

THE  
COLLECTED  
WORKS  
OF  
MAHATMA  
GANDHI

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OF  
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task. He has been content to build forts and ramparts for protection. Will he come forward to protect the home? And even if he does so, what sort of protection will he offer? Even in a home he will build fortresses and walls. He will make holes within these to fire bullets from and put glass and nails on walls. In the end, the children of the house will meet their death by climbing upon these. But we have to bring credit to the home. Hence it is my confirmed opinion that women should get a distinct kind of education. The two have separate spheres of activity and their training, therefore, should also be different. This does not imply that the work of the one is inferior while that of the other is superior; the spheres of the two are complementary.

[From Gujarati]  
Gujarati, 16-6-1935

### 180. STRUGGLES OF A WORKER

I am conducting, with the co-operation of some comrades, an ashram; its object is to so train ourselves as to be transformed into ideal peasants, so that we may be able to completely identify ourselves with village people and village society, and thus be able to serve them by being actually of them. With this end in view, agriculture has been taken up as the chief means of support with spinning and weaving as supplementary . . .

While starting the ashram, it had been conceived that along with the working out of the ideal of ourselves living a self-supporting peasant life, we should also serve the villagers by doing Harijan work, by introducing spinning and in other possible ways. But we have been entirely disappointed in this respect, for we have not been as yet able to find a suitable locality for the ashram. In the locality wherein the ashram is at present situated the hamlets consist of one or two houses; and these hamlets are separated from one another by a distance of from half a mile to one mile.

Another thing that has seriously impeded the progress of the ashram is that I committed grave blunders, as I now find them to be, in the matter of diet. In what now seems to be a mere over-enthusiasm for the ideal of poverty, the standard of diet was kept very low. The ashram, for instance, did not even use vegetables regularly. . . . Milk and milk products were considered a luxury. . . . All this has seriously crippled the health of the inmates. The ashram started with twelve inmates; we are now only five. . . .

The ashram has up till now stuck to the ideal of maintaining itself by manual labour. . . .

Friends and sympathizers as well as critics set this our insistence on the Tolstoyan idea of bread labour in opposition to the ideal of

social service, and argue that the ashram has thus deprived society of the benefits of the many services that the ashram workers would have been otherwise in a position to render to it. How and when, if at all, can one be justified in compromising the principle of bread labour for the sake of rendering 'social service'? Is not, most often, the conflict between 'being' and 'doing' only apparent and superficial, while in truth, 'being' is 'doing' in the real sense?

. . . the board per head per month has been Rs. 3 and other expenses including clothing Re. 1 per head per month.

This is from a letter<sup>1</sup> addressed to Shri Kishorelal Mashruwala by a highly educated selfless worker. It depicts the struggles of a sincere worker and is likely to help all who are trying to lead a life of service.

The effort is noble. The writer and his co-workers do not hesitate to own and mend mistakes when they discover any.

I do not know how Shri Kishorelal has answered the queries put by his correspondent. I must try to answer them in order to help the general reader who is interested in the questions of the type that puzzle the writer of the letter.

There seems to be some confusion about the principle of bread labour. It is never opposed to social service. Intelligent bread labour is any day the highest form of social service. For what can be better than that a man should by his personal labour add to the useful wealth of the country? 'Being' is 'doing'.

The adjective 'intelligent' has been prefixed to 'labour' in order to show that labour to be social service must have that definite purpose behind it. Otherwise every labourer can be said to render social service. He does in a way, but what is meant here is something much more than that. A person who labours for the general good of all serves society and is worthy of his hire. Therefore, such bread labour is not different from social service. What the vast mass of mankind does for self or at best for family, a social servant does for general good. These seven members today find that they have hardly time left for service other than that of slaving for their daily bread. This need not be so if they were proficient in their work. In fact they are not. As field labourers, they are no match for the ordinary labourers. As artisans too they are novices. Every worker, thank God, now knows that with intelligent use of his tools a spinner can easily double his output in a given time. That means doubling the income from the wheel. This is true of most things. In agriculture, the field for development

<sup>1</sup> Only extracts are reproduced here.



with the same tools is so vast that unless Nature interferes, a farmer can by the use of his intelligence any day quadruple his income, working the same number of hours per day. This means that for the same amount of income he need not labour so much as he is now doing. These workers can, therefore, when they have acquired proficiency, earn their bread in much less time than they need now, and will have energy set free for special Harijan or other service. The problem becomes complicated for householders who have many calls on their purses, but a self-denying worker whose needs amount to Rs. 4 per month has any day ample time at his disposal for work beyond labour that would bring him Rs. 4 per month.

But will three rupees per month needed out of four for food give a person enough to feed himself? If Dr. Tilak's figure for Bombay, i.e., Rs. 5 per month, is good, Rs. 3 for village life is certainly good. And when I add my own experience to Dr. Tilak's prescription there is no difficulty. Dr. Tilak erases powdered milk from the village menu. But as he says there is no escape from milk. The inmates were wrong in eliminating milk from their dietary. It is true that millions get not a drop of milk. But they do not get many other things without which we dare not do if we are to live to serve. We must therefore take those bare necessities which we have to strive every villager to produce for himself. Whole cereal, whether wheat, rice, *bajri*, *juwar* or the like, green edible leaves uncooked, milk, and any village fruit when in season such as mango, *amrood*, *jamun*, *ber*, etc., are indispensable for healthy life. The prince among edible leaves is perhaps *neem* leaves, to be had for the picking everywhere in India; and there are many edible grasses of which we have no knowledge. And tamarind fruit which is also obtainable everywhere is not to be despised. There is, however, a prejudice against tamarind which is difficult to understand. I have been using it liberally in the place of the expensive lemon with the greatest advantage. Diet reform is a limitless field of research, fraught with the greatest consequences for the world and more especially for the famishing millions of India. It means both health and wealth which according to Ruskin are one and the same thing. The members of the little ashram are right in thinking that they will do the greatest social service by living right all along the line. They will infect their surroundings whose limit may in course of time be the whole of India and then the universe. In this service the welfare of one is the welfare of all.

*Harijan*, 1-6-1935