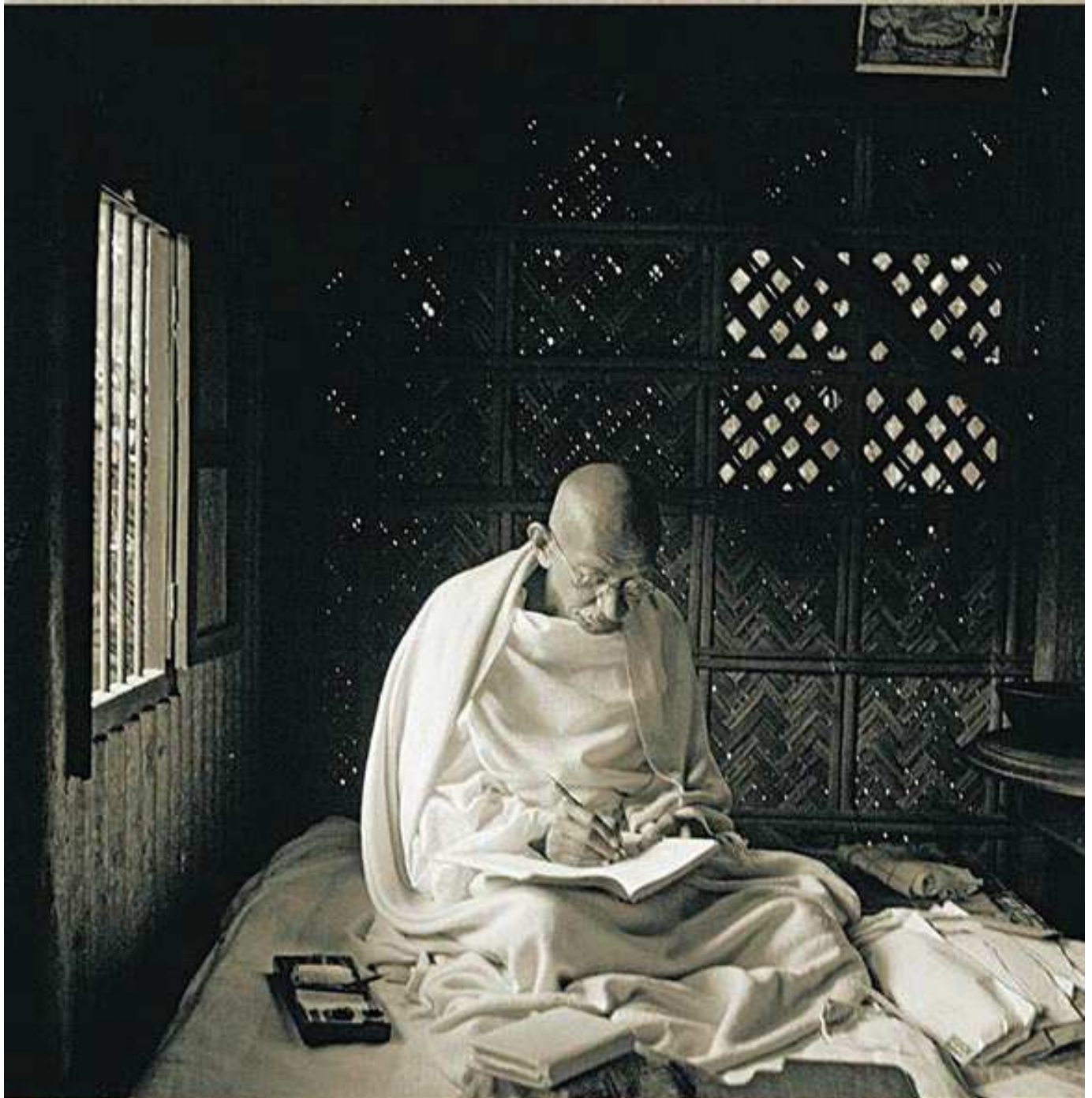


THE MIND OF MAHATMA GANDHI



Compiled and edited by
R. K. Prabhu & U. R. Rao

The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi

Encyclopedia of Gandhi's Thoughts

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41. LABOUR AND CAPITAL

Harmony of Relations

I HAVE always said that my ideal is that capital and labour should supplement and help each other. They should be a great family living in unity and harmony, capital not only looking to the material welfare of the labourers, but their moral welfare also-capitalists being trustees for the welfare of the labouring classes under them. (YI, 20-8-1925, p. 285)

I do not fight shy of capital. I fight capitalism. The West teaches one to avoid concentration of capital, to avoid a racial war in another and deadlier form. Capital and labour need not be antagonistic to each other. (YI, 7-10-1926, p. 348)

Conversion of Capitalist

.....If I would recognize the fundamental equality, as I must, of the capitalist and the labourer, I must not aim at his destruction. I must strive for his conversion. My non-co-operation with him will open his eyes to the wrong he may be doing....It can be easily demonstrated that destruction of the capitalist must mean in the end destruction of the worker, and as no human being is so bad as to be beyond redemption, no human being is so perfect as to warrant his destroying him whom he wrongly considers to be wholly evil. (YI, 26-3-1931, p. 49)

Exploitation of the poor can be extinguished not by effecting the destruction of a few millionaires, but by removing the ignorance of the poor and teaching them to non-co-operate with their exploiters. That will convert the exploiters also. I have even suggested that ultimately it will lead to both

being equal partners. Capital as such is not evil; it is the wrong use that is evil. Capital in some form or other will always be needed. (H, 28-7-1940, p. 219)

Labour's Duties, Rights

It is my universal experience that, as a rule, labour discharges its obligations more effectively and more conscientiously than the master who has corresponding obligations towards the labourers. It, therefore, becomes necessary for labour to find out how far labour can impose its will on the masters.

If we find that we are not adequately paid or housed, how are we to receive enough wages, and good accommodation? Who is to determine the standard of comfort required by the labourers? The best way, no doubt, is that you labourers understand your own rights, understand the method of enforcing your rights and enforce them. But for that you require a little previous training... education. (SW, p. 1046)

But there is no right in the world that does not presuppose a duty. An owner never spoils his property. When you know that the mill is as much yours as of the mill-owners, you will never damage your property. You will never angrily destroy cloth or machinery with a view to squaring your quarrel with the mill-owners.

Fight, if you must, on the path of righteousness and God will be with you. There is no royal road, I repeat, to gaining your rights, except self-purification and suffering. (YI, 4-8-1927, p. 248)

Labour's Power

In my humble opinion, labour can always vindicate itself if labour is sufficiently united and self-sacrificing. No matter how oppressive the capitalists may be, I am convinced that those who are connected with labour

and guide the labour movement have themselves no idea of the resources that labour can command and which capital can never command. If labour would only understand and recognize that capital is perfectly helpless without labour, labour will immediately come to its own.

We have unfortunately come under the hypnotic suggestion and the hypnotic influence of capital, so that we have come to believe that capital is all in all on this earth. But a moment's thought would show that labour has at its disposal capital which the capitalists will never possess. Ruskin taught in his age that labour had unrivalled opportunities. But he spoke above our head.

There is in English a very potent word, and you have it in French also, all the languages of the world have it-it is "No", and the secret that we have hit upon is that when capital wants labour to say "Yes", labour roars out "No", if it means "No". And immediately labour comes to recognize that it has got the choice before it of saying "Yes", when it wants to say "Yes", and "No", when it wants to say "No", labour is free of capital and capital has to woo labour.

And it would not matter in the slightest degree that capital has guns and even poison gas at its disposal. Capital would still be perfectly helpless if labour would assert its dignity by making good its "No". Then, labour does not need to retaliate, but labour stands defiant receiving the bullets and poison gas and still insists upon its "No".

The whole reason why labour so often fails is that, instead of sterilizing capital as I have suggested, labour, (I am speaking as a labourer myself) wants to seize that capital and become capitalist itself in the worst sense of the term. And the capitalist, therefore, who is properly entrenched and organized, finding among the labourers also candidates for the same office, makes use of a portion of these to suppress labour. If we really were not under this hypnotic spell, every one of us, men and women, would recognize this rock-bottom truth without the slightest difficulty.

Having proved it for myself, through a series of experiments carried on in different departments of life, I am speaking to you with authority (you will

pardon me for saying so) that, when I put this scheme before you, it was not as something superhuman but as something within the grasp of every labourer, man or woman.

Again, you will see that what labour is called upon to do under this scheme of non-violence is nothing more than...the ordinary soldier who is armed from top to toe is called upon to do. Whilst he undoubtedly seeks to inflict death and destruction upon his adversary, he always carries his own life in his pocket. I want labour, then, to copy the courage of the soldier without copying the brute in the soldier, namely, the ability to inflict death, and I suggest to you that a labourer who courts death and has the courage to die without even carrying arms, with no weapons of self-defence, shows a courage of a much higher degree than a man who is armed from top to toe. (YI, 14-1-1932, p. 17-18)

Gift of Intelligence

The moment labour recognizes its own dignity, money will find its rightful place, i.e., it will be held in trust for labour. For labour is more than money. (H, 19-10-1935, p. 285)

I hold that a working knowledge of a variety of occupations is to the working class what metal is to the capitalist. A labourer's skill is his capital. Just as the capitalist cannot make his capital fructify without the co-operation of labour, even so the working man cannot make his labour fructify without the co-operation of capital.

And, if both labour and capital have the gift of intelligence equally developed in them and have confidence in their capacity to secure a fair deal, each at the hands of the other, they would get to respect and appreciate each other as equal partners in a common enterprise. They need not regard each other as inherently irreconcilable antagonists.

Organization

But the difficulty is that, whilst today capital is organized and seems to be securely entrenched, labour is not. The intelligence of the working man is cramped by his soulless, mechanical occupation which leaves him little scope or chance to develop his mind. It has prevented him from realizing the power and the full dignity of his status.

He has been taught to believe that his wages have to be dictated by capitalists instead of his demanding his own terms. Let him only be organized along right lines and have his intelligence quickened, let him learn a variety of occupations, and he will be able to go about with his head erect and never be afraid of being without means of sustenance. (H, 3-7-1937, p. 161)

I am not opposed to organization of labour, but as in everything else, I want its organization along Indian lines, or if you will, my lines. I am doing it. The Indian labourer knows it instinctively. I do not regard capital to be the enemy of labour. I hold their co-ordination to be perfectly possible.

The organization of labour that I undertook in South Africa, Champaran or Ahmedabad was in no spirit of hostility to the capitalists. The resistance in each case and to the extent it was thought necessary was wholly successful. (YI, 17-3-1927, p. 86)

The labourer has to realize that labour is also capital. As soon as labourers are properly educated and organized and they realize their strength, no amount of capital can subdue them. Organized and enlightened labour can dictate its own terms. It is no use vowing vengeance against a party because we are weak. We have to get strong. Strong hearts, enlightened minds and willing hands can brave all odds and remove all obstacles. (H, 1-3-1935, p. 23)

Conflict Not Inevitable

I do not think there need be any clash between capital and labour. Each is dependent on the other. What is essential today is that the capitalist should not lord it over the labourer. In my opinion, the mill-hands are as much the proprietors of their mills as the shareholders, and when the mill-owners realize that the mill-hands are as much mill-owners as they, there will be no quarrel between them. (YI, 4-8-1927, p. 248)

The masses do not see in landlords and other profiteers their enemy. But the consciousness of the wrong done to them by these classes has to be created in them. I do not teach the masses to regard the capitalists as their enemies, but I teach them that they are their own enemies. (YI, 26-11-1931, p. 369)

There is a conflict of interest between capital and labour, but we have to resolve it by doing our own duty. Just as pure blood is proof against poisonous germs, so will labour, when it is pure, be proof against exploitation.

I never said that there should be co-operation between the exploiter and the exploited so long as exploitation and the will to exploit persist. Only I do not believe that the capitalists and landlords are exploiters by an inherent necessity or that there is a basic or irreconcilable antagonism between their interests and those of the masses.

The idea of class war does not appeal to me. In India a class war is not only not inevitable, it is avoidable if we have understood the message of non-violence. Those who talk about class war as being inevitable have not understood the implications of non-violence or have understood them only skin-deep. (ABP, 3-8-1934)

Constructive Use

Have I not said that, if they [labour] know their power and use it wisely and constructively, they will become the real rulers and the employers will be their trustees and friends in need and deed? This happy state of things will come only when they know that labour is more real capital than the capital in the shape of gold and silver which labour extracts from the bowels of the earth. (H, 28-9-1947, p. 350)

If every right flow from duty well performed, then it is unassailable. Thus, I have a right to my wage only when I have fully performed the duty undertaken by me. If I took the wage without doing my work, it becomes theft. I cannot associate myself with continuous insistence on rights without reference to the performance of duty on which the rights depend and from which they flow. (H, 30-11-1947, p. 448)