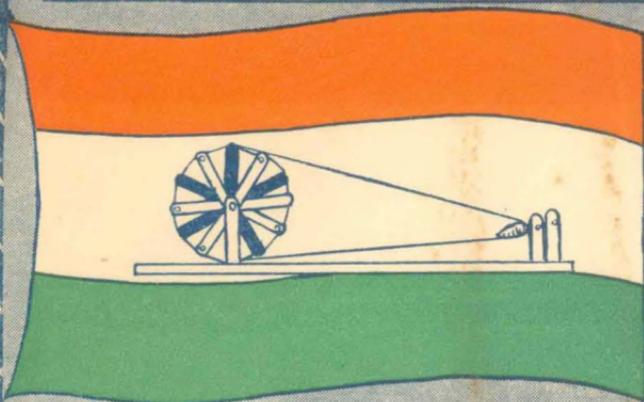


CONGRESS GOLDEN JUBILEE BROCHURE NO. 2

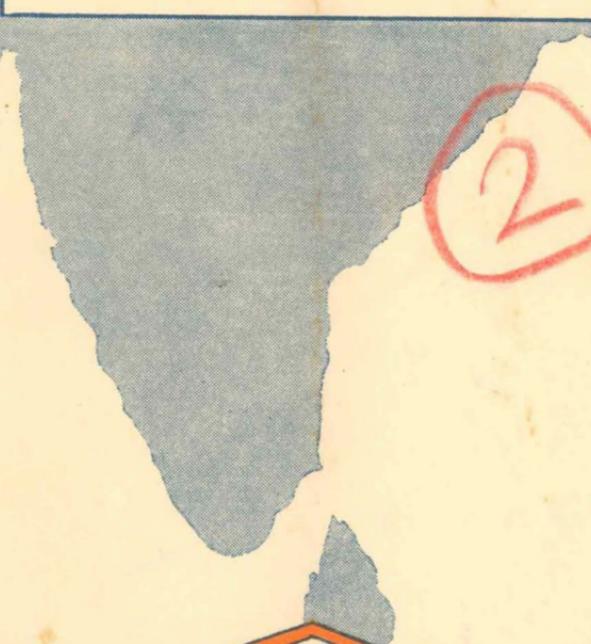


Village Industries & Reconstruction

BY

BHARATAN KUMARAPPA

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ALL INDIA CONGRESS COMMITTEE
ALLAHABAD



B.K.M.

Congress Golden Jubilee Brochure No. 2

Village Industries & Reconstruction

BY
BHARATAN KUMARAPPA,
ASSISTANT SECRETARY, A. I. V. I. A.

For favour of review

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ALLAHABAD

NOTE

The Congress Jubilee Brochures written in popular style are meant to educate the general public and furnish them with a working knowledge of the current Indian political and cultural problems. The Congress as an organisation may be said to be in general agreement with the conclusions of the different authors, although it may not be possible for it to subscribe to every detail of what has been written. There may be minor points of difference here and there for which we as publishers, or the Congress as an organisation, can take no responsibility.

J. B. KRIPALANI,

General Secretary.

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VILLAGE INDUSTRIES AND RECONSTRUCTION

1. Place of Villages in Indian Life

One of the most hopeful signs in India to-day is that people are now beginning to think in terms of villages. Since we came into contact with the West we had almost forgotten that India is a land of villages. We received our education along Western lines in towns, and thought that the way to modernize our country was to spread town and city conditions in imitation of the West throughout the land. But all this is now changing and we have begun to see that our salvation as a nation lies in village improvement.

The reason for the Congress as well as enlightened public opinion in India turning towards village improvement is not far to seek. It has now become a commonplace that India is a land of villages. Nearly 90 per cent. of the population is rural, and over 73 per cent. are producers of raw materials. So any organisation which aims at the material and moral well-being of our people must perforce turn its attention to the villages, for the villages are the real India. This is a good enough reason in itself. There is a still better reason. One of the great differences between our civilisation and that of the West is that our civilisation takes its root from rural life while that of the West centres round cities. Even in the republican days of ancient Greece it was the city that called the tune. In the Middle Ages in Europe, the mode of living was fashioned by royal courts situated in large cities. The life of courts trickled down from the king to the feudal lord, from the feudal lord to the squire and from the squire to the yeoman. To-day likewise, it is needless to say, Western civilisation is essentially an urban civilisation, drawing people in large numbers into crowded industrial centres where

mass production is carried on and where people are all moulded into a uniform pattern. In India this has never been the case. The centre of life in our country has always been the village. Though we have had monarchs who lived in splendour in cities, the villages never yielded up their independence. The monarch was only the defender of the people in times of attack, and the patron of arts and culture. Towns and cities were mainly distributing agents of village products, the village being the real producing centre. The village ideal and simplicity of life commanded the respect of all and farming was held sacred. Our culture is best understood therefore only when the agricultural background out of which it has arisen is taken into account. That being so, no mere imitation of the West which has developed on lines fundamentally different from our own, can at all fit in with our national heritage.

If then the village is to occupy the central place in all our thinking, we must ask what exactly were the principles on which village life in India was based? For in attempting to rebuild we must build on existing foundations, especially so when these foundations have the virtue of having stood the ravages of time. It is incumbent therefore on us to study the plans laid down by the original builders, for unless we follow closely their specifications, our building must collapse. Or to change the metaphor, the new, if it is not to be a clumsy patch-work on the old, must be in organic unity with the old. It must not be a mere repetition of the old, for no living organism can remain absolutely the same during the various stages of its existence. It changes and adopts itself to altering circumstances, and only thus it grows. In our efforts to make for the advancement of villages therefore we cannot seek idly to revert to the past or slavishly to imitate the same. We shall be rooted in the past, and thus while the mainspring of all our thought and activities is one with

that which motivated the village organisation of the past it will necessarily express itself differently to-day in the light of differing conditions which at present prevail, inasmuch as both heredity and environment constitute life.

That being so, in our effort to reconstruct our national life it becomes absolutely essential to gain an insight into the basic ideas which underlie our village life and organisation. These ideas so far as one can see are :—

1. To assure to every member of society at least a minimum subsistence. To this end workers were paid in kind, receiving thus what they needed in the form of food. It is easily seen that under such a system there can be little or no need for any one to starve. The joint-family system was another method adapted to the same end and also provided that there were no great inequalities in wealth.
2. To avoid competition and the uncurbed play of the profit-motive, and conversely to promote co-operation. The caste-system distributed the work of society among its various members and these were to carry on their several functions. This ensured that if a particular trade was paying at any one time not every body rushed to it to compete with every one else and to make as much profit for himself thus upsetting the whole social equilibrium, as happens to-day. For instance, when law is found to be lucrative every body qualifies to be a lawyer, quite irrespective of the need of the society for lawyers. The caste system also promoted group loyalty and co-operation, the absence of which is now so evident in us who are city-bred,

3. To make the village self-contained so that each village produced enough for its own requirements and did not have to depend for its primary needs on any outside agency. This conduced to the harmonious functioning of the various trades and professions in the village and prevent it from becoming exploited by and dependent on external powers. Even in regard to administration the village was a self-contained unit. Its affairs were settled by the Panchayat and each village was thus a republic presided over by its Panchayat which saw to the proper functioning of all the aspects of village life.
4. To give supreme place to the things of the spirit. This is evident from the fact that the highest caste in India is not that of the king or the trader but that of the priest and the intellectual. However rich and powerful the king might be, he paid homage to the wandering penniless sage at his court. Allied with this is the fact that no great value was placed on the mere acquisition of wealth. On the other hand renunciation was regarded as representing the highest stage in a man's development.

In contrast with these ideals, Western society is founded on court life, as mentioned already, with result that it glorifies the multiplicity of possessions rather than the simplicity of life. A man who has wealth is the one who commands respect and he easily obtains an exalted rank by being ennobled by the king. Further, Western economic organisation is based on ruthless competition, where the weak go under and the strong become stronger by exploitation of the weak. Nor has there been in the West any plan or well-

thought out scheme behind economic development with the result that production has gone on quite irrespective of demand, distribution is altogether unrelated to supply and the whole economic order is at sixes and sevens. Greed is rampant and there is cut-throat competition to secure markets and raw materials, quite irrespective of all moral or humanitarian considerations. The terrible situation in which the nations of the West find themselves to-day should, therefore, be a warning to us not to follow blindly in their wake. But before we summarily reject the contribution that the West may make to the solving of our economic problems, and decide to reconstruct on the basic ideas underlying our own village organisation, it is necessary to examine briefly the economic orders which prevail in the world to-day so that we may see for ourselves what will be the best plan for us to adopt in the work of setting our house in order.

2. Economic Orders in the World To-day

The two most important forms of economic life in vogue at the present time are Capitalism and Communism. Capitalism arose in Europe as the direct descendent of feudalism. Under feudalism the barons held the reins. They lived in strongholds and descended on the neighbouring hamlets from time to time to recoup their wealth and extend their power. The serfs rendered tribute to the barons and in return obtained from them safety from attack. The motive behind the feudal lords was nothing but selfish gain. When the Industrial Revolution came about in Europe with the use of machinery, and when at the same time enormous hordes were disgorged from India and taken to Europe, these feudal lords gave place to financial magnates who in their turn set up an organisation similar in many respects to the fental system by which they were able to garner in the profits as the feudal lords garnered in the

tributes. The motive here again was selfish gain and the method was by means of machinery to make as much profit as possible, quite irrespective of moral considerations. A single man with the instruments of production was able to obtain the benefit of the labour of thousands. He filled his pockets and since the instruments of production were his, the labourers were helpless and had to submit to his greed without protest. This is one of the greatest evils of Capitalism that not only does it give free vent to the profit-motive and with it to crass selfishness and greed, but it also deprives the worker of his independence by depriving him of the instruments of production. When this is done the triumph of the capitalist is supreme and the slavery of the labourer is complete. Not content with the profits obtained by exploiting those close at hand the capitalist turns his greedy eyes to distant corners of the earth, for he wants markets for his goods and raw materials for his factories. Consequently by means of high finance he controls these places and sees that they become hewers of wood and drawers of water for him and supply him with raw materials; he prevents them from producing their own manufactured goods, for then he will lose a market for his goods. Capitalism thus inevitably leads to imperialism and exploitation and enslavement of weaker peoples. In this process of course moral considerations are out of the question, for business is business. The only thing that matters is profit. That being so nothing may hinder the capitalist from his dirty work, and if there is resistance at once there is war, bloodshed and untold misery. The capitalist will have his gold, however many streams of blood flow in the process. The unfortunate labourer who in life forfeited his freedom to become a cog in the capitalist's wheel is now doped with high ideals of upholding national honour or helping in the noble mission of civilising barbarians, and he readily becomes gun-fodder to die for the greed of the capitalist. The picture here

drawn of capitalism is lurid. What else can it be when capitalism is stripped of all its outer coverings and seen in its ugly nakedness? It brings inevitably in its wake selfishness, exploitation, war, devastation and blood-shed.

Communism arose as a direct protest against these evils and we may therefore be tempted to expect that it will provide us with a pattern worthy of being adopted by us for our nation. Communism saw that at the root of capitalism was the profit-motive or selfishness or the desire for gain, however one may like to describe it, and it sought to get rid of it by socialising production. If every thing that is produced belongs to the community the bottom is removed from all selfishness and greed. Thus with rooting out the profit-motive communism thought to overcome all the evils which attend capitalism. In trying to do this, however the communists committed an opposite error to Capitalism. Capitalism gave the individual free play and allowed him, if only he could, to exploit every situation to his gain, no matter whether in so doing he did injury to others. In trying to check this, the communist went to the other extreme and did away altogether with individual initiative. The community is supreme and the individual is suppressed till he becomes once more the cog in the wheel that he was under capitalism. A few men with ideas plan the work for the nation and run it, while the rest can do naught else but carry out orders. This will no doubt be hotly contested by communists who claim that it is not the few that run the affairs of the community but the millions of the working class who meet in council and decide what they want. Whether decisions by millions can be any thing beyond a formal assent to what a powerful few lay down or not, it is obvious that so far as production goes no longer is there an opportunity under communism for initiative, creation, and expression of one's personality, without which the multitude

of goods which communism hopes to secure for the working class is as nothing. After all what man prizes most is his individuality, that is the freedom to think and act for himself and express himself in creating work. If man on the other hand has to work to a set pattern he is deprived of his greatest heritage as a human being, *viz.*, his individuality, and no greater accusation can be brought against a social system than that. For after all society is made up of individuals, and a social system which crushes individuality defeats itself.

Nor can this be helped by communists, for rightly protesting as they did against the uncurbed play of the profit-motive they bodily took over from capitalism the centralised methods of production. And what does centralised production mean, if it does not mean that the thinking and planning out of what is to be produced is in the option of the powerful few at the centre, while the rest are just hands or so many cogs in the wheel? The workers, then, or in other words, the mass of the people, whether under capitalism or under communism, suffer from a common defect in that 'theirs is not to reason why, theirs is but to do and die'. Standard articles are produced on a mass scale to the order of those at the centre, and very often a man may spend his entire life in not much more than placing a label on each tin as it passes quickly before him in succession. The monotony of it is soul killing, and the machine which man created has in the end succeeded in making of man a machine. For like the machine which he operates he knows only one movement and works only when the button is pressed at the central office. Originality, initiative and self-expression are conspicuous by their absence, and if present will be a handicap under such a system. And yet is not self-expression one of the greatest urges of a human being? Watch a child. He is happiest when he is allowed the greatest scope for self-expression and becomes

miserable when he is prevented. You may build a beautiful tower for him with his toy-bricks. He appreciates it but soon knocks it down to build one himself, however unsteady, and it is his own production that sends him into raptures? Or take Politics. Why do nations clamour for self-government? Foreign governments may in some cases be very efficient, but efficiency is not what one craves for. One craves for self-expression, so one proclaims that 'good government is no substitute for self-government'. Although the lot of workers and the peasants may be much better under communism than under capitalism, as in communism production is not for individual profit as in capitalism, still so long as communism retains centralised production there can be no scope in it for originality, for self-expression so far as the vast bulk of the people is concerned. Moreover, as already said, since the development of personality is the highest goal of human beings, this is no light charge to make against a social system.

3. Decentralisation and Swadeshi : The Indian Solution

If then the prevailing economic orders in the world provide us with no ready-made solution to the problem of reconstruction, with which we are faced to-day in our country, we are still left with the problem of finding a suitable plan in accordance with which we may build our national edifice. The trouble we found with capitalism is that it allowed unhampered freedom to the play of the profit-motive with the result that it led to selfish greed, violence and exploitation. Communism, on the other hand, sought to remedy this by going to the other extreme and it rid production of all profit-motive, with the result that it ended up also by ridding the workers of any scope for self-expression. Wherein then is our solution? We seem to err whether we retain the profit-

motive or whether we abolish it, and appear therefore, to be in a dilemma. But as all logicians know, most dilemmas are illusory and it is possible to find a solution for them. In this case our way of escape lies in the *via media* between the two extremes, and if Hegel is right in claiming that truth lies neither in the thesis nor in the anti-thesis, but in the synthesis which holds together within itself the partial truths of the thesis and anti-thesis, then we may claim truth for our solution. For our solution—and happily it is one followed wittingly or unwittingly even by our forefathers—is that neither the profit-motive is evil in itself nor is social control evil in itself. It is only when the profit-motive exceeds its limits and works to the detriment of others that it is evil. Similarly social control is not an evil in itself. It is only when social control exceeds its limits and deprives the individual of initiative that it is evil. That being so, our solution should be one which has room in it both for the profit-motive and for social control. And we believe that such a remedy is to be found in decentralising production and in practising the ideal of Swadeshi. Decentralising means refusing to dictate from the centre how things are to be produced and what kind they are to be, but leaving that always to the good sense and initiative of the producer. In this way alone can there be any scope for free self-expression and development of personality. To this it may be replied that if we allow each man to do as he likes, we shall only be reverting to capitalism, where one man by means of his greed monopolises all production to himself. This will have to be avoided and it will be easily avoided where there is no large-scale production or mammoth machines, and whatever machinery is used is on a small-scale operated on by an individual, as for example the sewing machine.

Besides, we shall have to educate people in the ideal of Swadeshi, according to which they should feel it their duty

to patronise the goods of their immediate neighbours rather than the goods brought from distant places. This means that we should seek to put into practice the ancient idea of making the villages self-sufficient, so that all the fundamental want of the people can be adequately met from within the village itself. If each village is thus a self-contained unit in itself at least so far as its essential requirements go and the aim of the worker is to produce primarily what he and his immediate neighbours need, then his production will be controlled by the definite demand for his goods in the village itself and when that happens, there will be no question of over-production, and the consequent problem of finding markets will have vanished. No one will seek to monopolise production for himself, for he will find that with the practice of the Swadeshi ideal there will be little demand for his goods outside his own village.

It is well perhaps at this point to explain what exactly is meant by Swadeshi and to remove all possible misunderstanding, for the true interpretation of the word is likely to be mistaken for a narrow intolerent clannishness which swears by its own little group, right or wrong, and has no use for any other. Such narrow group-loyalty can hardly be called ideal and if practised must prove disruptive of national and international unity. At a time when the radio, aeroplane and telegraph have brought peoples within easy reach of each other and the world has thus shrunk in space, it will be utter folly to split up the world into fragments each water-tight and impervious to influences from the outside. This is certainly not what those who advocate Swadeshi aim at. What is meant is conveyed by the saying 'Charity begins at home'. Our first duty is towards our immediate neighbours, and then it expands in wider and wider circles to embrace all humanity. Take, for instance, the family. A man is bound closer to the members of his family than to any one else. It

is his duty; therefore, to feed and clothe them rather than the duty of any one else. In fulfilling his duty to his family he is fulfilling his duty to society and to humanity. The circles are not mutually exclusive but concentric. There is no necessary opposition between the smaller and the larger circles, and we serve the larger circles even when we serve the smaller. Swadeshi then is to be understood in this sense of fulfilling our obligations to those immediately around us. To them of course we owe more than to any one else and to them therefore, our duty is greatest. But that does not mean that we may confine ourselves to our group and not recognise our obligations to any one else. In this respect the adage 'Charity begins at home' is helpful, for it only asserts that charity begins at home, not that it ends there. Even so, true Swadeshi while beginning in recognising one's obligations to one's own village does not end there but extends in wider and wider circles to embrace all humanity. The matter is so important, and yet so liable to misinterpretation that it may be well to allow the great advocate of Swadeshi to speak for himself in this regard. "Swadeshi," he says, "is the only doctrine consistent with the law of humanity 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. It were better to concentrate my effort upon the family, and consider that through them I was serving the whole nation, and, if you will, the whole of humanity. This is humility and it is love. The motive will determine the quality of the act. For instance, I may wrongly serve my family, regardless of the suffering I may cause to others; as, for example, I may accept employment which enables me to extort money from people. I may enrich myself thereby, and then satisfy many unlawful demands of my family. Here I am neither serving the family nor the State. Or I may recognise that God has given me hands and feet only to work for my susten-

ance and for that of those who may be dependent upon me. I would then at once simplify my life and that of those whom I can directly reach. In this instance I would have served the family without causing injury to any one else. Supposing that every one followed this mode of life we should have at once an ideal State. All will not reach that condition at the same time. But those of us who enforce it in practice will clearly accelerate the coming of that happy day. Under this plan of life in seeming to serve India to the exclusion of every other country, I do not harm any other country. My patriotism is both exclusive and inclusive. It is exclusive in the sense that my service is not of a competitive nature. 'Use your own property in such a way that you hurt no one else's,' is not merely a good legal maxim but a grand doctrine of life. It is the key to a proper practice of Ahimsa, of love. It is for us, who are the custodians of a great Faith, to show that patriotism based on hatred 'killeth' but that patriotism based on love 'giveth life' (Quoted in "Mahatma Gandhi's Ideas" by C. F. Andrews, pp. 126 and 127).

True Swadeshi then is not exclusive. While recognising that the whole world is one and its parts closely knit together, it seeks to serve the world by serving that little part in which one finds oneself, fully recognising others' rights to serve their own corners.

Under the operation of such an ideal, there can be no question of a few able producers exploiting and keeping in subjection the rest of the world, for as already said production will be only to meet the local demand. Thus there will be no incentive to uncurbed greed and selfishness as in Capitalism. Besides, production will be evenly distributed in accordance with demand. When production is thus evenly distributed among the members of the village, profit will also be evenly distributed, with the result that there will be no

concentration of the wealth in the hands of a few. Great inequalities of income will be avoided, also with the result that there will be little poverty or starvation and all will obtain a subsistence. There will of course be mutual exchange of goods between village for no village will be able to produce every thing under the sun, for local conditions and raw materials available will vary from district to district. Trade will not be one-sided, but mutual, so that there will be no question of one village becoming so efficient a centre of production as to deprive other villages of employment. It may be asked how this is to be secured. When public opinion has been educated to see the value of Swadeshi, the matter will be quite simple, for people will of themselves give first preference to articles locally produced and will avoid using goods imported from elsewhere, and when public opinion is in the process of being formed, village Panchayets should by means of legislation or protective tariff prevent dumping of unwanted goods from outside. This will not only ensure that the economic equilibrium of the village is properly maintained, but will effectively curb the unlimited exercise of the profit-motive, and when through decentralisation of production each village produces for itself what it wants, there will be little competition for markets, and when there is no competition for markets, there can be little incentive for war or group violence. Thus peace and uniform prosperity can be secured for the country and for the world at large. And further since under decentralised production the worker will have the option of producing what he likes and how he likes; there will be ample scope for creative endeavour and the development of individuality. What more can one desire of any social system?

It is along these lines then that efforts should be made to reconstruct our national life, for it not only overcomes the evils from which the prevailing systems of Capitalism and

Communism suffer, but it also is in the direct line of descent from our national heritage. We have already pointed out how our ancient village organisation sought to curb the profit-motive, to provide a subsistence to all, so that there are no great inequalities of income, to make villages self-contained and to give first place to personality or things of the spirit. All these objects are, it seems to us, best served by decentralising production and the observance of Swadeshi as described above.

4. All India Village Industries Association : History, Constitution, etc.

To give effect to ideas such as these, Gandhiji conceived of a village industries association, and at his instance the Indian National Congress at its 48th session held on 27th October, 1934 at Bombay passed the following resolution:—

“Whereas organisations claiming to advance Swadeshi have sprung up all over the country with and without the assistance of Congressmen and whereas much confusion has arisen in the public mind as to the true nature of Swadeshi, and whereas the aim of the Congress has been from its inception progressive identification with the masses, and whereas village reorganisation and reconstruction is one of the items of the constructive programme of the Congress, and whereas such reconstruction necessarily implies revival and encouragement of dead or dying village industries besides the central industry of hand-spinning, and whereas this work like the reorganisation of hand-spinning, is possible only through concentrated and special effort unaffected by and independent of the political activities of the Congress, Shri J. C. Kumarappa is hereby authorised to form, under the advice and guidance of

Gandhiji, an Association called The All India Village Industries Association as part of the activities of the Congress. The said Association shall work for the revival and encouragement of the said industries and for the moral and physical advancement of the villages and shall have power to frame its own constitution, to raise funds, and to perform such acts as may be necessary for the fulfilment of its objects”.

The Association contemplated by this resolution was formed on the 14th December 1934 and came to be known as the All India Village Industries Association or the Akhil Bharat Gram Udyog Sangh. The object of the Association is village re-organisation and reconstruction, including the revival, encouragement and improvement of village industries, and the moral and physical advancement of the villagers of India. It is to work under the guidance and advice of Gandhiji.

The organisation of the Association consists of:—Trustees, Foundation Members, Board of Management, Ordinary Members, Agents, Honorary Workers, Paid Workers and Associates, assisted by a Board of Advisers.

TRUSTEES

Six persons constitute a permanent Board of Trustees who hold funds and properties on behalf of the Association and disburse them in accordance with the instructions of the Board of Management.

FOUNDATION MEMBERS AND BOARD OF MANAGEMENT

The Foundation Members, who also constitute the first Board of Management, are eight in number and hold office for seven years from 3rd February, 1935. The Board is in full charge of the affairs of the Association.

ORDINARY MEMBERS

Any person who subscribes to the membership pledge is recommended by a member of the Board of Management and whose admission is approved by the Board becomes an Ordinary Member of the Association. Every member is required to send to the Secretary a report of the work done by him every quarter.

AGENTS

Agents are selected out of Ordinary Members by the Board of Management for representing it in a particular area and are chosen because of their special knowledge of the area, for their organising ability and known influence within that area. The agent forms the backbone of the Association and on him falls the responsibility of organising work in his district. He is empowered to collect funds for his work, no part of which is to be used for his own personal requirements. He is to expect no financial aid from the Central Office. He is to submit to it a report of his work and abstracts of receipts and payments every month.

HONORARY WORKERS

These are workers other than Agents or Ordinary Members and pledge themselves to use village made articles and to propagate their use among others, to render whatever service they can to the villagers, and in general to work for the object of the Association. They are required to send reports of their work every quarter to the Central Office.

PAID WORKERS

Other than workers appointed and paid by Agents and a few paid workers engaged at the Central Office, the Board appoints whole-time village workers who will reside in villages and do village reconstruction work according to the programme of the Association. They are generally appoint-

ed in non-agency areas and are paid as a rule a monthly maintenance of not more than Rs. 10.

ASSOCIATES

Any one who sympathises with the object of the Association and pays an annual subscription of not less than Rs. 100 is an Associate, and one who pays a lump sum of Rs. 1,000 is enrolled as a life-Associate.

ADVISERS

Advisers are those who, consistently with their preoccupation agree to give the free benefit of their special knowledge to the Association whenever they are consulted.

Besides these, the work of the Association is carried on by Affiliated Institutions and Certified bodies.

AFFILIATED INSTITUTIONS

These are Institutions like Ashrams and other public bodies which have for their objects the promotion of village industries and the welfare of the villagers and in whose constitution and rules there is nothing repugnant to the ideals of the Association.

CERTIFIED BODIES

These are generally shops or persons prepared to produce or sell village manufactures coming within the province of the Association. They form the marketing medium of the Association. Certificates have till now been issued for dealing in whole wheat hand-ground flour, gur. (jaggery), honey, unpolished hand-pounded rice, ghani-pressed oil, hand-made paper, ghee, dal and dry fruits.

FINANCE

True to the ideal of decentralisation, the work of the Association through out the country is financed locally. Agents collect funds locally from their area for their work.

The Central Office, however, receives subscriptions and donations from whatever quarter from those who sympathise with the work, and as already said enrolls Associates and Life Associates who contribute to its funds. In time it is hoped that the Central work will be chiefly supported by fees of Affiliation and Certification.

NUMBERS ON THE ROLL

On the 7th of November, 1935, there were on the roll of the Association :—

- 423 Ordinary Members.
- 61 Agents.
- 27 Certified shops.
- 5 Affiliated Institutions.

PUBLICITY

The Association is publishing bulletins on topics on which reliable information has been gathered. Articles explaining the policy and the aims of the Association have been contributed from time to time to newspapers and periodicals. The *Harijan* acts at present as the official organ of the Association. It is a weekly published in English, Gujarati, and Hindi and workers are expected to read it for guidance and instruction.

5. Programme of the All India Village Industries Association

The Village Industries Association cannot of course tackle all the problems connected with the village. Further, several of the problems can be most effectively tackled only by the State, for they require political and economic power over the whole of India. The Association therefore must perforce confine itself only to such methods as lie within

private control and organisation, and that it can effect without the aid of State power and State machinery.

It is obvious that any Association which aims at village reconstruction must first concern itself with the physical condition of the villager, for the villager is the centre of all village activities, and unless he is physically fit, there can be no hope of improvement of any kind in the village. The Association therefore has on its immediate programme the sanitation of the village. It is evident that unless the streets, lanes, and open spaces of the village are kept clean, and the water supply is pure, the villager will suffer from constant attacks of epidemics, itches and fevers which sap his already too low vitality. Those who are eager for the advancement of the villager are therefore invited by the Association to begin the work of sanitation in the way of simple road-making in the villages, freeing the lanes of accumulated rubbish which gather flies and disease-carrying germs, introducing improved and economic methods of disposal of human excreta, cleaning village wells and tanks, and teaching the villagers the proper use of water-supply and sanitary habits in regard to spitting, ventilation, clothes, and cooking.

Besides this, the Association is devoting much time and thought to food reform, to evolving a balanced diet which being well within the means of the villager will provide him with all the necessary nutriment. The productive capacity of the villager has decreased partly as a result of malnutrition. It is necessary therefore to introduce life-giving elements into the villager's food or at any rate to see that whatever food he is able to afford is not deprived of even what little nutritive value it may have. If the villager lives on rice alone with some pickle to swallow it down it becomes very necessary that he should get all the nourishment

that rice is capable of giving ; and for this purpose he should be taught to steam the rice with just the necessary quantity of water, so that there is no water thrown away after boiling, for the water contains much of the nourishment of the rice. And what is more, the villager should be taught to use hand-pounded rice, hand-pounded not only because hand-pounding provides employment for the villager and saves him the money he would otherwise throw away on a rice-mill, but also because hand-pounded rice according to medical opinion is superior to mill-rice in nutritive value because the heat incidental to large machinery is injurious to vitamin B. The rice is to be unpolished for otherwise in the process of polishing, the pigmented covering containing Vitamin B which is essential for nourishment and which is preventive against bery-bery is lost. Medical opinion is unanimous in pointing out that the food content of unpolished rice is much greater than that of polished rice, for unpolished rice is much richer in proteins, fats and minerals. Besides, unpolished rice never causes constipation while polished rice always does. For these reasons, the Association urges the use of hand-pounded unpolished rice, and one of the easiest things for any one who has the interest of the villager at heart to do is for him to use hand-pounded unpolished rice himself and to urge the villager to do the same. Further, medical opinion is in favour of whole wheat hand-ground flour and gur (Jaggery) in the place of refined sugar, for in the process of refining much of the valuable food elements both in wheat and sugar is lost. The Association therefore carries on propaganda for the use of whole wheat hand-ground flour and gur. Besides, the common grains, herbs, fruits and vegetables found in the villages are now being analysed under the auspices of the Association so that a balanced diet may thus be evolved for the villager. In all these ways the Association hopes to put fresh life and vigour into the starved bodies of the villagers,

But this is not the only work of the Association. Its very name indicates that its primary interest is the economic life of the villager. The villager today is in a sorry plight. He finds himself with practically no gainful occupation, for the many industries which formerly kept him busy and above want have been gradually snatched away from him by large-scale factory production. Consequently he has to gain all his support from the land. But the land has already more people depending on it for support than it can bear. What then is he to do? The Village Industries Association steps in at this point to study the actual condition of the existing village industries, both those that may be flourishing and those that may be perishing or perished, and to introduce, revive or improve industries best suited to local conditions and discover or create a market for surplus village products. In this however there is no attempt to compete in the open market with machine-made goods, for as already said competition for outside markets is in conflict with our ideal of Swadeshi. What is aimed at is that consistent with the idea of Swadeshi, the villagers should be self-dependent producing all that they immediately need. Why send out raw cotton to Lancashire or Japan and have it made into cloth and sent back to the villagers, when the villagers themselves are well able to make cloth? Will a poor man whose income is less than Rs. 10 a month dream of sending his clothes to be washed and laundered in Europe? The very idea is absurd. The poor man must wash his clothes himself for he cannot afford the expense of sending them to Europe, paying for the high cost of all labour there and for packing and freight back. And yet the poor villager of India is committed exactly to such absurd procedure every time he sends from his village raw material which he could work on himself and gets it back in the form of finished products. The tragedy of the situation is that under this system the villager

is doubly impoverished. He has to pay out for the finished product and he has been deprived of employment. It is all very well to say that Lancashire and Japan will produce better cloth for him and save him the trouble of making it himself. Such an argument might weigh with the professional or official classes whose income is assured from other sources. But such classes are only an insignificant fraction of the population of India. The bulk of the people are agriculturists who have to earn their bread with the sweat of their brow. To them every pie is precious and the denial to them of opportunity to work means denial of opportunity for means of livelihood. The Association therefore regards it its primary duty to prevent as far as possible raw materials which are capable of being utilised by the villagers from being sent out of the village and to instruct the villagers to produce finished articles from them for themselves. The idea is thus to arrest the flow of wealth from the villages to the outside world, and to divert the flow back to the villages and thus make them prosperous. In the past, Indian villages produced all they needed themselves and some of their industries such as those of cotton, silk, carpet, brass and ivory work were the envy of the world. There is no reason why to-day India should be reduced to being a purely agricultural country; and what is worse, the increasingly impoverished condition of the masses shows that if this process of depriving of villager of industrial occupation goes on unabated, it must bring about the complete extinction of the masses. Already their condition is on the verge of starvation, and unless this process is arrested and the villagers given subsidiary occupation to agriculture there can be no hope whatsoever for them.

All this may be readily granted. But it may be said that the way out of this desperate situation is not to revert to old-time village industries but to start large factories all over

India, which will absorb the unemployed from the villages. The difficulty with this remedy is that it fails altogether to meet the situation in our country. The agriculturist cannot leave his land and work in a factory, for the land needs his attention. What he wants is subsidiary industries which will occupy the time when he has no work on the land. Besides, factories cannot be multiplied for the mere asking, and we shall have to have innumerable factories before all the idle man-power can be used; and if all are thus employed in the factories, where are all the goods thus produced to be sold? Already the world is suffering from over-production in various industries and there is cut-throat competition to secure markets. Multiplying factories is therefore an altogether impracticable proposition. Further factory-production is effective when labourers are few and the demand for goods is great. The situation confronting us to-day is just the reverse. We have in our country on the one hand millions of people who do not have sufficient work to do and on the other a plenitude of goods dumped on us whether we will or no. Our problem therefore is not to *save* labour but to *provide* labour for our starving millions, and we can do this effectively not by factory-production, which after all can absorb only a fraction of the population, but by teaching the villager such industries as will meet his primary needs and thus make him self-sufficing, not looking beyond his own or neighbouring village for his primary requirements. In this way production will be distributed amongst several families in the village and when production is thus distributed profits will also be distributed amongst several so that wealth is not concentrated in the hands of a few as at present. People will work for themselves and their immediate neighbours and there will be little exploitation by commercial magnates or by export traders. Instead of being deprived of his raw material by the exporter and dependent on the

foreigner for the supply of his wants, the villager will then be self-dependent meeting his own primary requirements by his own labour and selling the surplus. The villager under this system will not be exploited and will be able to say to the trader who wishes him to produce goods for commercial purposes—"I am quite content to produce what I need; if you wish me to produce for you, you will have to pay me on my terms". The aim of the Association is therefore to make the villager thus self-sufficient by reviving or introducing industries which will help him to meet his own requirements.

It may be replied, we do not live in an isolated world and whether we will or no factory goods will be pouring in on us and it will not be possible for village articles to compete with them. But, as already said, the aim of the Association is not to enter into competition, but to produce only for one's requirements and that of one's immediate neighbours. For example, I spin and make enough cloth for myself and when I produce khaddar just for myself there can be no question of mill-cloth being cheaper in price for I pay no price in cash for my khaddar. But it will be said every villager cannot produce all he wants for himself. He will have to buy in the open market what he himself does not produce, say for example, paper or shoes, and in such cases village-paper and shoes will come into competition with factory-made goods. To this our answer is that there is no reason why as time goes on and with improved methods of production village-made goods should be any inferior in quality to factory-goods. On the other hand, they may be expected to be superior as already in the West hand-made goods are preferred to factory-produced articles. Even in regard to price it has been found that when labour is plentiful and cheap as in India hand-made goods can compare quite favourably with factory products. More over with the

concentration of human ingenuity on devising machinery for individual use (*e.g.* the sewing machine) as will happen under the aegis of the Association, instead of as at present for large-scale production, the output per head may quite easily be increased, and labour and time saved, with the result that the hand-made product becomes as inexpensive as any factory product. In our programme therefore there is a definite place for machinery which will aid the individual worker, as *e.g.* the sewing machine already mentioned, but little or no place for large-scale machinery which centralises, production and enslaves the worker.

It is true that not all industries of a country can be carried on, on a small scale. There will be need for centralised production as for example in the case of public utility services. But these will no more be in the hands of individuals but under state management and control and run entirely in the interests of the people, and other large-scale industries may be run in the interests of consumers by co-operative societies. These, however, do not form part of the work of the Association and therefore do not concern us here.

In accordance with the principle of Swadeshi, the industries carried on in the village should in general be related to the needs of the villagers themselves and not to those of townspeople or foreigners. The villager, however, may in some cases produce goods for which he himself has no use provided there is a ready demand for them (in which case the production will be related to a definitely known demand), provided the materials necessary for their production are locally available and they give employment to several. There is no use for example in villagers trying to produce fountains or watches, for the machinery and raw materials necessary for these are not locally available, the demand for them

is limited to townspeople and so these trades can now occupy only a few families. Besides, the West has put so much thought and capital to perfect these industries, that the villagers cannot hope to compete to any advantage in the production of these goods. This is not so, for example, in regard to palmyra gur (jaggery), the material for which is found almost everywhere in India, the demand for which is great, and which can therefore occupy several families in most villages. It is such industries as these that the Association will foster.

In regard to such industries in which the villager engages for commercial purposes, the Association insists that the artisan should be assured of a minimum subsistence wage. It is therefore taking effective measures to see that articles sold under its auspices secure to the producer at least this minimum wage. One of the least paid industries in our country is spinning which at present secures to the spinners only about quarter anna for an hour. This will no more be tolerated. The spinner will be paid a subsistence wage calculated on what it requires to feed an adult on a scientifically prescribed minimum basis. It is of course true that to-day the villager's food is much below this basis, but the Association recognises that when it teaches the villager to eat better and nourishing food, it cannot at the same time deprive the villager of the wherewithal for the same. The wage is to be paid on the basis of the average output of an efficient worker working eight hours a day. Under this system, it will perforce follow that the price of khaddar and of other village goods which pay below the prescribed minimum will rise and that consequently the sale of those articles will decrease. But Gandhiji who is the directing mind behind the Association is not deterred by this fact. He would rather that the trade in these goods perished than that the villager be exploited and paid an inhuman wage.

Under our scheme, it must be remembered that the villager produces himself the necessities of life, so that there is no question of the villager himself being unable to afford any of his own fundamental wants. What it would mean in practice is that those who realise their responsibility to the villagers around them will regard it their duty to pay the higher prices so that they do not lend support to a system which exploits the helplessness of the masses. The motive underlying the enforcement of a minimum wage is entirely a moral one. Practical difficulties there will undoubtedly be. But faith in the justice and rightness of our step in regard to this matter must alone help us to overcome them, and must in the end enable us to demonstrate to the world that the way of justice and truth is after all the only economic way.

One of the chief tasks of those connected with the Association is to make an intensive survey of villages, in order to discover what are the industries now being carried on, and under what conditions, what are the raw materials available for industries, what industries were formerly carried on, how much knowledge of the processes involved in these industries survives to-day and how far they may be profitably revived. The Association will naturally seek to give its special support to such of these industries as are of wide application requiring little capital or outlay, affecting many and capable of being tackled by each village without much outside help. Among industries which meet these requirements and which therefore may be revived or introduced to advantage are the following—spinning and weaving, tanning, oil-pressing, manufacture of gur (jaggery) and paper. In regard to all of these except perhaps the last the material necessary is practically universal in India. They require very little capital, the skill necessary is easily acquired and the demand is great. These therefore have been placed on the immediate pro-

gramme of the Association. Taking tanning, for example, there are dead animals in every village. These are at present generally thrown away and either the Harijans cut them up for eating or they are left to be eaten by dogs, crows or vultures. The skin and bones are usually entirely wasted and the whole vicinity is polluted when the carcass is allowed to rot in the open. Instead of this, under the auspices of the Association people are now being taught what various uses can be made of the carcass. The carcass is flayed, the skin is salted and removed to a tannery, where it is cured and made into leather. From the fleshings which come off when the skin is being cleaned, glue is made. From the entrails the fat is removed and the intestines are converted into guts used in tennis bats and as violin strings. The flesh and bones are boiled in water for seven or eight hours. The fat rises to the top. The fat thus separated is used for lubricating and industrial purposes. The well-boiled bones and flesh are dried in the sun and then pounded into powder. This powder is valuable manure and can readily find a market. The horns are used for the manufacture of combs, knife-handles and such like. Bones also are used for the same purpose. When one thinks of the various uses that can be made of practically every part of a dead animal, and the many industries to which it gives rise, one can see what a phenomenal waste is allowed to be perpetrated in our country for lack of knowledge. It will be the task of those connected with the Association to apply themselves to such problems, and to seek to produce wealth and employment for villagers from apparent waste.

One of the factors that have contributed to the terrible poverty of the masses is that the village has during the last century been gradually drained of all its intelligentsia. These took to a literary education and obtained clerkships and offices in the Government and were lost to the village. Some

of them also became middlemen and commission agents with the result that village industries when deprived thus of the better endowed individuals fell into decay. For any industry to be run efficiently three kinds of people are required,—the business man, the technical expert and the drudge. The two former have migrated into cities and towns under the present regime and only the drudge who is incapable of applying any intelligence to his work is left to carry on village industries. And we cannot therefore wonder that village production is at present so deplorably inefficient. The Village Industries Association seeks to remedy this state of affairs by applying business methods and technical skill to problems affecting the villager, and thus to restore the balance between the three factors that are necessary for industrial development. Taking the illustration above given, it is obvious that the wasteful methods, now prevalent in villages, of disposing of dead animals is the result of ignorance on the part of villagers of the uses to which carcasses can be put and the processes which must be gone through for the purpose. Technical knowledge is required which the villager of the present day does not possess, and only with the application of this knowledge can the villagers take up the processes in question. When the technical expert has shown the villager the processes to be adopted, the business expert is needed to organise the industry and put it on a stable business footing. The Village Industries Association hopes to wean such experts from towns and cities and to make them available once more in villages for the purpose of reviving and developing village industries.

Another important task which the Association has set itself is to carry on research in better methods of production as to evolve devices whereby the quantity and the quality of the villager's output can be increased. For this reason various types of industries such as oil-pressing, dairying,

bee-keeping, paper-making, tanning, spinning and weaving are being experimented upon at the Head Quarters, and more industries will follow as time goes on. Besides, being in touch with village work all over the country the Association expects to broadcast information regarding improvements in methods of production, sanitation or diet in any one part of the country to other parts.

It is expected that before long, the Association will have a Museum of village industries, where not only village articles from all over the country will be exhibited, but also the various processes involved in their manufacture will be demonstrated, so that those who come to see it may be practically benefited thereby and see how far industries prevailing in one part of the country may be profitably introduced elsewhere, and learn the necessary processes. Attached to the Museum will be a Library where it is hoped to make available all the useful literature connected with the industries exhibited. In course of time a Rural Training Centre will also soon be developed, where it is expected to give villager workers the training they require.

These are at present some of the ways in which the Association is trying to tackle the problems of village uplift.

6. Appeal

The work of the Association, of course, cannot progress satisfactorily except with the co-operation of all those who have eyes to see, ears to hear and a heart to understand the desperate situation in which the villager finds himself to-day. According to the survey of a Government officer in the Madras Presidency, the debt during 1933 to 1934 per head of the rural population was Rs. 38 and per family Rs. 194 while the net income per head was only Rs. 11-12-0 a year, which means that within an income of about one rupee a month the villager had to find food, clothing, shelter, pay interest on

debt and meet other incidental expenses. How he lives at all under the circumstances is a mystery. His life can consist in nothing more than a bare keeping of body and soul together, with none of those extra amenities which make life worth living. If only the educated and the well-to-do had some knowledge of the miserable lives of the villagers who form the bulk of the population, and whose condition is becoming more and more desperate from day to day, and they realise their heavy responsibility, they would not rest till they had contributed in whatever way they could to improve the lot of the villager. We must remember that after all our country is a land of villages and that so long as we do nothing for the villages we do practically nothing for the country. Here is work, then, for all who long for the uplift of the motherland.

In this work, not only the man but also the woman can help. Indeed, the woman can help even more than the man for village work refers to amelioration of poverty and distress, sanitation and food-reform, in all of which the woman is fundamentally interested. Women are after all the home-makers and as such they hold the key to the future of India. It is on the training that mothers give to the children that the future of the country depends. If they are imbued with the spirit of Swadeshi and inculcate in their children their duty to their neighbours, the work of the Village Industries Association is done. The field is immense and calls for the best efforts of all—man and woman, Hindu and Muslim, Congressite and non-Congressite—and the Association accordingly sends out its invitation to all irrespective of distinctions to come forward and help.

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