

In 1828

We are reproducing here a piece that was published in **Young India** in 1931 under the title, "In 2828." It consists of extracts from a letter written by a woman spinner in 1828, with comments by Mahatma Gandhi. It gives an interesting picture of one avenue of women's employment which was destroyed by British colonial rule.

Sjt. Satis Chandra Das Gupta of the Khadi Pratishthan is editing a Bengali newspaper called *Rastra-vani*. He recently unearthed a letter addressed to the editor of *Samachar Darpan* which was published in Bengali in the 20s of the 19th century. As the letter was of great importance showing how the *charkha* was being slowly destroyed and how it was valued by women in those days, he has published it in his paper and sent me its translation. I am sure it will be read with interest by all who are at all

interested in the *khadi* movement. Here is the letter:

The representation of a spinner To the editor, *Samachar*.

I am a spinner. After having suffered a great deal, I am writing this letter. Please publish this in your paper...When my age was five and a half gandas (22) I became a widow with three daughters. My husband left nothing at the time of his death...I sold my jewellery for his *shradha* ceremony. At last, as we were on the verge of starvation, God showed me

a way by which we could save ourselves. I began to spin on *takli* and *charkha*...

The weavers used to visit our houses and buy the *charkha* yarn at three *tolas* per rupee. What-ever amount I wanted as advance from the weavers, I could get for the asking. This saved us from cares about food and cloth.

In a few years' time I got to-gether seven *ganda* rupees (Rs 28). With this I married one daughter. And in the same way all three daughters...

Now for three years, we two women, mother-in-law and I, are in want of food. The weavers do not call at the house for buying yarn. Not only this, if the yarn is sent to market still it is not sold even at one fourth of the old prices. I do not know how it happened. I asked many about it.

They say that *bilati* yarn is being largely imported. The weavers buy that yarn and weave. I had a sense of pride that *bilati* yarn could not be equal to my yarn, but when I got *bilati* yarn I saw that it was better than my yarn. I heard that its price is Rs 3 or Rs 4 per seer. I beat my brow and said, "Oh God, there are sisters more distressed even than me. I know that all men of *bilat* are rich but now I see that there are women there who are poorer than me. I fully realise the poverty which induced those poor women to spin. They have sent the product of so much toil out here because they could not sell it there. It would have been something if it were sold here at good prices. But it has brought our ruin only. Man cannot use the cloth out of this yarn even for two months ; it rots away. I therefore entreat the spinners over there, that, if they will consider this representation, they will be able to judge whether it is fair to send yarn here or not.

A representation from a suffering spinner, Shantipur (Samachar Darpari)



The readers will not fail to observe the nobility of the writer who in her blissful ignorance felt that yarn was spun by the hands of her *bilati* sisters poorer than herself and therefore felt for them.

Alas, her belief was baseless. She could have stood her own if the foreign yarn had been hand spun. She

could have stood her own even against the foreign yarn, if behind it there had been no policy of determination to capture the Indian trade and kill the national village industry.

Young India, May 21, 1931 (C. W. Vol. 46, pages 188-J89)

Women's Groups In Pakistan Dismayed By The New Law Of Evidence

The Council of Islamic Ideology, made up exclusively of men, recently considered the new law of evidence (Qanoon-i-Shahadat). This new Law has now been promulgated by the Majlis-i-Shoora. This law proposes to equate the evidence of two women with one man, thus reducing the status of women to half that of men and is supposedly based on verse 282, Surah Baqra.

Several women's groups in Pakistan have expressed shock at the promulgation of this law. Women representatives state that not only is the law discriminatory but it also finds no support from any Quranic injunctions. The Women's Action Forum has demanded the right publicly to present their own interpretation of verse 282, Surah Baqra.

One clause in the law states "In matters pertaining to financial or future obligations, if reduced in writing, the instrument shall be attested to by two men or one man and two women so that one may remind the other, if necessary and evidence shall be led accord-ingly." (2a). Women's groups maintain that there is no reference to future obligations other than the witnessing of a contract in Surah Baqra 282. They also seek clarification of the term 'financial' obligations.

There is also a feeling among Pakistani women that since the Pakistan Commission on the Status of Women is still in the process of identifying the status of Pakistani women, it is premature to promulgate laws pertaining to the status of women.