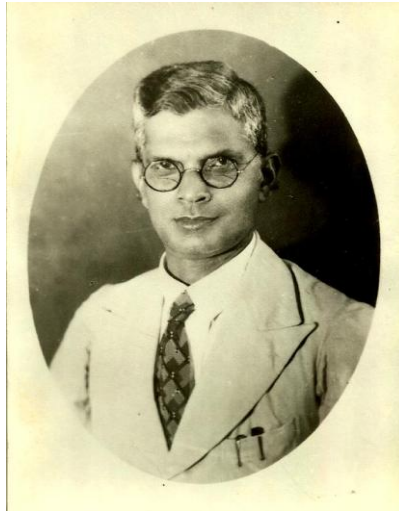


Creative Delight



(This article written by Dr A R Poduval was so much appreciated by Mahatma Gandhi that he got it reprinted in "Young India". Gandhiji wrote – "Under the heading "The Creative Delight" there appears in St. Berchmans' College Magazine a very readable and thought provoking article by Capt A R Poduval of Cochin. Though for the pages of "Young India", it may be considered somewhat long, I have not had the courage to mutilate it. I present the reader with the whole of Capt. Poduval's article in the hope that it will bring converts to the great cause of Daridranarayan".)

Ten years ago, when I was travelling to North Wales, I was struck with the universal employment of the spinning wheel in every cottage that I visited. And I asked the cottagers why they should spend their time in this slow process of making yarn, when they could procure miles of machine-made cloth comparatively at a cheap rate. One of the women told me that the spinning wheel in Wales and in several parts of rural England was an heirloom industry, almost sanctified by usage; that the fabric of home-spun lasted much longer than the machine-made stuff, and also was a partial solution of the economic problems. She went to a cupboard and took out several pieces of cloth, which were entirely home-made, and some of them were remarkable for their texture and pretty designs in embroidery and needle-work with which they were freely garnished. She also told me that there was something of simplicity, homeliness, and domesticity in the wooden spinning wheel before her and added that if the whole world were converted into a cloth factory, I would still hear the peaceful hum of the domestic spinning wheel in the villages, because it has become almost identified as one of the family. It gives us, women, a good deal of peace and contentment from the

worries of domestic life to hear the music of the whirling wheel. It is the best companion in our hours of loneliness.

From the way in which she tuned up this panegyric on the spinning wheel and the extreme complacency with which she witnessed the cotton drawing out into the thin fibre, one would have thought that she was almost witnessing the interesting performance of one of her own little children. There seems to be human feeling running through the threads. This Welsh charkha has been rooted to that spot for years. The footstool had worn out. But the paraphernalia for spinning had their definite stations on the wheel, all ready for work at any time, to be left off or resumed, several times in the day.

I have, as a matter of habit, certainly influenced by a strong predilection, acquired a knack of sketching and painting, in those consecrated moments, when life seems to be more valuable than its money-value; and these amateur attempts have found a respectable place in the walls of every house, where I have practically discarded the six penny prints that have absolutely ruined our love of art and our creative instincts. There are hundreds of pictures, world famous ones, which I can get for little expense, and less trouble. Some of these 'bits' were painted after long trudges across the country; I have often been caught in a heavy snow storm or a soaking rain in these expeditions or have sometimes pitched my kit in a field, to be widely scattered all around by an enraged bull, with the danger signal on its forehead, whose proximity I had not suspected. And after all this sweating or wetting, I come back to find in the print shop round the corner, a picture of the same scene, even so much better painted than mine own, to be had for the low sum of four pence. But I seem more attached to my indifferent sketch than to the reproduction of the scene by a celebrated artist. And I have asked myself why. Now the answer to that question bears an important relation to the normal psychology of a man, if that has not been entirely screwed out of its central connections into a lazy languorous eccentric orbit.

It is the pristine delight that man always felt in works of his own creations. It is not a new development, not a new acquisition. It is natural to all human beings. The tree which you have planted, the fruits that you pluck from your own garden, the house you have built, even the children that have been born to you—all these are more pleasing and more attractive, more in tune with the inexplicable feelings of your soul than the trees and the fruits and the houses and the children of others, however much they may transcend yours in beauty or deliciousness. Your hand, your mind and your heart have gone into their making. There is a magical tie that binds you to these products of your own make.

This is my philosophy of the spinning wheel. Just a year before I started for Europe, this idea of "Creative Delight" began to occupy my mind, and I thought that in the charkha, there was another unexplored field for me to enjoy the fruits of my own labour. At that time I looked back on myself - and took an inventory of the stuff on me and about me. How sad! There was hardly a thing there which could not be expressed in terms of rupees, annas and pies. The subtle thread of 'feeling' was absent. And then I thought that it would give me a new pleasure to clothe myself in fabrics of my own making and to feel the touch of my own handiwork on the sensitive skin.

That was how I started spinning. It was years after the great Mahatma had preached the gospel of Charkha - the emblem of a rejuvenating vital force that is slowly creeping through the day-cracked clay of the Indian constitution. At first mere threads snapped and less evolved. The small spindle of real yarn, placed side by side with the fluff of wasted cotton, looked like a molecule in a microcosm. But every centimeter in the tiny spindle would speak if it had a tongue. Something had gone out of me in its creation. In the delight of the first experimental production, I took it to my children with the pride of an artist in the creation of a new work of art. They were already spinning yarn by the yards, but of course, Papa's yarn deserves some complement. "O! what a tiny little thing big Daddy has made" they said; and they took it into the broad open light to see that it was there; that the cotton had really wound itself round that little iron wire. Its thread was too loose,

often irregular in thickness; it had all the technical deformities you can possibly think of. But in spite of these deficiencies it was like a first love. I have it kept as still as a form memento of my earliest attempt at the spinning wheel.

It took me less than two days to learn the art. The cotton would just roll itself into a thread automatically through the sensitive finger tips and wind on the spindle. The interrupted creak of the wheel has now become a continuous melodious hum which has to be heard, to realize the poetry of it. I used to snatch every ten or fifteen minutes' interval in the prosaic tedious life of the profession to turn out another twenty or thirty yard to my total number and I used to watch with delight the meagre spindle visibility developing in the middle, like the abdomen of a diabetic.

A certain official, who used to visit me occasionally and brought with him a full panoply of the latest from the mills of Manchester and Preston 'bekleided' in suit of formal cut, asked me as I was engaged at this agreeable task; "whatever I was doing"

"Spinning" I said quietly.

"You spinning?" he asked in astonishment.

"I think I am" I said: "Seeing is believing"

"What do you propose to do with the yarn? Sell it?"

"That is after I have made sufficient to clothe me and my family which I suppose, probably never will be" I answered.

"But surely" he said, "You are not going to clothe yourself and your family in this coarse stuff"

"Why not; is it criminal to do so; or do you think our skins are too delicate for such fabric? Look on the walls" I said "something of mine; mine own individuality has gone into the making of every touch in those water color sketches; I dare say, I could procure with half the trouble and expense Summer and Christmas numbers of your leading journals and fill up my walls with prints country squires hunting

and shooting partridges on the moors; of the greasy yellow London frog; of burghers drinking in a cabaret; and reproductions of famous pictures turned into soap-advertisements. But what have we in common ? I say you try to make a pen-rack for yourself, however clumsy, put it on your table and see how you feel. That will give you some idea of the delight of creative production. It has to be done before it can be felt. It is the same idea in spinning; just an application of normal man's real, original creative instinct to make a thing for yourself and feel the gladness of the production."

"But surely - "

"There is no but in the case" I put in rather hotly, "it is the best tonic for what some of you people generally suffer from - mental ennui - the result of having little 'to do and plenty of time to do it in' as the American say. Why, I tell you, if you could make your own pack of cards to play with, you might find a little poetry even in that most unpoetical of all past times."

I have thought what a wonderful and artistic future in the wooden symbol before me. There is enough of scope to exercise man's ingenuity, in devising new patterns of the wheel, and new patterns on the fabric made by the wheel. The domestic spinning wheel is as old as civilization and even today the very best, finest fabrics are home-spun because you can put your brain and your feelings into the stuff. In some of the famous museums of Europe you still see the gossamer muslins of an older type placed in glass cases against a black background to enable them to be seen. No machine makes that; they are dreams in cotton industry unhappily dead.

Now this creative delight is an essential element in the mental constitution of every individual and is just one of the most distinguishing features that absolutely separate him from the animal. I have particularly emphasised Charkha because it has far more far-reaching interest; it acts in the double capacity of a revival of one of our most useful and honoured institutions, and as a means of economic conservation. I perceive that in the thickest whirl of this civilization, there are several people in Europe who still feel the longing emotional impulse to isolate art from mechanics

and to feel closer tie between person and immediate product, without going through a mechanical proxy. I know a large number of respectable ladies here who still use home-spun. A few days ago while having tea with an upper middle class family, I dropped my handkerchief on the floor and while picking it up my kind hostess noticed the peculiar strange black boarder with which it was ornamented.

"Is it that an Indian Pattern," she asked me.

"Yes" I answered, "and more than that the whole thing is home-made."

She had a closer look at the fabric and said, "It is rather coarse, don't you think so?"

"Yes Ma'm; but so is your German fountain pen. It does not look half so graceful as that made by some of the famous manufacturers of America; nor are they any cheaper. But they work well, wonderfully well, indeed and I see you are partial to them."

"Ah, yes", she answered, " this is of Deutchland, you know." But speaking of home products, she added, " I make all my clothes; cut and stitch them too; you see, they sit on me with a sentiment, a greater sympathy than I can extend from the tailor."

Of course there are any number of people at home, whose minds are not tuned up to this feeling; who want to show what money can buy without their share in the material. People who sell the milk of their own cows and buy cheaper milk for their own use have a special eccentric genius for doing so; for it is not want, it is a special mentality whose real psychological nature has yet to be worked out.

There are a hundred and one things that our youngsters might turn to, to exercise this creative impulse, that I believe myself that the spinning wheel is the symbol of this instinct in man. Mankind is immediately concerned with food first and clothing next. If everybody could produce in his own garden much of the wheat required for his food, I should think most people would have a better appetite for eating. If each individual would make his own material for clothing it would not only solve the second eminent problem of our lives, but would also create a real taste for dressing. In the same way you could turn your ingenuity with real profit and pleasure by exercising your creative instincts in the production of those other sundries of life, which while greatly stimulating your powers of originality, will also tend to establish the sympathetic bond that knits you to your own native land.
