the earlier years of the war. The work of AISA, suffered some disruption due to the political arrests of its workers, Gandhi reviewed the khadi situation with considerable dissatisfaction over some of the emerging trends. In his talks and discussions with the Trustees of AISA, at Sevagram in 1944, he measured khadi work against the objective of reaching seven hundred thousand villages and found that very little had been achieved. Although khadi was sold in the cities and work was thereby provided to villagers, it had not become acceptable in the villages where the spinners hardly spun for their own use. In the re-oriented approach to khadi Gandhi expounded, four aspects were intensively focused on : first, all efforts were to be directed towards self-sufficiency, i.e., towards spinning for one's own consumption; second, self-sufficiency was to be interpreted so as to allow scope for some production for sale so long as the sale was in the nearby village or district or at most the province; third, khadi, was not to be viewed as an occupation or craft merely to earn a living but as a means for uplifting the villages and thereby generating in the people spontaneous strength for swaraj; and fourth, the objective was to rejuvenate the village life as a whole and this could not be done by khadi alone but through a rehabilitation of agriculture, cattle breeding and all other village industries.

Khadi was never meant merely for the townspeople....The defect in the existing development, good though it appeared, was that it was not good enough for the villagers who spun yarn and wove khadi but did not use it themselves. They neither understood nor appreciated the dignity and value that its use carried. The fault was not theirs. The workers themselves did not understand. The town

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dwellers had to wear khadi and do the penance. They were willing to buy penance for a few extra rupees which they could easily spare and be called patriots in the bargain. But how could the Charkha Sangh belie its faith by ignoring the very foundation of khadi?<sup>6</sup>

Gandhi emphasised that mere pursuit of the social objective of providing employment to the people or the economic objective of producing khadi for sale was not the core of the khadi programme. Khadi, according to him, could begin 'to have permanent effect only when carried out as part and parcel of the wider programme of non-violent village uplift or village reconstruction.' 'Today', he stated, 'our main concern should be to lay the foundation for this [khadi] work as deep as possible and not merely be satisfied with the production of khadi and sale of khadi itself.' The cardinal point in the above approach was to build up self reliance among the rural people. To achieve this wider objective, Gandhi presented a draft of the proposal which contained following points.

- The village is the centre for the charkha, and the Charkha Sangh can realise its highest ambitions only when its work is decentralised in the villages.
- The largest number of workers whose one passion is the charkha and whom the AISA approves should go to the villages.
- The sales-depots and production-centres should be curtailed.
- Training institutions should be developed and teaching courses enlarged.
- The Sangh should permit any province or district which wants to be independent and self-sufficient to become so.
- A standing Committee composed of the members of the AISA, AIVIA and the Hindustani Talimi Sangh should be formed in order to issue necessary directions in the light of the new ideology.

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<sup>6</sup> 'The New Plan', *Harijan*, 27 July, 1946

The task assigned to the three institutions was to achieve perfect non violence. The three institutions was to be so equipped that entire government machinery would depend upon them and not the *vice versa*. This would save the AISA from being reduced to a mere philanthropic institution.

‘We plied the Charkha’, Gandhi complained in the convention, ‘but mechanically, not intelligently.’ The workers had not fully adopted the non-violent outlook. Gandhi had thought of disbanding the AISA and distributing its property and funds among the people. Khadi was the epitome of non-violent self-sufficient economy.

If you agree with me you would wind up the AISA and distribute all its property and assets among its workers for carrying on the work. The Sangh need not keep even a pice for future activities. All of us should be convinced that the charkha is the symbol of non-violent economic self-sufficiency. If we and the people grasp this significance of the charkha not a pice need be spent on propaganda for the charkha. There would then be no reason to fear Government ordinances either. Nor need we look to the rich for alms. We shall without effort become the centre of hope, and people will come to us of their own accord. They will not go elsewhere to seek work. Every village will become the nerve centre of Independent India... This is the real function of the Sangh. We have to live and die for it.

## ALL INDIA SPINNERS ASSOCIATION

‘I am a man possessed by an idea’, Gandhi said in an interview to Louis Fisher at Sevagram in the first week of June, 1942, a month before his ‘Quit India’ call to British. ‘If such a man cannot get an organisation, he becomes an organisation’.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Fischer, Louis A Week with Gandhi, 1944, p.27

About the same time as his interview with Gandhi, Louis Fisher also talked to Gandhi's constant companion, Mahadev Desai. Desai used to spin five hundred yards a day. Even while travelling he spun on trains. But, Desai said to Fisher, he did not notice anybody else doing it. In the villages millions had taken to spinning thanks to Gandhi's propaganda and personal example. *'But the habit has not spread very far'*, Desai admitted, *'and spinning is no factor in India's national economy'*.<sup>8</sup>

If Gandhi's statement exemplified his determination and faith, Desai's betrayed the ground realities.

Khadi was an idea which had possessed Gandhi, much before his tryst with India's freedom struggle. The All India Spinner's Association (AISA) was an organisation born out of the womb of this idea. AISA, however, was preceded by other efforts to organise the khadi works.

In July 1921, by passing a resolution asking for the general information on nation-wide khadi works, the Congress began its association with khadi. At the Satyagraha Ashram in Sabarmati already khadi work was going at regular pace under the able supervision of Maganlal Gandhi. In those days, it was difficult to dispose off khadi that was produced. Cadres as well as leaders had to go on hawking.

Besides propaganda, it was also important to organise khadi work. In May 1922 the Congress Working Committee so as to stimulate the production and consumption of khadi entrusted Seth Jammalal Bajaj with the organisation of a

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p10

special Department of Khadi for which the Committee sanctioned Rs.17 lakh. The Department comprised of three divisions a)Technical Instruction b)Production c)Sale.

Technical Instruction was to be provided at the Sabarmati Ashram under the instruction of Maganlal Gandhi. Every province was invited to send two or three students each to this institute for a six month's course, to be trained in all the process of khadi production. Students trained here were to be engaged for the organisation of the khadi centres or similar training institutes in their respective provinces.

The Department of Production was to aim at the co-ordination of inter provincial work and the standardisation of yarn or cloth. The department was not ordinarily to interfere with the administration of local organisations. Mr Lakhmidas Purshottam was to direct the department with help of travelling inspectors. The sales department was to open khadi stores in select places where Provincial Congress Committees were unable to provide adequate facilities for consumers. Mr Vithaldas Jerajani was to be in-charge of this department. Seth Jannalal Bajaj<sup>9</sup> was responsible for the co-ordination between the departments and general propaganda work. The budget provided was:

a)Technical Instruction-Rs.25,000b)Sales Department-Rs.2,00,000 c)Production Department -Rs.20,000d)Propaganda Information Bureau-Rs. 1,00,000e)Loans to Provinces-13,55,000

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<sup>9</sup> He was solely responsible for the administration of the finances. All applications for the loans was to be forwarded by the provinces to Seth Jannalal Bajaj who would submit them to the Working Committee with his own recommendation. provided that in case of emergency Seth Jannalal might grant loans not exceeding Rs. 5000 in anticipation of the Working Committee's sanctions

On 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1924 by a resolution at the Cocanada Congress All India Khadi Board was appointed. Its term of office was for three years. Head quartered at Sabarmati, Jannalal Bajaj was appointed as its president-cum-treasurer and Shankarlal Banker as its secretary. Among the six member Board were Shaukat Ali, Vallabhbai Patel, Maganlal Gandhi and others. The resolution also appointed six auditing Inspectors for different zones; they were to officiate from under a Auditor.

Jannalal's appointment as the president-cum-treasurer of the Board was significant. In the absence of Gandhi, who was then undergoing a six year jail term, his appointment showed the confidence that Gandhi reposed in him. An adopted heir to a rich marwari merchant of Wardha, then a nondescript town in Central Maharashtra, Jannalal, was attracted to Gandhi, as his biographer<sup>10</sup> avers, by his ethical and spiritual outlook. Wardha, later in 30s and 40s was to become a laboratory for Gandhi's village reconstruction experiments, in whose making Jannalal played no small role<sup>11</sup>. 'He was one of the first and few businessmen who burnt their boats to join Gandhi'. He was made the Chairman of the Reception Committee for the Nagpur Congress session. Soon after the Nagpur Congress, at the instance of Gandhi, he was nominated as one of the two Treasurers of the Congress. It was under him that the mammoth task of collecting a crore of rupees, under the Bezwada programme was initiated and successfully completed.

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<sup>10</sup> Nanda, op.cit.,

<sup>11</sup> Money lending and cotton trade were the main occupations of the Bajaj family. The main stay of the family business, however, was trade in cotton. Its purchase, ginning, press-packing, and sale to textile mills in India and abroad. Although himself lacking any college education, Jannalal was involved in number of social activities including opening of schools and student hostels in and around Wardha. Gandhi's studied abstention from politics when he landed in India in 1915 drew Jannalal to him. He had then contributed a sum of Rs 30,000 for the construction of the ashram at Sabarmati. It was loyalty to Gandhi which later drew Jannalal into the political arena.

Founded in 1925, with its headquarters at Sevagram (Wardha), AISA was to be an expert body charged with the task of developing and organising hand-spinning and hand-weaving throughout the country. The Association succeeded in placing the industry on a sound footing and the figures given below will give an idea of the progress made in production and sale in the three quinquenniums<sup>12</sup>.

Table I

Period	Production (in Rupees)	Sale (in Rupees)
1926-30	1,53,72,883	2,00,59,517
1930-35	2,07,38,757	2,76,95,553
1936-40	2,20,59,673	2,76,44,467

In 1930, the total number of people engaged in organising the khadi industry was over 2000. Precise figures as regard the number of workers in the aided and private organisations are not available but in the direct service of AISA alone there were 1145 workers distributed in different provinces. With the workers in the Aided and Independent organisations the number must be well over 2000; and these were distributed over 638 depots in all parts of the country. Of these, 264 were of AISA, 61 were of aided and 313 of independent. The numbers according to the provinces are as shown in Table II.

<sup>12</sup>Mitra, K & P P. Lakshman *Cottage Industry in Indian Economy*



Table II

Figures showing the number of khadi workers in the AISA,  
Aided and Independent Organisations.

Province	A.I.S.A	Aided	Independent
Andhra	30	4	53
Assam	...	...	1
Bihar	57	1	13
Bengal	...	44	17
Bombay	3	...	5
Burma	1	...	...
Gujarat	7	...	20
Karnatak	21	...	36
Kashmir	1	...	...
Maharashtra	23	1	4
Punjab	11	5	7
Rajasthan	18	1	28
Sind	1	1	7
T.N & Kerala	51	2	69
U.P. & Delhi	30	2	50
Utkal	10	-	3
Total	264	61	313

(Source: Khadi Guide, 1931, p2)

The total production and sale for the financial year of the Association ending 30<sup>th</sup> September, 1930 were as under:

**Table III**  
**THE TOTAL PRODUCTION AND**  
**SALE IN THE YEAR OF 1930**

<b>Province</b>	<b>Production</b>	<b>Sale</b>
Andhra	802337	825001
Behar	401359	450096
Bengal	495747	895833
Bombay	..	536472
Burma	..	39624
Gujarat	46617	276856
Karnatak	98800	444232
Kashmir	222802	76756
Maharashtra	119895	404996
Punjab	303892	267826
Rajasthan	486268	212313
Sind	...	104674
T.N & Kerala	1624411	1196607
U.P. & Delhi	814320	788217
Utkal	75162	100366
<b>Total</b>	<b>5491610</b>	<b>6619869</b>

(Source: Khadi Guide, 1931, p22)

The activities of the production depots in 1930 covered 6909 villages and benefitted 1196 cadres, 179453 spinners and 13733 weavers as under. The figures given below are incomplete in respect of Bengal and U.P.- Delhi. The cadres figure is small because in most places the spinners carded the cotton themselves.

Table IV

**The number of Villages that benefited from AISA work with number of direct beneficiaries i.e., Carders, Spinners and Weavers.**

Province	Villages	Carders	Spinners	Weavers
Andhra	674	436	20716	1246
Bihar	773	...	16432	1181
Bengal	81	...	3025	441
Gujarat	301	...	4356	79
Karnatak	581	43	7879	505
Maharashtra	221	227	4750	1386
Punjab	311	...	65844	1336
Rajasthan	563	490	13062	2714
T.N.	2983	...	38997	3210
U.P.& Delhi	332	...	2292	1560
Utkal	89	...	2100	75
<b>Total</b>	<b>6909</b>	<b>1196</b>	<b>179453</b>	<b>13733</b>

(Source: Khadi Guide, 1931, p23)

The amounts distributed as wages to the above mentioned number of cardres, spinners and weavers in the year 1929-30, were as follow:

**Table V**  
**The Wages distributed among the Spinners and Weavers in 1930**

Province	Spinners	Weavers
Andhra	209379-8-5	285053-10-5
Bihar	99939-7-9	80563-7-9
Karnatak	28753-0-0	28734-0-0
Maharashtra	40034-9-3	38883-1-3
Punjab	51588-11-6	71505-11-6
Rajasthan	88500-0-0	132750-0-0
T.N.	411602-0-0	454884-0-0
U.P.& Delhi	160183-15-6	117812-8-9
Utkal	12264-0-0	10289-0-0
Total	1102245-4-5	1220475-7-8

(Source: Khadi Guide, 1931, p23)

From its inception to 1940, Shankarlal Banker remained the AISA Secretary. After that, Shri Krishandas Jajoo became its Secretary. From the beginning till his death in 1939, Jamnalal Bajaj was its treasurer. Besides the President, Secretary, Trustees, and its Executive Committee members, the Agents and the Secretaries at the Provincial Branches played an important role in the AISA network. The names of the Provincial Agents and Secretaries in 1927 are given below. There were changes in the later time but the table below gives an indication of the kind of people who were with the AISA.

Table VI:

## The names of Agents and Secretaries Of Provincial AISA branches in 1927

Province	Agent	Secretary
Andhra		Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya
Behar	Rajendra Prasad	Laxminarayan
Bengal	Hemaprova Devi	-
Burma	Nanalal Kalidas	-
Karnataka	Gangadharrao B. Deshpande	-
Punjab	Dr. Gopichand Bhargava	Kishanchand Bhatia
Rajasthan	Jamnial Bajaj	-
Sindh	Dr. Choithram P. Gidwani	-
Tamil Nadu	-	S. Ramanathan
U.P.	Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru	Sitla Sahai
Utkal	-	Niranjan Patnaik

(Source: Khadi Guide, 1927)

Till 30<sup>th</sup> November 1925, the Association had 2144 members under 'A' category, 140 under 'B' category and 17 Associate members. In 1926, a category for the children of age below 18 was introduced. Membership requirement in this category was fixed at thousand yard per month. The following table indicates the membership in the various categories from 1926-42.

Table VII

## Figures showing membership details from 1926 to 1942

YEAR	'A' Category	'B' Category	Children Category
1926	3472	942	-
1927	2195	340	264
1928	1527	279	205
1929	1411	In this year, both these categories were removed	
1930	1928		
1931	1308		
1932	655		
1933	512		
1934	1131		
1935	1206		
1936	1994		
1937	1161		
1938	1836		
1939	2531	Out of this 2274 were AISA workers	
1940	3558	Out of this 2939 were AISA workers	
1941	2914	Out of this 2417 were AISA workers and workers of Certified organisations	
1942	Owing to political upheaval there were very few members and information is also lacking		

(Source: *Charkha Sangh ka Itihas*, p 150)

AISA also had number of general workers on its roll who were paid minimal. In 1926-27, when AISA was already established it had, including the head quarter and all branches, a total of 435 workers, after that the figures were as follows:

Table VIII

Table containing the figures of number of workers on AISA's roll as well they payment they received for their work.

Year	Numbers of workers	Remarks
1927-28	411	
1928-29	663	Average monthly wage Rs.25/-
1929-30	1145	
1930-31	1949	Average monthly wage Rs.30/-
1932	1134	Average monthly wage Rs.20/-
1933	1115	Average monthly wage Rs.20/-
1934	871	Average monthly wage Rs.26/-
1935	1097	Average monthly wage Rs.21/-
1936	1135	
1937	1633	
1938	2221	
1939	2732	
1940	2933	
1941-42	3400	2188 of these received a monthly payment of Rs.19/- 1122 of these received Rs.20-50/- 122 of these received Rs.50/-
1942-43	1935	
1943-44	2438	
1944-45	2341	
1945-46	2136	394 of these received Rs.15/- 1170 of these received Rs.15-30/- 408 of these received Rs.30-50/- 142 of these received Rs.50-75/- 22 Of these received more than Rs.75/-

(Source: *Charkha Sangh ka Itihas*, p.169)

The work of the AISA by 1946 had spread over the whole of India. It had 19 branches and 900 production centres covering some 50,000 villages. Its sale organisations employing nearly 4000 men operated mostly in towns and cities and there were about 300 sale depots in all.

During the last 20 years of its work the Association had given employment to more than three lakhs spinners and about 50,000 weavers and had distributed 7 crores of rupees as wages among villagers. The wages paid were 6 annas and Re.1-80 per spinner and weaver respectively, for an eight-hour day. The annual output stood at one crore square yards and the sales about one crore.

Total output of khadi under AISA was, however, negligible in comparison with the nation's output of mill cloth. But the prospect of the industry is not so much in its possibility or impossibility to replace the entire mill cloth production, but the leadership it will have given for other cottage industries being organised on the same principles. Of these principles, the most striking is the policy of wage payment in spinning and weaving. In this connection, one may refer back to the year 1934 when Gandhi put the AISA to the test of bearing a living wage to its workers. The Association was shaken, and the sale of Khadi whose price has been raised fell off considerably. The fall in sale continued, but it did not take long to realise, as the following figures would show, that Gandhi had given it a healthy shake.

Table IX

Year	Total Production		Total Sale (In Rupees)
	In Rupees	In Sq. Yards	
1934	33,98,380	95,56,788	46,59,125
1936	27,74,029	64,88,926	36,73,690
1940	51,36,983	95,51,438	77,62,750

By 1940, one had reached back the yardage of 1934 and far exceeded the figures in rupees of both production and sale. The rise in wages instead of killing the industry had set it on a sounder footing, by giving the workers enough money to keep their body and soul together and clothe themselves in their own product and not cheap mill cloth. But unfortunately, the rise in wages had increased the volume of uncertified khadi coming to the market as it could be produced at wages lower than those fixed by the Association. It also was cent percent hand-spun and hand-woven, and as good as genuine khadi, and people buy it, no matter whether the spinner and the weaver have been sweated in the process.

‘Only those who toil should have a share in the output’, Gandhi had said in Noakhali. The wage policy of AISA which is his contribution to the nation is also nearly Marxian<sup>13</sup>. Shri Gulzarilal Nanda calculated that in producing Rs. 50 Crores worth of mill-made cloth in this country, only Rs. 10 Crores were distributed as wages. Khadi of the same value would make a wage-bill of Rs.35 Crores. Khadi made out of the same quantity of cotton as mill cloth would sell at Rs.100 crores, but would distribute Rs.70 crores as wages. Against an increase in the price of cloth by 50 crores, the increase in wages is Rs. 50 crores.

As Acharya Kriplani says, Khadi Industry is symbolic of a socialist economy where the workers get back most of their output. The output under AISA is not frittered away as profit, rent and interest. These three constitute the so-called ‘Surplus Value’ and an industry such as the Khadi Industry which leaves no room for ‘Surplus Value’ must according to the Marxian School be socialistic. Further, in this Industry the instruments of production are socially owned in the sense that workers severally can afford to purchase the Charkha and the capital

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<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, Chapter VI



required for organising these workers for production and sale consumption invested in the AISA which is a public body earning neither rent nor interest nor profit.

R.B. Gregg<sup>14</sup> says Khadi Industry provides one elemental security and - it tends immediately to develop the moral qualities of the people: hope, initiative, perseverance, self-reliance, self-respect'.

Table X

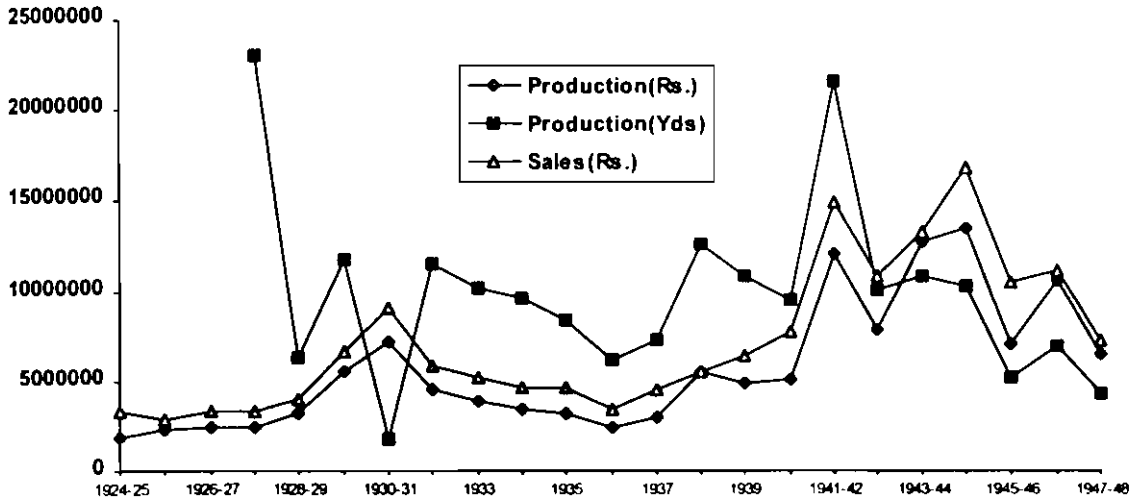
**Total khadi production and sales conducted by AISA and Certified Organisations (From 1924-48) are as follows:**

Year	Production (in Rs.)	Production (in Yg)	Sales (in Rs.)
1924-25	19,03,034	}	33,61,061
1925-26	23,76,670	}2,29,56,140	28,99,143
1926-27	24,06,370	}	33,48,794
1927-28	24,16,382	}	33,08,634
1928-29	31,55,437	62,61,812	39,49,077
1929-30	54,91,610	1,16,76,930	66,19,893
1930-31	72,15,502	1,75,76,576	90,94,132
1932	44,87,195	1,15,03,886	58,12,533
1933	38,68,810	1,02,24,344	51,75,927
1934	34,06,380	95,80,986	46,67,125
1935	32,44,105	84,61,737	46,90,013
1936	24,28,257	62,23,697	34,47,741
1937	30,15,339	72,69,877	45,32,729
1938	54,99,486	1,25,59,594	54,98,720
1939	48,29,610	1,08,95,608	64,13,002
1940	51,36,983	95,51,438	77,62,750
1941-42	1,20,02,430	2,15,84,076	1,49,85,513
1942-43	78,62,368	1,00,45,214	1,07,90,410
1943-44	1,27,52,233	1,08,80,739	1,32,61,642
1944-45	1,34,58,069	1,02,63,903	1,67,87,970
1945-46	70,63,219	51,76,995	1,04,86,530
1946-47	1,05,68,870	70,05,473	1,11,95,131
1947-48	65,74,389	43,51,646	72,46,604
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,11,63,048</b>	<b>21,41,40,674</b>	<b>16,53,35,074</b>

(Source: Charkha Singh Ka Itihaas, p. 320).

<sup>14</sup> Gregg, R. B., *Economics of Khaddar*, p. 153

The following is the graphic presentation of the above figures:



CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUDING THE **PASSION**

What, in post-independence India, is the impact of Gandhi's economic thoughts? Briefly, their impact was very limited. Shortly after independence a correspondent confronted Gandhi with the complaint that although he had argued all his life in favour of 'moral' economic policies, now that the British power had quit and the Indian National Congress was governing India, Gandhi had become strangely silent. 'You write nothing against the unmoral economics of India',<sup>1</sup> complained the correspondent.

Gandhi's reply was an admission of failure. 'Those who are in charge of the government are my fellow workers...If I have failed to convince them of the soundness and feasibility of the economics referred to by the correspondent, how should I expect to convince others? They do not feel that they would be able to carry the people of India with them in the prosecution of what may be summed up as the *khadi economics* and to renovate the villages of India through village industries'.<sup>2</sup>

Gandhi's insight that his erstwhile fellow-workers who were now in charge of the Government did not believe in Gandhian economic policies and had no wish to put them into practice was essentially correct.<sup>3</sup> Gandhi's failure was his inability to convince the educated India of the practicality of his khadi programme. When asked, in late 40s, 'What causes you the most concern-what keeps you awake at night?', Gandhi replied, 'The hardness of the heart of the educated'. But more than this it was perhaps his inability to make the village India as the fulcrum of its own change that marks Gandhi's own limitations.

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<sup>1</sup> *Harijan*, 14 September 1947; CWMG, Vol. LXXXIX, p. 144.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>3</sup> Pyarelal discusses the last attempt of Gandhi to make his heir understand him. Pyarelal, *Towards New Horizons.*, 1959, pp. 1-8.

Gandhi's principal mechanism for achieving Indian independence was the spinning wheel, with which he identified all his ideas. By reintroducing the wheel- a part of the Indian past, driven out of use by the British textile factories - and by spreading its use, he hoped to make India independent of foreign cloth, and to make each peasant family independent of the periodicity of Indian agriculture.

A nationalist song of the time went in the following manner:

*Yeh Charkha tope hai,  
Barood iske ban gaye gole,  
Isi se Lunkashayar  
Manchester ko udadenga.*<sup>4</sup>

Gandhi was indifferent with regard to trade in foreign goods other than cloth. He had never been an advocate of prohibition of all things foreign because they were foreign. His economic creed was a complete taboo in respect of all foreign commodities whose importation was likely to prove harmful to indigenous interests. That meant prohibition of import of a commodity that could be adequately supplied indigenously. He would not countenance the boycott of a single foreign article out of ill will or a feeling of hatred.<sup>5</sup>

The three affliction of disease, hunger and cloth famine could be removed when India adopted Swadeshi, in its restricted sense to mean only Swadeshi clothing. By insisting on Swadeshi in clothing, Gandhi had a two-pronged strategy. On one hand, he was trying to stop the drain of wealth owing to import of textiles and make India self-sufficient in clothing matters. As far as this aspect of

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<sup>4</sup> Quoted in 'Outlook', 18 August 1997, p.150.

<sup>5</sup> 'The Students' Interrogations', Young India, 15 November 1928, CWMG, vol. XXXVII, p.413.

Swadeshi was concerned he made no distinction between mill made clothes and hand-spun, hand-woven khadi. Production was to be indigenous, that was the criteria. On the other hand, stark poverty and un-employment made him insist upon hand-spun, hand-woven cloth as true Swadeshi. In it, he saw the potential to distribute wealth amongst the poorest of poor, instead of concentrating it in the hands of few mill owners. Primarily, therefore, the wheel was a practical technology.

But it was also, and just as importantly and by the same token, a symbol. Gandhi and his followers were to be seen sitting and spinning, and the yarn they spun was to be seen and handled; when woven it made white khadi cloth, which they wore. To spin and wear it was the mark of the Congress party. Other people also bought it and wore it as 'the livery of freedom', as Nehru had called it. But as a symbol the wheel was more than political and economic in its reference. It had spiritual, aesthetic, and historical dimensions; spiritually, Gandhi said the work of the spinning wheel composed his soul to peace like a prayer - it even restored his bodily health; aesthetically, he found its music beautiful; historically, he said that spinning of wheel was in the reverse direction to the turning of the world during the last three hundred years of history- that each man, as he spun, was setting the globe spinning back in the reverse direction toward health and peace.

Arthur Koestler refers to the Charkha as 'a symbol of rejection of industrialisation.'<sup>6</sup> This is a misleading though perfectly understandable statement. The misleading nature of this assessment of the significance of Charkha in Gandhi's thought is made clear by Gandhi's explicit statements on the subject. He maintains that hand-spinning is not meant to displace any existing form of industry nor to oust a man from any remunerative occupation

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<sup>6</sup> Koestler, Arthur. *The Yogi and the Commissar*. *New York Times Magazine*. 5 October 1969

that he might be engaged in. Its main purpose is 'to harness every single idle minute of our millions for common productive work.'<sup>7</sup> The cloth produced in the mills provided work for a limited number; home-spun cloth would give work to all. Gandhi uses a telling phrase in this context: 'Khadi serves the masses, mill cloth is intended to serve the classes. Khadi serves labour, mill-cloth exploits it.'<sup>8</sup> To wear khadi was an expression of one's solidarity and kinship with one's neighbours. Gandhi refers to it as the spiritual aspect of the spinning wheel and an expression or indication of one's sympathy with the poor. For this reason, he advocated that the Congress party should make the wearing of khadi a condition of membership and make the daily use of the spinning wheel a symbol of India's desire for self-determination and self-government. Khadi, in his view, connoted the start of economic freedom for India.<sup>9</sup>

The controversial nature of Gandhi's emphasis on khadi is evident not only from Koestler's misleading interpretation of the significance of the Charkha, but also from the accusation levelled against him that he was leading the country back into the dark ages. Gandhi's defence is that he is seeking to make 7,000,000 villages in India self-sufficient units rather than the exploited source of the wealth of cities in India and Britain. He does not mean by this that he is seeking to make the villages totally self-contained units. They should be self-sufficient with regard to the basic necessities of life, but since it is not possible for the villagers to produce all their needs, they should produce enough of what they are best able to produce in order to exchange it for what they cannot produce.<sup>10</sup> The spinning-wheel could possibly be considered medieval, but whereas it was

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<sup>7</sup> *Selections from Gandhi*, p.57.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p.58.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p.59

<sup>10</sup> *Selected Works*, Vol. VI, p.350.

once a symbol of slavery it was now, in Gandhi's view, a symbol of freedom, unity and equality. The restoration of the village industry meant the return of life to the villages.

What the khadi scheme involved was the decentralisation of the means of production and distribution of one of life's necessities. This in turn implied the decentralisation of the cultivation and processing of cotton. Did this mean that Gandhi favoured the decentralisation of all industries and that the spinning wheel was after all, to use Koestler's phrase, 'a symbol of the rejection of the industrialisation' as it is normally understood? The answer to the first part of the question is that Gandhi did not envisage the decentralisation of all industries. He maintains: 'Heavy industries will needs be [sic] centralized and nationalized. But they will occupy the least part of the vast national activity which will mainly be in the villages.'<sup>11</sup> In the answer to the second part of the question, it would be misleading to suggest that Gandhi is opposed to industrialisation as such. If by industrialisation we mean the introduction of machinery that would help to remove the poverty of India and at the same time avoid the creation of unemployment among the masses, then Gandhi would certainly be in favour of it. He was not opposed to the introduction of machinery provided it did not displace human labour and result in the tragedy of enforced idleness. 'Machinery has its place; it has come to stay. But it must not be allowed to displace the necessary human labour...I would favour the use of the most elaborate machinery if thereby India's pauperism and resulting idleness be avoided.'<sup>12</sup>

Gandhi was opposed to the abuses of industrialisation rather than the concept of industrialisation and he sought to limit not eradicate the use of machines. He

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<sup>11</sup> Selected Works, Vol. IV, p.346.

<sup>12</sup> Selected Works, Vol. VI, pp. 379-80.



was not oppose to the kind of industrialisation that alleviates the poverty, idleness and misery of the masses in India. He was, however, totally opposed to that kind of industrialisation whereby the mass production of goods was controlled by a small number of people with the aid of sophisticated machinery. That is, he rejected industrialisation which 'concentrated power in the hands of the few who amassed fortunes at the expense of many.'<sup>13</sup> Because of its essentially competitive nature Gandhi firmly believed the future of industrialism to be dark. This was the reason why Gandhi found himself totally opposed to this form of industrialisation and dedicated to bringing about its ultimate destruction.<sup>14</sup> In the sense in which Koestler used the term then the spinning wheel could be rightly regarded as 'a symbol of the rejection of industrialization'. What is misleading about the statement is that it does not allow for the possibility of conceiving a different and, from Gandhi's standpoint at least, a more acceptable form of industrialisation where people mattered.

The question that needs to be asked at this point is whether the alternative form of industrialisation suggested by Gandhi was in any way a viable option in the modern world. Some light may be shed on this question by a consideration of the economic theory propounded by E. F. Schumacher, the author of *Small is Beautiful*.<sup>15</sup> The sub-title of Schumacher's book namely, 'Economics as if People Mattered', is significant, and a clear indication that his approach to economics is similar to that of Gandhi.

Schumacher's thesis is based on his conception of the role of economics. He maintains that the judgements of economics are essentially fragmentary, for, when an activity is described as uneconomic what it means is that it does not

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<sup>13</sup> *Selections from Gandhi*, p. 71.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 63-4

<sup>15</sup> Schumacher, E.F., *Small is Beautiful*, 1973.

earn a profit for those who undertake it. But that judgement fails to take into consideration the social, aesthetic or moral values of the activity concerned, hence its fragmentary nature. An economist needs to understand that his aims and objectives are derived from certain basic presuppositions concerning the nature of man, and that his methods derive from presuppositions concerning nature. When his view of man and nature changes, so do his economic judgements. Although Gandhi never expresses himself in quite these terms, it is clear that his attitude to the economics of industrialisation is profoundly influenced by his metaphysical presuppositions concerning the nature of man and God or Truth. He is less concerned with the material benefits that might accrue from mass production technology than he is with the adverse social consequences of the methods of mass production. This is not to imply that he is opposed to improving the lot of the masses in India. On the contrary, his dedication to Sarvodaya and Swadeshi clearly indicates his sympathy and concern for the welfare of his fellow countrymen. What he is opposed to is the kind of economic development that ignores creative activity, undermines social structures, and imperils the spiritual well being of his fellowman. It was his understanding of Truth and the nature of man that determined his attitude to industrialisation. Let this chapter be closed with a quote from Gandhi himself. When asked, in late 1920s, what ought to be the basis of India's future economic constitution, Gandhi replied:

According to me, the economic constitution of India and for the matter of that the world, should be such that no one under it should suffer from want of food and clothing. Everybody should be able to get sufficient work to enable him to make two ends meet. This ideal could be universally realised only if the means of production of elementary necessities of life remain in the control of the masses. Their monopolisation by any country, nation or groups of persons would be unjust. The neglect of this simple principle is the cause of the destitution that we witness today not only in this unhappy land but other parts of the world too. It is this evil that the khadi movement is calculated to remedy.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> 'The Students' Interrogations', *Young India*, 15 November 1928, CWMG, Vol. XXXVII, p.412.

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