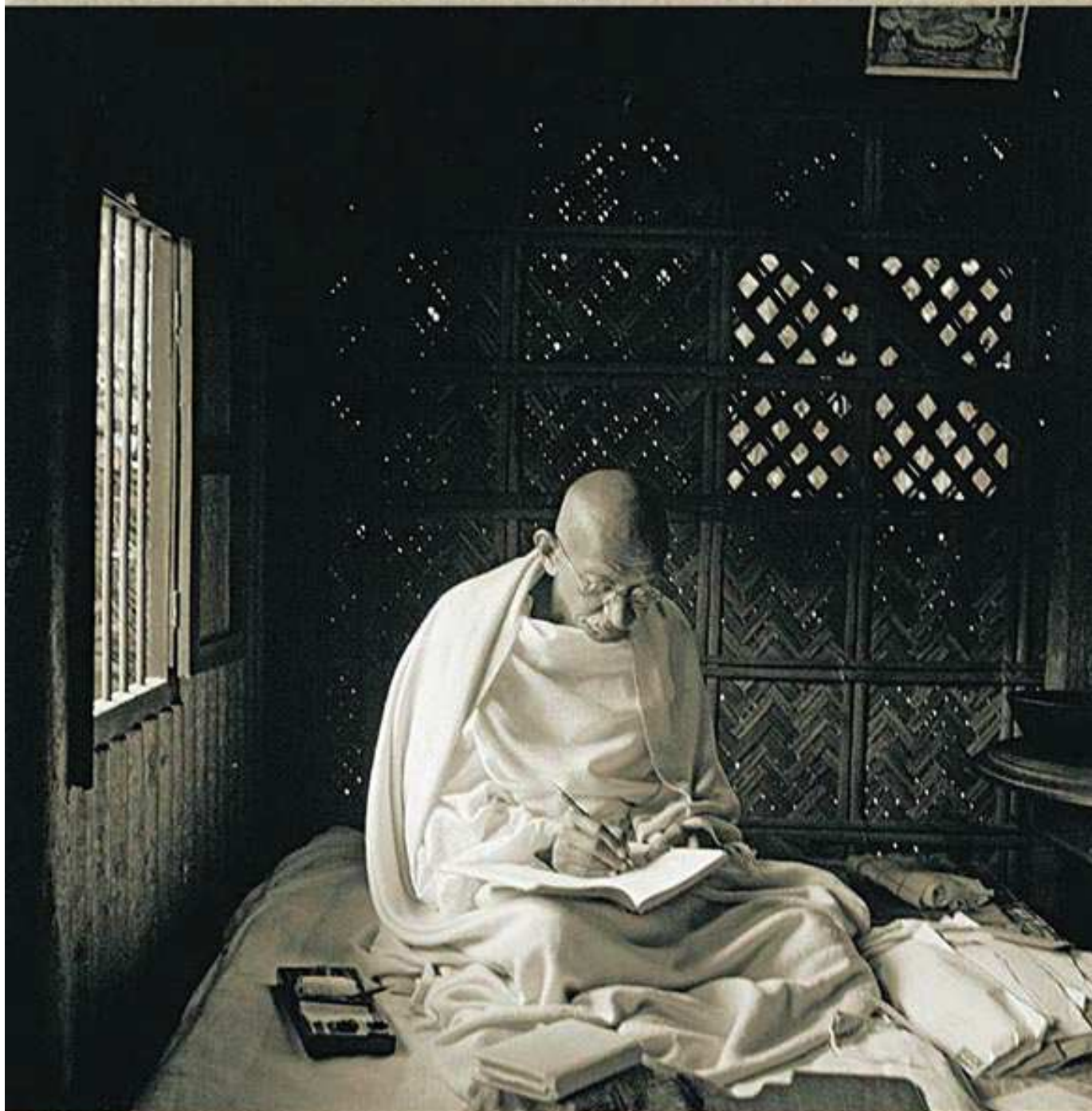


# THE MIND OF MAHATMA GANDHI



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

# The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi

Encyclopedia of Gandhi's Thoughts

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### 43. TILLERS OF THE SOIL

#### *Recognition of the Ryot*

IF INDIAN society is to make real progress along peaceful lines, there must be a definite recognition on the part of the moneyed class that the ryot possesses the same soul that they do, and that their wealth gives them no superiority over the poor. They must regard themselves, even as the Japanese nobles did, as trustees holding their wealth for the good of their wards, the ryots. Then they would take no more than a reasonable amount as commission for their labours.

At present, there is no proportion between the wholly unnecessary pomp and extravagance of the moneyed class and the squalid surroundings and the grinding pauperism of the ryots in whose midst the former are living.... If only the capitalist class will read the signs of the times, revise their notions of God-given right to all they possess, in an incredibly short space of time, the seven hundred thousand dung-heaps which today pass muster as villages can be turned into abodes of peace, health and comfort.

I am convinced that the capitalist, if he follows the Samurai of Japan, has nothing really to lose and everything to gain. There is no other choice than between voluntary surrender on the part of the capitalist of superfluities and consequent acquisition of the real happiness of all, on the one hand and, on the other, the impending chaos into which, if the capitalist does not wake up betimes, awakened but ignorant, famishing millions will plunge the country and which not even the armed force that a powerful Government can bring into play can avert. I have hoped that India will successfully avert the disaster. (YI, 5-12-1929, p. 396)

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The dream I want to realize is not spoliation of the property of private owners, but to restrict its enjoyment so as to avoid all pauperism, consequent discontent and the hideously ugly contrast that exists today between the lives and surroundings of the rich and the poor. The latter must be enabled to feel that they are co-partners with their zamindars and not their slaves, to be made to labour at the latter's sweet will and to be made to pay all kinds of exactions on all conceivable occasions. (YI, 21-11-1929, p. 384)

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I would like to use the landlords and the capitalists for the service of the masses. We must not sacrifice the interests of the masses to the capitalists. We must not play their game. We must trust them to the measure of their ability to surrender their gains to the service of the masses. They are not insusceptible to the higher appeal. It has been my invariable experience that a kind word uttered goes home to them. If we gain their confidence and put them at their ease, we will find that they are not averse to progressively sharing their riches with the masses. (ABP, 3-8-1934)

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### *Conversion of Zamindars*

I do not want to destroy the zamindar, but neither do I feel the zamindar is inevitable....I expect to convert the zamindars and other capitalists by the non-violent method, and, therefore, there is for me nothing like an inevitability of class conflict. For it is an essential part of non-violence to go along the line of least resistance.

The moment the cultivators of the soil realize their power, the zamindari evil will be sterilized. What can the poor zamindar do when they say that they will simply not work the land unless they are paid enough to feed and clothe and educate themselves and their children in a decent manner? In reality, the toiler is the owner of what he produces. If the toilers intelligently combine, they will become an irresistible power. That is how I do not see the necessity

of class conflict. If I thought it inevitable, I should not hesitate to preach it and teach it. (H, 5-12-1936, pp. 338, 339)

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I do not want the power of a Hitler, I want the power of a free peasant. I have been trying to identify myself with the peasants all these years, but have not succeeded in doing so. What, however, differentiates me from the kisan today is that he is a kisan and a labourer not by choice but by force of circumstances. I want to be a kisan and a labourer by choice, and when I can make him also a kisan and a labourer by choice, I can also enable him to throw off the shackles that keep him bound today and that compel him to do the master's bidding. (H, 7-6-1942, p. 184)

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### ***The Kisans***

The kisan or the peasant, whether as a landless labourer or a labouring proprietor, comes first. He is the salt of the earth which rightly belongs or should belong to him, not to the absentee landlord or zamindar. But, in the non-violent way, the labourer cannot forcibly eject the absentee landlord. He has so to work as to make it impossible for the landlord to exploit him. Closest co-operation amongst the peasants is absolutely necessary. To this end special organizing bodies or committees should be formed where there are none and those already in existence should be reformed where necessary.

The kisans are for the most part illiterate. Both adults and young persons of school-going age should be educated. This applies to men and women. Where they are landless labourers, their wages should be brought to a level that would ensure a decent living, which should mean balanced food, dwelling houses and clothing, which should satisfy health requirements. (BC, 28-10-1944)

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### ***Non-violence, Not Legislation***

If Swaraj is attained by the effort of the whole people, as it must be under non-violence, the kisans must come into their own and have the uppermost voice. But if it is not so and there is a sort of a workable compromise between the people and the Government on the basis of a limited franchise, the interests of the tiller of the soil will need close watching. If the legislature proves itself to be incapable of safeguarding Kisan's interests, they will, of course, always have the sovereign remedy of civil disobedience and non-cooperation.

But...ultimately it is not paper legislation nor brave words nor fiery speeches, but the power of non-violent organization, discipline and sacrifice that constitutes the real bulwark of the people against injustice or oppression.

I have no doubt that if we have democratic Swaraj, as it must be if the freedom is won through non-violence, the kisan must hold power in all its phases including political power. (BC, 12-1-1945)

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Years ago I read a poem in which the peasant is described as the father of the world. If God is the Provider, the cultivator is His hand. What are we going to do to discharge the debt we owe to him? So long we have only lived on the sweat of his brow. (H, 25-8-1946, p. 281)