

Inauguration of Kalasala At Sodepur by Gandhiji on 2.1.1927

DAY-TO-DAY WITH GANDHI [SECRETARY'S DIARY] by Mahadev H. Desai,
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2.1.1927

From Calcutta Gandhiji proceeded to Sodepur, where Sri Satishbabu has established a Kalashala (an art section) of his institution Khadi Pratishthan. Gandhiji was invited to open this Kalashala. All the Khadi produced by the Khadi Pratishthan is bleached, dyed and printed and different qualities of yarn and Khadi tested in Kalashala. It was working in full swing on the day we visited it. There was a small exhibition attached to it. The Pratishthan has spent 70,000 rupees after the Kalashala-30,000 after land and the remaining after the structure. Satishbabu has raised the whole building in nine months. But Kalashala is not mere industrial institution, it is an Ashram. Satishbabu has settled all the workers of the Pratishthan in this Kalashala and he himself lives with his family in their midst. All the inmates get up at 4 a.m. join in a congressional prayer and do their respective duties right in the Ashram style. Then there is a common prayer again in the evening at 7 p.m. and every inmate gets the quantity of yarn spun by him during the day registered. The Pratishthan has some paid servants on its staff, but all of them, inmates and servants, live like members of a big family.

The following table shows the progress of Khadi production by the Pratishthan :

	1924	1925	1926
Quantity in Maunds (1 maund=80 lbs.)	55	300	823
Sale :	Rs. 17,687	57,194	1,04,811

Shri Satishbabu wants the production and sale figures to mount to 400,000 rupees next year and he is devoting every ounce of his energy to it. It was in order to encourage Satishbabu in his Herculean effort that Gandhiji went to Sodepur. **A big gathering of about six thousand had collected at the Kalashala, when Gandhiji went there. Many of them had come from Calcutta. Pandit Motilalji, Srinivas Iyengar (Congress President)** and many others were present. Dr. Roy also was present though he was suffering from a paralytic attack and had to come riding on the shoulders of Jamnalalji. **Three addresses, from Panihati Municipality, the AntiMalaria Association and another institution, were given to Gandhiji.** As Dr. Roy was suffering from pain on the waist, he took the support of Jamnalalji to stand and speak.

“Every particle of this ground will now be hallowed with the touch of Mahatmajji’s feet here. In the most pathetically beseeching tone he says: ‘Wear Khadi.’ And still we wonder, ‘How ever can we wear it !’ Don’t go back from this meeting, with the smug satisfaction of having had the darshan of the Mahatma. It is all the same whether we go to holy places like Gaya and Varanasi or stay at home, if after our return we lead the same sinful lives. We must adore the thing that helps us in the attainment of our cherished object, no matter how insignificant it be. Ramchandra had called such a hero as Hanumanji to save Sita, but He accepted the help of even a squirrel. Our squirrel is our Sodepur and Panihati. It cannot grow into India’s Manchester, unless you all wear Khadi and take the sacred spinning pledge. Revered Gandhiji ! You are fully aware of everything about this Pratishthan-its hope, its cherished goal, its halo and its worry.”

1. A legend has it that among those who were helping Rama in building a bridge to let his army cross over to Lanka (Ceylon), there was a squirrel. It would roll itself on sand and then shake itself free from it at the place where the bridge was being built. Pleased with its love and sense of duty, Shree Rama passed in love his fingers over its back- The strips on the squirrel's body are the marks left by His fingers. Tulsidas' Ramayana does not mention any such incident.

Gandhiji said: "The moment I got the invitation to open this Kalashala of Khadi Pratishtan, I accepted it, as I love Khadi and the spinning wheel very much. But let me first refer to the three addresses. I thank you for them. The heads of all these three institutions are residents of this district. **The first is the Municipal address. I hope you (the Municipality) will help this institution. And it is an easy thing to help it. It is enough if you wear the Khadi produced here.** What an injustice it is that you wear foreign or mill-made clothes. A Khadi Pratishtan cannot be created with the money of the rich. I ask you, the common people, to help it as best you can. **I congratulate the Anti-Malaria Association for its work.** May you gain even greater success than you have ! I hope some Ayurvedic or Unani physician will discover a remedy that will give relief to out masses. It is no use if somebody suggested a remedy that may cost a thousand rupees. The third address expresses the hope that everybody will spin and wear Khadi.

"I cherish that same hope myself. The Khadi Pratishtan has been working for some years past. **When I was in jail, I heard no other news except the fact that Roy had grown mad after Khadi. I was told that he had given up chemistry, given up manufacturing medicines and perfumed oils for just a few and become a new kind of chemist who provided nourishing food to the millions of India by accepting the mantra of Khadi and propagating it in his tours over India. I heard also that another gentleman, who had become his friend 30 years ago, had also begun to do that same work. I am referring to Satishbabu, Dr. Roy's chief disciple. I say all this not to praise them, but to do something to help them.**

1. Unlike allopathic medicines these Hindu and Muslim systems of medicine prescribe cheap but effective remedies. They are still in vogue in India mainly on account of their cheapness and comparatively more lasting cure, though they are slower in producing their effect.

2. **Sir P.C. Roy** --- a well-known Chemist and founder of the Bengal Chemical and Pharmaceutical Works. Salary of Rs.1500 and a bungalow and a motor car and a share in the profits ! Renouncing all this, Satishbabu thought, 'Why should I not join him when my Guru Mahashaya (a term of respect) has taken up that work ?' He has besides given away a large part of his wealth. None of the buildings which you see standing now existed only 9 months before. There are now the bleaching and yarn-testing departments in these Extension Buildings. You will see all that today.

"Rs. 70,000 have been spent over it. Somebody may say that Satishbabu has lost his balance of mind, that, proud of his past achievement, he is pouring money on the institution in crazy faith and not sober reason. But he is not mad. His faith is indeed extraordinary; but faith is a power that moves high mountains like the Himalayas, inspires mariners to sail over unchartered seas, sustains the relationship between husband, wife, and children, between father and son, between the rich and the

poor. If everybody thinks that it is his vanity that has moved Satishbabu to set up all this equipment, the success of his undertaking will be jeopardised. It is easy to pull down a building, but it is not easy for all to erect extensions to it.

“But I wish you all to bless this activity after full deliberation. How awful is the poverty that prevails among us ! The Calcutta market imports rupees ten lakhs worth of cloth daily, while we do not produce that much cloth even yearly ! Can anything be more preposterous ? We have somehow managed to reach the production figure of 15 to 18 lakhs of rupees for the whole country ! Is it not a sign of our disgrace, our senselessness and imbecility, that we do not produce the cloth that Bengal needs in Bengal itself ? Think of the poverty that stalks the land. At Atrai I heard that a family of four earns Rs. 80 per year. (Sir William) Hunter has shown that a majority of people get nothing but dry bread and salt. Can this be allowed to go on ? I assure you, it is a hollow dream if we imagine we can get Swaraj merely by waving the National Flag and singing the National Song. If you want to make the dream of Swaraj come true, you must adopt Khadi. Without Khadi, you cannot protect your freedom and do your duty. The spinning wheel alone can be the centre of all other activities.

“India needs not one Roy, not one Satishbabu, not one (Khadi) Pratishthan, but hundreds and thousands of Roys, Satishbabus, Pratishthans. And you cannot hope to achieve this state without going mad after Khadi. Every man and woman can contribute his or her share to this great national sacrifice.

“After keeping aloof for a year I can no longer hold myself back and I want to roam all over India. For one year now, I want to become a bania hrough and through. **This land has been sanctified by the feet of Chaitanya. The place from which Chaitanya gave his message is not far from here. He also worked for the helpless.** I was taken today to Kalighat for the Ashwinibabu Memorial. I saw there a painful sight --- a line of beggars. You people give them money and food. Does the man who gives them money perform a pious deed ? I don't think. The beggars must be provided with work. If we don't do that and go on merely giving them some money, India will be destroyed. If you believe in the ideal of Chaitanya, if you have pity for the miserable of India, don't go away from here without taking out some money from your pockets for buying Khadi. Never in my life-time shall I forget that scene when many people took out from their torn clothes nothing but a small pie (the lowest coin=1/192 rupee) and gave it to me. I hailed their gifts with joy. My heart was then weeping on the one hand and rejoicing on the other that there is still so much faith among the people.

“In conclusion, I have only one thing to say: ‘Develop the Khadi-work through Khadi Pratishthan’ for in its progress lies the progress of India.” Nearly three thousand rupees were collected on the spot in response to Gandhiji's appeal.

5.1.1927

Left Sodepur for Comilla, another pilgrim centre for Khadi. Is it possible to visit Bengal and not see the Khadi Pratishthan and Abhaya Ashram.”