

Address By THIRU. BANWARILAL PUROHIT, Hon'ble Governor of Tamil Nadu at the "Visit of Gandhi Gram Rural Institute" at Multipurpose Hall, Gandhi Gram on 25/07/2018 at 03:30 P.M.

Anaivarukkum Maalai Vanakkam

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District Collector

Distinguished Invitees

Faculty

Students

Ladies & Gentlemen

I am delighted to be here at the Gandhigram Rural Institute amidst the teachers and Students of this prestigious seat of learning. It is a moment of privilege and joy for me to be here at the place where the practical application of Gandhiji's ideas and philosophy is being carried out.

For three long centuries, the British ruled India. They considered India as the pearl of their Empire. But the course of history took a turn. A small made man with exceptional charisma, an apostle of non-violence, planted the seed of liberty in the hearts of his fellow citizens. With passive disobedience as his only weapon, he, who would later be called Mahatma, undermined British colonial power. He prepared India for economic autonomy and rose up against the caste system. The spinning wheel would be just a museum piece had not Gandhiji made it synonymous with the freedom struggle.

The starting point for the constructive programmes of Khadi, eradication of Untouchability and prohibition came from the Tolstoy Farm which Gandhiji had setup in South Africa.

The Tolstoy Farm was named as such by Herman Kallenbach, Gandhi's associate. It was founded in 1910 and proved to be an ideal laboratory for Gandhi's educational experiments. "Tolstoy Farm was a family in which I occupied the place of the father," wrote Gandhi, and that I should so far as possible shoulder the responsibility for the training of the young". The routine of the children on the farm was divided between attending classes and contributing to the maintenance of the farm. Manual work was combined with instruction on a daily basis, and Gandhi took this concept one step further by introducing vocational training to give "all-round development to the boys and girls".

How Gandhiji got interested in the spinning wheel or the charkha is another interesting story.

In 1917, a well – to-do widow, Gangabehn Majumdar, accustomed to riding from one village to another on horseback, found an ancient wheel in the lumber room in Vijapur in Baroda. It was cleaned up and presented to Gandhiji who set about finding sliver and yarn. The first silvers were obtained from a mill and the spinning wheel was set in Gandhiji's study.

Gandhiji began spinning so as not to depend on foreign material for clothing, thus began the 'Khadi' or swadeshi' movement, to fight the British.

The original wheel was carefully studied, taken apart, adapted and simplified so that anyone could use it.

By reviving the spinning wheel Gandhiji hoped to encourage village industry and reduce import of British Cloth.

In the twenties and thirties when the movement spread it was a fashion to spin. The oft heard refrain was.

Charkha Chala Chalake

“Lenge Swarajya Lenge”

It was sung by men, women, and child in all walks of life. Shop selling British goods were picketed, people were urged to boycott foreign goods. In fact this resulted in the great 'bonfire' when people heaped all their silk sarees, suits and all the foreign clothing they possessed, and set on fire. This was done in many parts of the country.

Tamil Nadu was always close to Gandhiji's heart. It is important to recall that when Gandhiji started the Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad, in which there were initially 25 inmates, 13 of them were Tamilians. People in the audience may know that Gandhi visited Tamil Nadu 20 times between 1896 and 1946. During his first visit in 1896 he tried to learn Tamil and bought 9 Tamil books for the purpose. During a subsequent visit in 1921, when in Madurai, Gandhiji made a change from donning the typical elaborate attire to wearing the simple dhoti and upper cloth that clothed him for the remaining years of his life. About this he himself has written and I quote,

"All the alterations I have made in the course of my life have been effected by momentous occasions. Such a radical alteration in my dress I effected in Madurai."

Sarvodaya is a Sanskrit term meaning 'universal uplift' or 'progress of all'. The term was used by Mahatma Gandhi as the title of his 1908 translation of John Ruskin's *Unto This Last*, and Gandhi came to use the term for the ideal of his own political philosophy. Later Gandhians, like the Indian nonviolence activist Vinoba Bhave, embraced the term as a name for the social movement in post-independence India which strove to ensure that self-determination and equality reached all strata of Indian society. In this connection it is useful to narrate an interesting anecdote.

Gandhiji received a copy of Ruskin's *Unto This Last* from a British friend, Mr. Henry Polak, while working as a lawyer in South Africa in 1904. In his Autobiography, Gandhi remembers the twenty-four-hour train ride to Durban when he first read the book and he was so much in the grip of Ruskin's ideas that he could not sleep at all. He wrote and I quote: "I

determined to change my life in accordance with the ideals of the book."

Ruskin's outlook revolved around three central tenets:

1. That the good of the individual is contained in the good of all.
2. That a lawyer's work has the same value as the barber's in as much as all have the same right of earning their livelihood from their work.
3. That a life of labour, i.e., the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsman is the life worth living.

Four years later, in 1908, Gandhi rendered a paraphrased translation of Ruskin's book into his native tongue of Gujarati. He titled the book Sarvodaya, a word he invented from two Sanskrit roots: sarva (all) and udaya (uplift) -- "the uplift of all" (or as Gandhi glossed it in his autobiography, "the welfare of all").

The ideal which Gandhi strove to put into practice in his ashrams was, he hoped, one that could persuade the whole of India to embrace, becoming a light to the other nations of the world. The Gandhian social ideal encompassed the dignity of labor, an equitable distribution of wealth, communal self-sufficiency and individual freedom.

I have gone around this wonderful institute and have been greatly impressed by the practicality of its approach. The Institute which is administered by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India and fully funded through UGC, New Delhi has developed academic programs in rural development, rural economics and extension education, rural oriented sciences, co-operation, development administration, rural sociology, English, Tamil and Indian languages.

Besides, its contribution to teaching, from diploma, degree and all the way to post-doctorate levels, the Institute applies the learnings from both scientific and social research to solve contemporary rural problems. The curriculum is a combination of theoretical, practical and extension experiments. The Institute has become home to many pioneering models of rural development programmes. The students and scholars who emerge from its portals tend to meet the personnel needs of rural development

programmes under various governmental and non-governmental organizations.

The three dimensional approach of education namely teaching, research and extension has become a highly celebrated model, earning global and nationwide appreciation.

It aims at striking a balance between the old values of simple and spiritual life that are worth retaining and the new ones tempered with modernity, rationality and science. Fortified with these values, the Institute aspires to groom and prepare the student community for harnessing the promising opportunities of and for facing newer challenges of the 21st century.

I should conform that during my visit today I became a student trying to understand, assimilate and adopt each one of the ideas and practices that Gandhiji held dear to his heart. This visit will remain etched in my heart and mind and I shall continue to ponder over the thoughts and impressions I gained today. I wish to conclude by saying that you are all fortunate to be groomed in an institution that follows the development model of Gandhiji. Each one of you is destined to be great in the same manner as the followers of Gandhiji of the 20th century such as Sardar Patel, Rajagopalachari and Kamaraj. May prosperity and fame be bestowed on each one of you here and may this illustrious institution rise to even greater heights of fame.

Nandri Vanakkam

Jai Hind