237. BENGAL’S SACRIFICE

I overflow with joy to see examples of purest sacrifice in Bengal. The whole family of a zamindar has taken to khadi. All the women spin. The men and women wear khadi exclusively. The zamindar has made over his house and his land for the use of Khadi Pratishthan. The sacrifice made by Satish Babu, who is the life of Khadi Pratishthan, is something extraordinary. He used to earn a monthly salary of Rs. 1,500 in the Chemical Works of Dr. Ray. He had been provided with a bungalow too. He could have got more if he had asked for it. He was doing khadi work even then, but he was not satisfied with that. His tender heart felt that, if he attempted two tasks at a time, both might suffer in consequence. He was the very life of the Chemical Works and, if he did not give his full time to it, it would certainly suffer. But, then, khadi meant service of the poor, and he did not think it right that he should do that work in his spare time. Just as it is a sin for a man to have two wives, so also it is wrong for a man to make two things his life’s mission. Moreover, no sacrifice is too great in the cause of khadi. Arguing thus with himself he decided in an instant to leave the Works which he himself had built up. And now he meets his household expenses from the income from his meagre savings and devotes all the 24 hours of the day to the cause of khadi. He has by now opened eleven branches of his centre, out of which five are already in production, and he is thinking of opening more still.

1 Gandhiji toured Bengal in 1925; Jeth Sud 1 in that year fell on May 23.
2 Congress leader of Surat district; educationist and author; first Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of the Gujarat State in 1960
3 Wife of Pragji Desai
4 It was extended up to August 31, 1925.
Through his efforts 5,060 spinning-wheels are plying. The number of handlooms weaving pure khadi is 597.

His wife, too, has joined her husband in this work. This good lady must be unhappy to have to face want in place of the plenty of former days, and it must be hard for her to be contented with one of the small blocks in a rented tenement in place of an independent bungalow to live in; but she bears all these hardships with a cheerful face.

Satish Babu’s, however, is not the only instance of this kind. Many other young men have been making sacrifices which fill us with admiration. Satish Babu had much and he gave up much but he has no problem of meeting his daily needs. He has, on the whole, no hardship regarding accommodation. But there are about a hundred young men who receive Rs. 20 a month to meet all their needs. We cannot realize how difficult life in Bengal is without seeing the conditions ourselves. In the rainy season, they are forced practically to live in water. At any time the houses, all of them, may be washed away by floods. Even for going from one house to another they have to use small boats. The insanitary conditions at such a time are impossible to describe. These young men suffer such hardships and serve the people. Many of them are engaged in khadi work and some in national schools. Spinning, of course, is being done in all schools.

In these conditions, there can be no question of their being able to indulge their palate. They cannot always get milk and curds. The usual food is rice and dal. Pure vegetarians are rare in Bengal. Even those who do not eat meat eat fish. These poor workers do eat fish, if nothing else. We must admit that this is a great help when they do not get milk and curds. This fact does not detract from the value of their sacrifice. I have mentioned this fact of their having fish to eat, only because I do not want to be guilty of exaggeration in describing the young men’s hardships.

All these young men are educated. Many of them were professors and drew big salaries. They do not regret their sacrifice. On the contrary, they feel joy in it. Were it not so, they would not be able to keep up the extremely difficult sacrifice they have made. When I think of their sacrifice, Gujarat’s sacrifice, what little there has been, seems insignificant by comparison. The sacrifices which I see here made by the educated class can only be compared with similar sacrifices in Maharashtra.

[From Gujarati]

*Navajivan*, 24-5-1925