

THE
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GANDHI

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GANDHI

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263. *SPEECH AT GANDHI SEVA SANGH MEETING-II*

SAVLI,
March 1, 1936

I shall devote one hour every day to the session. During that time I can speak for about half an hour at the most, and the remaining half hour will be spent in listening to your questions and so on. I have already received some questions from you and the President² has also raised some questions in the course of his speech. I shall first reply to his questions. If my reply raises any further questions in your minds, you are free to ask them.

The first question concerns the subsistence wages. In my view we cannot formulate any exact rule about it. We can no doubt say that we shall not go beyond a certain limit. For instance, the Sangh has set the limit of Rs.75 as monthly wage. According to me even this is too much, because our field of activity is in the villages. And we cannot allow Rs. 75 or Rs. 50 in the villages. Nor is so much money needed there. True, all people cannot go to the villages. They have their own difficulties. Then, there are some people who are good workers and whose ideas and actions are acceptable and whom we would not permit to leave the field of service. And they cannot maintain themselves on low wages either. To such people we can give even Rs. 75. But we give this reluctantly and they too accept it reluctantly. This, however, is not a matter to be considered by others. But, if one person can carry on with Rs. 5, why should he demand Rs. 50 merely because some other person is getting Rs. 50? The person earning Rs. 50 or Rs. 75 has either poor health or has some other handicaps which the person earning Rs.5 does not have. This should not be considered a matter of competition at all. Let a person take only what he needs. For instance, Mirabehn can manage with very little. But I told her that she should definitely take milk and fruits. Because of this her monthly expense goes up to Rs. 10 or 15. But Gajanan who works in her place in Sindi has such habits that he requires almost nothing compared to Mirabehn. This does not make him envy Mirabehn. And it should not make him en-

¹ Gandhiji arrived at the meeting at 4 p.m.

² Kishorelal Mashruwala

vious. Thus, no one should accept more than his minimum requirements. Any person who has lived in a city so far and has now gone to a village but has not been able to adjust himself to village life may take higher wages for some time.

The next question deals with body-labour. What I have said earlier includes my reply on this point also. Each person will function within his own individual limits. We cannot lay down more than this. Let every man put in the maximum body-labour he can. One worker wrote to me that he managed to earn his livelihood in the village; but all his time was spent in doing body-labour. He had resolved to take to spinning and also planned to make a living by spinning. But he found no time to do anything else. I have written to him that, if he continues his work with devotion, people will have a lesson to learn even from this. If the people of the village desire to accept his services, he can educate their children, clean up the garbage and in return earn his bread from them. If he puts his heart in his work, he will be able to earn his livelihood. But he must take only what is necessary. He may be able to have sweets, ghee, fruits, etc., if he asks for them. But he should not accept these things even if the people offer them on their own. I go round with the thought of the village in my mind, and so other problems do not arise for me. There can be no question at all of drawing the maximum out of public funds.

PRESIDENT: What should be the lowest limit of body-labour, so that, if a particular worker is not able to put in that much work, he would be justified [in withdrawing himself and thus] cease to be a drain on public funds?

GANDHIJI: I have understood your question. But it is not possible to set the same limit for all workers. In fact, each one of them should put in as much labour as he can. Let him earn whatever wages he can, and supplement the deficit from the funds of the Sangh. If his needs are not so great that it would be disturbing to others when they know about them, he should not hesitate to meet them from the Sangh. I cannot set any limit. I would not set any limit if the management were in my hands. I do not also wish to determine which type of work should be regarded as body-labour. I can only say that writing a book is not body-labour.

The third question—a very difficult one—relates to the family. Members should help the President in solving this problem. And the President also should be alert in the matter. We have changed our way of life. We have given up the old tradition. Nevertheless, we are born in the cities. We have got our parents, wives and

children. They have been all brought up in the old tradition. They have not changed their way of living. We wonder what right we have to compel them to accept the way of life we have accepted. And we want to educate our children in the old method which we have discarded. That is the reason why the workers are worried about the future of their children. They wonder if they would be able to educate their children so as to make them lawyers or doctors. On the one hand, a member of the Sangh lives in poverty and on the other he feels that his duty to his wife and children is different from what he has accepted for himself. He believes that sacrifice is his dharma but not his family's. Renunciation is regarded as a duty in old age. At the root of this idea is the traditional Hindu sentiment that we should renounce the world in old age. That is why we want to educate our children in the old way. But we have given up the belief that renunciation is a duty only of old age, not imperative for youth. We have accepted it as our duty, even in youth, to renounce all pleasures and serve the country. If we believe that sacrifice is man's dharma and that our pleasures should be consistent with the dharma of renunciation, then it becomes our duty to recognize the appropriateness of this dharma for our wives and children as well. If they insist on having more than this, let us tell them that we can give them only this much, that we can give them only the food that we ourselves eat; that what we consider proper for ourselves, we consider proper for them too. What more could be done? Right from my South Africa days I have adhered to this ideal. There is nothing wrong in wanting to reduce one's income. And any ideal which is right for us is also right for our children. All problems would be easily solved if we accept this. But the conflict arises when we believe that our wives and children have a different dharma to follow. We must go as far along this path as possible. If, out of an impulse, we have gone too far, there should be no hesitation in retracing our steps. The Sangh should carry on with whatever means it may be having. Let us keep an eye on our resources and fix the maximum limit. But, in doing this, we shall have to look to the country as well. We are bound to be affected by whatever may be happening in the country. And it is our goal to take the country along with us. We must always try to pursue our activities taking the country with us. I cannot lay down any rule in such matters. These are matters concerning the individual and they depend on his sincerity. The highest limit of Rs. 75 has been set. Whether or not that amount should be drawn is a matter for individual decision.

JAMNALALJI: But, from the point of view of an organization, it becomes necessary to make some rules. It would not be a good rule that the organization should give what an individual considers proper to demand. One who is engaged in public work should also think of one's market value.

G. I think from the public viewpoint it is difficult to clarify the matter any further. A person's market value may be Rs. 25 merely because he knows only Marathi and Sanskrit and is ignorant of English. But why should we put his value merely at Rs. 25? Take the example of a woman spinner. She would not earn even a pice in the market. But we have decided to pay her three annas. The question of market value arises in the case of a lawyer or a doctor. He charges whatever fee he desires. But we should not make such distinctions. We may make some distinction if the lowness of one's wages is due to one's special quality. For instance, if the needs of Gajanan are fewer than those of Mirabehn, he has no need to take as much as Mirabehn. If a person who is a B.A. LL.B. and another with a knowledge of Marathi-Sanskrit have similar functions to perform, they should be valued at the same rate.

J. But, if a person who can earn only Rs. 25 outside can get Rs. 40 from the Sangh, he would remain with the Sangh merely because of the temptation to get Rs. 40 even at the cost of degrading his soul.

G. That is correct. But it depends on the firmness of the organizers of the Sangh; if there were any such person in the Sangh, they should convey it to him that he does not possess the abilities he was supposed to possess. But take the example of Ravishankerbhai¹. He may not have any market value but he is a great worker.

J. What would be the correct policy with regard to the education of children and medical treatment?

G. The education of the boys certainly deserves our consideration. I have already said that the dharma which is proper for us should also be considered proper for our families. The children should not be converted to another dharma. If I have considered it my dharma to maintain myself through body-labour, it would be as good as converting my son to another dharma if I try to make him a barrister. I can only give him training in body-labour. Along with this, I should give my children whatever education I can within the income limits I have set for myself.

¹ Ravishankar M. Raval

Let me now come to the point of medical treatment. Take the example of Timmappa. It is true that once we have gone to the villages, we should adjust our whole life accordingly. But we must also look to the results of our experiments. What was the result of Timmappa's not taking milk for a few days? He had to spend on railway fare to go to Bombay. He had to be under obligation to a doctor. But even that was a mistake. When we go to a village and live in poverty, we must avail ourselves only of such medical facilities as the poor villagers can command for maintaining their health. Even if you tell me that I do not follow this precept myself, I cannot conceal my ideal, though I may accept the charge. He who remains continuously ill should send in his resignation.

RAJENDRA BABU: Why do you stress so much the condition of the worker maintaining himself by body-labour? This would leave little time for service. It may be all right to set an example to the people but setting an example is not enough. The need for advice and consultation cannot be ruled out. A worker's usefulness is very much reduced by overmuch insistence on physical labour.

G. This involves the question of reforming the entire Indian society. Every human being should maintain himself only through physical labour. I consider it a divine law. That is the reason why I have fixed that ideal. Now, the question is about intellectual development. Yes, it is a relevant question. But, if I could have power over the world, I would make physical labour compulsory for everybody. Exceptions would have to be made even here, for example, in favour of sannyasis and such others. People would themselves make the means of livelihood available to them. Whether you call it society or people or State, the meaning is the same. I am not making any new or original point. Ruskin, in his *Unto This Last* (translated by me as *Sarvodaya*¹) has said the same thing. Our Shastras also stress the same point. It may not be clearly mentioned, but it is there by implication. I am not well-versed in the Shastras. Vinobaji and Kakasaheb can talk with authority citing references from the Shastras. But I found the point clearly expounded in *Unto This Last* and that very night I transformed my life. The gist of Ruskin's argument is that a doctor or a lawyer should take the same wages as a labourer.

R. What should the present members do to pursue that ideal?

¹ *Vide* Vol. VIII.

G. All the present members have this ideal before them. But in the pursuit of that ideal they may follow some honest occupation or take their wages from the Sangh. But the Sangh should give wages only to those whose services it values. It should not give the wages as a favour. The Sangh should not make anyone dependent on it. This Sangh is not to produce parasites. It may become dependent on them by taking the maximum work from them.

DEVSHARMAJI: Is not the limit of Rs. 75 too high?

G. All the better if it could be brought down. As for me I have decided upon Rs. 15 as the limit. You may lower it from Rs. 75 to Rs. 50 if you wish. But it does not seem likely.

[From Hindi]

Gandhi Seva Sanghke Dwitiya Adhiveshan (Savli)ka Vivaran, pp. 32-6

264. LETTER TO DR. M. A. ANSARI

March 3, 1936

DEAR DR. ANSARI,

Having obtained some dispensation from medical friends, I am able to write this to you. I hope to reach Delhi on 8th. I hope you will prevent people from coming to the station. I am not in a fit state to face crowds and cut my way through them. I should love quietly to be taken to Birla's new Harijan Home.

This must—could—have been written by Mahadev. I have taken up this letter to tell you that as soon as I received your great book¹ on regeneration, I began to read it and finished it the day following. I have called it great because it is evidence of much research and great labour. There is hardly a superfluous word in it.

But as I was reading it, I asked myself, "Does this book take mankind upward? Is it in need of that kind of regeneration? What is revival of youth worth if you cannot be sure of persistent physical existence for two consecutive seconds?"

Is mere physical restoration the end of true medical science? I wonder!

I asked myself these questions, because you were the author of the book and I have ever known you as a seeker of God. When

¹ *Regeneration in Man*