

THE
COLLECTED
WORKS
OF
MAHATMA
GANDHI

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OF
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GANDHI

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rather than despise or shun them, would you touch them? Supposing they ate clean food and did not touch beef or carrion, would you touch them? I tell you there are numerous so-called Harijans in India who satisfy all these conditions, who live cleaner and purer lives than we do and yet we regard them as untouchables. How will God forgive this heinous sin of ours?

But you want us to admit them to the temples too! How can people doing dirty jobs be admitted to temples?

Have I ever asked them to go to temples with baskets of filth on their heads? Have I not said that they would satisfy all the conditions about bath and cleanliness that the other Hindus satisfy? According to you all surgeons and all nurses are unfit to go to our temples!

Harijan, 1-8-1936

239. DISCUSSION WITH A FRIEND¹

[Before August 1, 1936]

[FRIEND:] Why do you insist on eight hours' manual work a day? Is it not possible in a well-ordered society to reduce the working day to two hours and leave the citizen ample leisure for intellectual and artistic pursuits?

[GANDHIJI:] We know that those who get all that leisure—both the working and the intellectual class—do not make the best use of it. In fact we too often find the idle mind being turned into the devil's workshop.

No; he would not be idling away. Supposing we divided the day into two hours' physical labour and six hours' intellectual labour; would it not be good for the nation?

I do not know that it would be feasible. I have not mathematically calculated it, but if a man will do the intellectual labour only for profit and not for the nation, I am sure that the scheme will break down; unless of course the State pays him amply for the two hours' labour and compels him to do other work without paying him anything. That would be a fine thing, but it cannot be done without a kind of State conscription.

¹ Extracted from Mahadev Desai's "Weekly Letter"

But take for instance you. You cannot in the nature of things do eight hours' physical labour, and have to do eight hours' or more intellectual work. You do not abuse your leisure?

It is compulsory work and leaves no leisure, as for instance it would if I was going out to play tennis. But I tell you even taking my case that I am sure our minds would have been infinitely better if we laboured with our hands for eight hours. We would not have a single idle thought, and I may tell you that my mind is not entirely free from idle thoughts. Even now I am what I am because I realized the value of physical labour at a very early stage of my life.

But then if physical work has such inherent virtue, our people have been working more than eight hours a day, not with any appreciable effect on the purity or strength of their minds.

Physical labour by itself is not an education even as mental labour is not. It has been with our people deadly drudgery without their knowing this, and that deadens one's finer instincts. That is where I have my strongest complaint against the *savarna* Hindus. They have rendered work for the proletariat a task of hard drudgery, from which they have no pleasure and in which they have no interest. If they had been considered members of the society enjoying the same status as they, theirs would have been the proudest position in life. This is supposed to be the *Kaliyuga*. In the *Satyayuga*, or golden age, whenever it was, the society I dare say was better ordered than today. Ours is an ancient land where civilizations have come and gone, and it is difficult to say what exactly we were like in a particular age. But there is no doubt that we are where we are because we have long neglected the Shudras. Today's village culture, if culture it can be called, is an awful culture. The villagers live as worse than animals. Nature compels animals to work and live naturally. We have so debased our working classes that they cannot work and live naturally. If our people had laboured intelligently and with joy, we should have been quite different today.

Work and culture cannot be separated, then?

No. They tried to do it in ancient Rome and failed miserably. Culture without labour, or culture which is not the fruit of labour, would be 'Vomitoria' as a Roman Catholic writer says. The Romans made indulgence a habit, and were ruined. Man cannot develop his mind by simply writing and

reading or making speeches all day long. All my reading I tell you was done in the leisure hours I got in jails, and I have benefited by it because all of it was done not desultorily but for some purpose. And though I have worked physically for days and months for eight hours on end I don't think I suffered from mental decay. I have often walked as much as 40 miles a day and yet never felt dull.

But you had this mental equipment.

No fear. You don't know how mediocre I was at school and in England. I had never the courage to speak at debating society meetings or even in a gathering of vegetarians. No. Don't you run away with the thought that I was blessed with any extraordinary powers. God, I think, advisedly did not give me then the power to speak. You must know, among us I am the least read man.

Harijan, 1-8-1936

240. DISCUSSION WITH STUDENTS OF VILLAGE WORKERS' TRAINING SCHOOL¹

[Before August 1, 1936]

Q. How to dispossess people of ill-gotten gains which is what the Socialists are out to do?

A. Who is to judge what gains or riches are ill-gotten or well-gotten? God alone can judge, or a competent authority appointed both by the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' can judge. Not anyone and everyone. But if you say that ALL property and possession is theft, all must give up property and wealth. Have we given it up? Let us make a beginning, expecting the rest to follow. For those who are convinced that their own possessions are ill-gotten, there is of course no other alternative but to give them up.

Q. What is the root of violence? Does it not take place to prevent injustice and humiliation?

A. Hardly. The root of violence is selfishness, anger, lust, etc.

Q. I have not made myself understood. I see in front of me terrible wrong being done and I am provoked to violence. Is not the wrong at the root of it?

¹ Extracted from Mahadev Desai's "Weekly Letter"