

MAHATMA GANDHI ON MODERN

CITIES v/s. VILLAGES



I am convinced that if India is to attain true freedom and through India the world also, then sooner or later the fact must be recognized that people will have no live in villages, not in towns, in huts, not in palaces. Crores (Tens of millions) of people will never be able to live at peace with each other in towns and palaces. They will then have no recourse but to resort to both violence and untruth.

I hold that without truth and non-violence, there can be nothing but destruction for humanity. We can realize truth and non-violence only in the simplicity of village life and this simplicity can best be found in the Charkha (hand spinning wheel) and all that the Charkha connotes. I must not fear if the world today is going the wrong way. It may be that India too will go that way and like the proverbial moth burn itself eventually in the flame round which it dances more and more fiercely. But it is my bounden duty up to my last breath to try to protect India and through India the entire world from such a doom.

The essence of what I have said is that man should rest content with what are his real needs and become self-sufficient. If he does not have this control, he cannot save himself. After all, the world is made up of individuals just as it is the drops that constitute the ocean.

There are two schools of thought current in the world. One wants to divide the world into cities and the other into villages. The village civilization and the city civilization are totally different things. One depended on machinery and industrialization, the other rested on handicraft. We have given preference to the latter.

After all, this industrialization and large-scale production was only of comparatively recent growth. We do not know how far it has contributed to our development and happiness, but we know this much that it has brought in its wake recent world wars. This second world war is not still over and even before it comes to an end we are hearing of a third world war. Our country was never so unhappy and miserable as it is at present. In the cities people may be getting big profits and good wages but all that has become possible by sucking the blood of the villages. It is the city man who is responsible for war all over the world, never the villager. (6-12-1944)

I regard the growth of cities as an evil thing, unfortunate for mankind and the world, unfortunate for England and certainly unfortunate for India. The British have exploited India through its cities. The latter have exploited the villages. The blood of the villages is the cement with which the edifice of the cities is built. I want the blood that is today inflating the arteries of the cities to run once again in the blood vessels of the villages. (23-6-1946)

The half a dozen modern cities are an excrescence and serve at the present moment the evil purpose of draining the life-blood of the villages . . . The cities with their insolent torts are a constant menace to the life and liberty of the villagers. (17-3-1927)

We may not be deceived by the wealth to be seen in the cities of India. It comes from the blood of the poorest. (30-6-1934) You cannot serve God and Mammon is an economic truth of the highest value. Western nations are today groaning under the heel of the monster god of materialism. They measure their progress in £.s.d. American wealth has become the standard. She is the envy of the other nations. I have heard many of our country men say that we will gain American wealth. But avoid its methods. I venture to suggest that such an attempt, if it were made, is foredoomed to failure. We cannot be 'wise, temperate and furious' in a moment. (28-5-1946)

The revival of the village is possible only when it is no more exploited. Industrialization on a mass scale will necessarily lead to passive or active exploitation of the villagers as the problems of competition and marketing come in. Therefore, we have to concentrate on the village being self-contained, manufacturing mainly for use. Provided this character of the village industry is maintained, there would be no objection to villagers using even the modern machines and tools that they can make and can afford to use. Only they should not be used as a means of exploitation of others."

A certain degree of a physical harmony and comfort is necessary, but above a certain level, it becomes a hindrance instead of help. (29-8-1936)

Any country that exposes itself to unlimited foreign competition can be reduced to starvation and therefore, subjection if the foreigners desire it.

This displacement of village labour is impoverishing the villagers and enriching the moneyed men. If the process continues sufficiently long, the villagers will be destroyed without any further effort. No Chengis Khan could devise a more ingenious or more profitable method of destroying these villages. (20-6-1936)

What India needs is not the concentration of capital in a few hands, but its distribution so as to be within easy reach of the 700000 of villages that make this continent 1900 miles long and 1500 miles broad. (23-3-1921)

Centralization cannot be sustained and defended without adequate force. Simple homes from which there is nothing to take away require no policing; the palaces of the rich must have strong guards to protect them against dacoity. So must huge factories. Rurally organized India will run less risk to foreign invasion than urbanized India, well equipped with military, naval and air forces. (30-12-1939)

Under my scheme, nothing will be allowed to be produced by cities which can be equally well produced by the villages. The proper function of cities is to serve as clearing houses for village products. (28-1-1939)

As a matter of fact a villager could manufacture of himself sufficient cloth cheaper than mills if he did not count the value of his labour. (28-5-1925)

Independence must begin at the bottom. Thus, every village will be a republic having full powers. It follows, therefore, that every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its affairs even to the extent of defending itself against the whole world.

In this there is no room for machines that would displace human labour and that would concentrate power in a few hands. Labour has its unique place in a cultured human family. Every machine that helps every individual has a place.
(28-7-1946)

Economic equality is the master key to non-violent independence.

A nonviolent system of government is clearly impossibility so long as the wide gulf between the rich and the hungry millions persists. The contrast between the palaces of New Delhi and the miserable hovels of the poor labouring class nearby cannot last one day in a free India in which the poor will enjoy the same power as the richest in the land. A violent and bloody revolution is a certainty one day unless there is a voluntary abdication of riches and the power that riches give and sharing them for the common good.

Everybody should be able to get sufficient work to enable him to make the two ends meet. This ideal can be universally utilized only if the means of production of the elementary necessities of life remain in the control of the masses.

Their monopolization by any country, nation or group 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 in other parts of the world too.
(15-11-1928)

The village communities should be revived. Indian villages produced and supplied to the Indian towns and cities all their wants. India became impoverished when our cities became foreign markets and began to drain the villages dry by dumping cheap and shoddy goods from foreign lands.

I am quite capable of running a big enterprise, but I deliberately sacrificed the ambition, not as a sacrifice, but because my heart rebelled against it.

(27-2-1937)