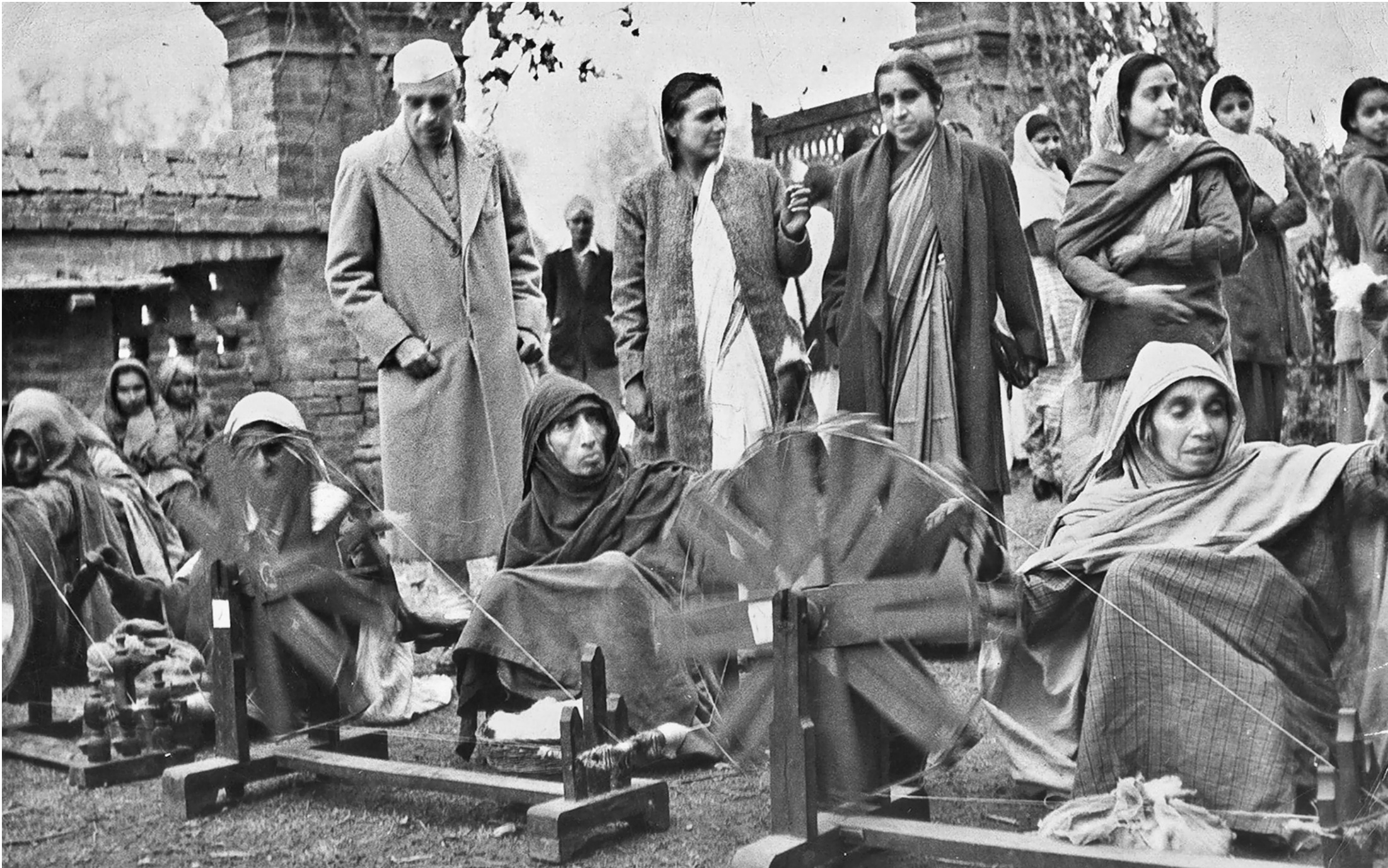


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Our two main problems



We need to grow our own food and make our own textiles. It will take commitment, discipline and unity to pull this off, says Lal Bahadur Shastri, writing a mere three years after Independence. 'But how many of us have first-hand knowledge of the work being carried on in the villages and fields,' he asks

During the three years of our independence, the country has made progress in many directions and things have been done which, in the pre-independence days, were outside even the realm of schemes or plans.

The expansion of education and medical facilities, building new plants, dams, irrigation canals and roads, the opening of scientific laboratories and virgin soil brought under cultivation, these are some of the achievements of this period, besides radical social legislation by the central and the state governments giving equal rights to all citizens with no distinction between men and women, high and low, rich and poor.

The Constitution has further set before the nation an ideal of civil liberty and of equal opportunity to all. The achievement of these objectives is the most difficult task that has ever devolved on any country in the very early stages of its freedom, but we are struggling on in pursuit of a great ideal for which we have lived and fought for so long. Gandhiji, through the Congress organization under whose auspices we have grown up, set that ideal before us. We are yet very far indeed from realizing it; we have made only a humble beginning. We might, as is only natural, make mistakes and have to retrace our steps if the conditions so demand in order to serve better.

Even if we fail or falter, the laudable ideal will ever remain before us as a beacon light to lead us to individual, social, political — and may I also add — spiritual progress.

The problem of food

But independence has brought in its wake several problems which weigh heavily upon us. These are many, and they deserve our consideration but, in this article, I shall deal with only two — food and cloth. Their production, if tackled properly, may well pave the way for further progress.

Serious thought has been given to the first, but the latter has not received the same attention. I do not propose to elaborate on the various aspects of the problem of food production, but I would like to emphasize here how we should get on with the actual work to achieve a definite result within a prescribed time.

We have got sound schemes and ample

funds placed at the disposal of the departments concerned. Top priority has also been given to it. But how many of us have first-hand knowledge of the work being carried on in the village and the fields? Officers at the top and even those below work on the basis of reports and not on what is actually happening in the fields.

Leaving aside the programme of work and what should be our target, let me enumerate below some of the essential points in regard to this problem:

- (i) The productive capacity of the existing land under cultivation to increase; save crops from drought and damage as far as possible.
- (ii) Culturable and virgin soil to be brought under cultivation.
- (iii) Government to provide necessary means and resources as an aid to implement the above.
- (iv) Cultivators to put their best on their own initiative without waiting for Government help. Each and every one to fulfil the task allotted to him howsoever limited his scope might be.
- (v) Agency to supervise and execute the scheme.

A complete survey of each and every village should be the first and most essential part of our scheme. We should have a clear idea of the cultivated and uncultivated area, the virgin soil to be brought under cultivation, the number of wells, tube-wells, ponds, tanks, etc, crops and their produce per bigha or acre, the improvements required and what is possible for the villagers to do themselves and the kind and extent of Government aid that should be forthcoming.

Military precision

A detailed record of the progress of the work done should be maintained along with proper check and necessary supervision. The agriculture and the revenue departments, the panchayat, the SDM and the district magistrate, in so far as they are concerned, should have the plan of each village before them and see to its actual execution. If there is delay in the progress of work in any area, the SDM, the tehsildar and other persons concerned should be held responsible and should be asked to explain the causes of the delay.

Success and failure has to be keenly watched and it should be judged whether the progress is reasonable and reliable. There should be a persistent effort to see the materialization of the plan within a pre-

scribed time. All this should be done with military precision. It is in that spirit that "Grow More Food" has to be worked.

An army of land workers should not remain merely a slogan. Every cultivator should be made to feel that he is a soldier of that army and should report at the village panchayat how he is faring with the work allotted to him. Let us create a sense of need and urgency in the minds of cultivators and other workers. Whatever effort is made and howsoever rapid our pace may be, the attainment of the target will take time. In the meantime our people should exercise great patience in awaiting results. They may have to carry on with coarse grains, vegetables or nuts etc and also with less food. It may come as a rude shock to the people but they should be taken into full confidence about it.

We must make ourselves self-supporting in cereals as it is a matter of shame to all of us not to be able to do so with the huge resources at our disposal. If we are in right earnest and prepared to work hard, we can succeed in reducing our imports of foodgrains considerably by the end of next year.

Equally important

Let us now consider the question of cloth. It may not be considered as important as food; yet it will be unwise to minimise its importance. It is needless to emphasize that if we can manage food and cloth for ourselves, there is bound to be economic stability. Mills must produce the quota allotted to them. If they do not co-operate, they should be dealt with firmly and, if necessary, new legislation enacted...

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