



The essays in this volume address the fundamental question “What is Education?” Drawing on a lifetime of experience as a teacher, artist and craftsman Devi Prasad shares and elucidates the insights of Gandhi and Tagore as well as a global range of thinkers on education, to argue that Art Education should be the core of the education process.

Art Education, broadly understood, inculcates a sense of unity and harmony with both the living and the non-living world around us. In a world torn by strife, these are qualities desperately needed to create responsible and humane citizens. Devi Prasad thus offers a profoundly moral vision of education - an organic vision which strives to bridge the vast gap between the potential and performance of today’s education.

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## FOREWORD

Insights shine through this book like shafts of light in a darkened room. As you move on, the scope of its explanatory and persuasive power dawns on you and towards the end you begin to wonder why you would bother to buy and read other books on education. Having once chosen educational theory as my academic and professional field, I can hardly remember how many books and papers I have read over the last three decades. I had the good luck to be taught 'education' by some remarkable teachers over many years, but it is difficult for me to recall an evening like this when an idea made so complete a sense as Devi Prasad's argument does. He says that the promise of education to reform our violence-driven world of today can be realised by placing art and work at the centre of pedagogic activity. Why privilege the aesthetic so much? Devi Prasad's answer stems from a deep critique of modernist development in all its ideological forms. The killing of human creativity through education was a mega-project which has landed us in a big, terrifying and depressing mess, he says. We encounter it everywhere, in both the so-called developed and the developing countries. Redeeming ourselves from this mess would call for a predisposition for hope, confidence and ingenuity. I have been familiar with Devi Prasad's claim since the early 1980s when I happened to read the Hindi original of his book, *Art: the Basis of Education* (National Book Trust). I was familiar with his faith in the potential of an art-based education for creating a predisposition towards peace. The two most important sources of his inspiration were also known to me: Gandhi and Tagore. Despite these prior spheres of acquaintance with Devi Prasad's worldview and educational theory, I was stunned when I encountered the last three chapters of this book. The epiphanic moment came through his discussion of the Biblical parable where the last hired are paid as much as the senior most. Devi Prasad uses this parable to dig a ruthless hole in our present-day notion of decentralisation, by saying that hardly anything intrinsically worthwhile is left for those who live at the bottom of the socio-global pyramid to decide on, as most decisions with pervasive reach and implications are already taken by those at the top. So the book is about flattening the pyramid of power. It is also about redefining modernity. That should suffice to convey that it is a book for those who are worried about the world, not just about education. It offers the essence of the long

experience and wisdom of an artist and a teacher who is also an activist of peace. He offers us an original commentary on Gandhi and Tagore, apart from a lucid synthesis of the ideas of Montessori, Neil and others who lived through the two terrible wars of the last century and wondered about shaping a world without wars by working with children. I have little doubt about the worth and continued validity of the work they did with their children. We must ask whether what we are doing is adequate for the problems we hope to address and whether we understand what the problem is.

Krishna Kumar

Director, NCERT

April 24, 2005

## PREFACE

From the very beginning, my work involved writing reports, suggesting projects, submitting proposals, giving talks and holding seminars with students and other groups on a wide range of topics in the field of education, art and non-violence. Many of them were related to the work of Gurudev Tagore and Mahatma Gandhiji as I had spent the formative years of my life at Santiniketan and Sevagram. Some of the specific subjects that I covered pertained to Gandhian issues regarding pacifism and Satyagraha; constructive programmes including war-resistance, Compulsory Military Service - a system prevalent in a large number of countries all over the world - and the campaign for Alternative Service. This last subject - "anti-militarism" - was a major part of my work as Secretary of the War Resisters' International.

One day, I was looking at these old papers and realised that there were nearly one hundred of them. Some of them, I felt, should be made available to more people, especially to the younger generation. I started looking into them a bit more carefully, but there were so many of them and of such a wide range that I felt tired and decided to give up the task. My mind, however, could not remain at peace. I went on putting pressure on myself, convinced that the work was worth spending time and energy on for the sake of the new generation. Bindu, my wife, who had been following my work closely, helped me in sorting out the papers and putting them in some order. We also started searching for a publisher who would be interested in publishing a small collection of these articles in the form of a book.

By chance, a friend who knew about my work suggested Lakshmi Rameshwar Rao's name in this connection. Lakshmi knew about my work on 'child art and education'. She responded in a very positive and encouraging manner. Anurita Patir's name was suggested as Editor for the book. She, to my good luck, showed much interest in it. Interestingly, Anurita happened to be the wife of a very caring and affectionate doctor who had recently performed a surgical operation on me.

Bindu and I showed Anurita the work we had already done with about 30 articles. Obviously, several of them had sections that overlapped since each of these articles was written for a special occasion and for a particular journal or book or even for a talk. For instance, a particular incident cited in an article on Satyagraha could also

be seen in other articles on Gandhiji or Education. This problem had to be resolved during the process of editing.

There is another point to which I must draw the readers' attention. Individually, each article was originally written for a specific situation and in a particular context. When read as they are now, some may give an impression of being incomplete statements. Let me give an example. The other day, a friend picked up the manuscript and read one of the smaller articles. After reading it she said: "What you have written does not sound complete by itself. What about the other aspects of the issue?" I suggested that she read another article from the manuscript. After reading for a while she said: "Oh! Yes, now I understand the formation of this book. One must read most of the book as otherwise its contents and purpose cannot be fully understood. Some of the articles, if read individually, in all likelihood may sound incomplete." The purpose of mentioning the above point is to request the reader to treat this little book as *a full meal* and not as a *snack* only.

Today the world has become more competitive, materialistic and mechanical. This has led to many educational problems and we are still left asking basic questions like: What is the aim of education? What should be its essential elements? I think the issue that we first need to address is: What kind of adults will the children of today become with the education that they are currently receiving? Will they grow up asking for more and more information about the material world, seeking further improvements in their material comforts? In fact, today the need is that both the child and the adult receive a kind of education which will bring them closer to each other and the community they live in; make them more sensitive to others, along with caring for humanity as a whole; and let all life around grow in equality and graceful living. My aim is to tell my brothers and sisters that it is time to respond to life with more sensitivity.

At the end I would like to express my gratitude to Prof. Krishna Kumarji for writing such a thoughtful foreword to the book and to Dushyant Parasher for giving the book an attractive look.

Devi Prasad

## EDITOR'S NOTE

Freedom to be close to Nature - to be one with it - is to gain one's freedom to grow," says Devida, inspired by his time at Santiniketan, the abode of the Poet Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore has also said earlier: "Childhood should be given its full measure of life's draught, for which it has an endless thirst. The young mind should be saturated with the idea that it has been born in a human world which is in harmony with the world around it."

There is a dream - of a child unfettered, with Nature as a teacher, unfolding her secrets, the generosity of the sun, the giving nature of a fruit-bearing tree, the joyfulness of a flower, the gurgling of the brook, the stillness of a pool of water. Lessons gradually pouring into the child's heart, the secrets of the universe, the soul. And then the nightmare begins. Picture, as you easily can, those little concrete rooms into which we stuff our pre-school children at the tender age of two or three, so that in a year or two they can get admission into a 'well-recognised' school. We are concerned, sensitive, loving parents and yet that is what we do. The child then enters one of those 'prestigious' schools where she is taught to draw a tree, a plant or the sun only in certain specified shapes and in certain specified colours and so it goes on...

Well, reading Devida's articles made me remember that dream which is almost forgotten. How did we land up with the educational system that we have today? When you read his papers, our present educational system seems to so closely resemble the British educational system - the resemblance is almost uncanny. I quote from his writings: "In British India, the education given in government schools and colleges was totally unrelated to the life of the community and tended to wean them away from their own people and culture." This was so vehemently criticised by Indians before Independence and now there seems to be little to choose between the two. Gandhiji spoke of: "...instead of regarding reading and writing as an end in itself, we should regard it as a means of development of character and achievement of *swaraj*." So the vision, the dream, even the method was all there, propounded and practised by Rabindranath Tagore at Santiniketan and Mahatma Gandhi at Sevagram Ashram (Devida spent many years at both these centres) - so what

happened? How did we manage to bypass it so totally, I am at a loss to understand this?

As a concerned parent, I yet see myself treating my child as a 'miniature' adult. I expect him to be responsible, honest, clean, punctual, intelligent and dutiful - so much on his tender shoulders. And the demands of school place their own additional burden that I have to drag him away from trying to learn to cook by my side to do tiresome pages of writing; reprimand him for not learning those endless multiplication tables; expect him to come as soon as he is called to do his homework; wake up on time every cold winter morning for school and so it goes on. Sometimes when I see him from a distance - a little child of 10 - with all these expectations from him, everyone trying to teach him something or the other, negative outpourings from parents and teachers, red marks all over his copies, I wonder how his mind, heart and soul take it all. How does he manage to survive? How does he still manage to continue to be full of joy and laughter? That I suppose is the world of the child - for whom I have preferred using the pronoun 'she' - that Devida takes you into and one is able to breathe and smile once more. He says: "Children have a simple and straightforward way of relating to their environment. It is governed by pure search to discover and know. Instincts and senses govern their interaction with the world around them. And that world is almost completely different from that of the adult."

So is there a way out of this mire that we have sunk into? Devida provides us with an answer! He believes that education is a: "... process of discovering oneself as a free individual at peace with oneself on the one hand and on the other, being an integral part of and in harmony with the larger reality. This harmony is developed in the individual, not by imposition by law from the top but by that discipline to which the senses naturally submit. Creative activities are that discipline in which the senses seek quite intuitively, harmony, proportion and wholeness of any experience." According to him, "... creative activities are related to the external world. To make an efficient table, a pot or a house, it is necessary to know arithmetic, even history and geography. The natural way to acquire that knowledge is through unconscious disciplines and is possible only by aesthetic activities."



And what of good and evil, peace and war, courage and 'saving one's skin' Devida states: "Have we not seen time and again that many an intellectual and student of human behaviour has failed to take action against gross human suffering and injustice for fear of reprisal from the establishment or, for that matter, any of such 'powerful' bodies." He believes that: "... a warless world cannot be created by providing information and developing intellectual virtues, but by fostering moral discipline and by taking an aesthetic approach to education for developing the individual to his or her full humanity."

And so where does one get a teacher like him - who encourages, waits patiently for the child to come into his own, responds to the child-nature in the child, has faith in the child's ability to trace his own pace of development? A teacher who is "... convinced that if allowed and encouraged to enjoy and live healthily in their own world, and to climb their own ladder of development at their own pace, children will be better prepared for adulthood. As well-fulfilled individuals, they will be prepared to face life boldly and intelligently, and with fewer inhibitions."

Surely someone, somewhere, will be inspired by these writings and by their long forgotten dreams to provide meaningful education to children by providing them creative opportunities so as to evolve into beings that are: "... predisposed to peace, i.e. free and courageous enough to choose the path of love and unity with all human beings, instead of the path of fragmentation of human activity. ... Most people can experience that state of being only through aesthetic discipline, the discipline of art."

Anurita Patir

## 01. WHAT IS REAL EDUCATION?

### Living a Life of Reasonable Quality and Dignity

Sometime ago, a paper presented at a seminar on elementary education had a very meaningful statement about the state of education in our country, particularly elementary education. It said: "The right to education is a human right that most civilised societies would uphold as a fundamental right for its members. It is obvious that in an ideal situation, all citizens of a country should have access to a minimum level of education that guarantees, not merely knowledge of the three R's, but also a means of living a life of reasonable quality and dignity."

Although there may be other questions that should be dealt with, I think the question that is more important than those generally raised about education today is: After all what actually is that 'education' which is supposed to help the individual to live a 'life of reasonable quality and dignity'? This question is becoming more important as modern technology goes on increasing the level of information available to everyone, So much so that educational planners are tempted to go in that direction while formulating the syllabi for schools - even for primary level education. Is their objective to educate individuals to become experts in various areas of knowledge and technology? Or to teach people to earn enough money to live comfortably? Or to educate people to become expert engineers so as to be able to build earthquake-proof houses, high rise buildings, more efficient tools and machinery, and all that is needed for giving the individual physical satisfaction?

To improve the means to 'living a life of reasonable quality and dignity', should education be the medium for stuffing the brain of the learner with all kinds of information about the universe along with the knowledge to use it skilfully? The efforts our educationists put into drawing up the syllabi to be followed by teachers are enormous. Although I admire their hard work, to me it seems out of proportion, especially when we look into its results in our daily lives. What is actually happening is quite different from the goals the educational world thinks it is working towards. Why?

### Longings of the Heart and Mind

Could the answer to this 'why' be the fact that the real needs of the human mind and heart are hardly being taken into serious consideration by educational planners? Or are there other factors in the educational approach that restrain the individual from living a life that gives importance to the search for knowing and learning - a process different from the wish to accumulate information in the head - directly or via the computer? This issue is of great importance while planning the education of the child, right from the earliest stages of its life, even before what is called elementary education.

At this point it may be helpful to go into the make-up of the human mind. How does it function? The general notion is that it is a workshop which provides individuals the means to improve their intelligence and knowledge about the world around, which, in turn, helps them in improving their style of living and dealing with others in a civilised manner. Modern education puts its maximum emphasis on developing such qualities, which it hopes will make life comfortable and worth living.

In other words, modern education caters only to the functioning of the conscious part of the human brain, which stresses the development of logical activities, i.e. the intellectual side of the human personality.

Educational systems everywhere begin and end with the pursuit of intellectual growth of the personality, and knowingly or unknowingly distort the emotional side of our being. Today, they stress the development of logical faculties, which are the function of that part of our psychic apparatus, the ego, which represents reason and commonsense.

The modern system of education is partitive and not a process of uniting. Instead of fostering mutual aid and love, it generates competition and hatred. Education, which accentuates disunity, cannot foster a sense of community, i.e. a sense of belonging. If education in any of its aspects or stages tends to emphasise, even indirectly, the individual against the group. It is surely the wrong kind of education.

A simple and quite common example should suffice to show how subtly the spirit of competition develops from early childhood in our country. After the announcement of the examination results, the child comes home. The father asks, "What are your results?" The child replies that he secured 65 percent marks - ordinarily speaking good enough to show the child's educational standard. Then the father wants to

know how much his friend got. If it is more than what the son got, he is given a good thrashing because the father wants his son to do better than the other children in his class. Let me say that rather than this being the fault of the father, it is a drawback of the educational system, which induces and encourages the spirit of competition. The above is probably a very minor example of the system being responsible for encouraging competition, cheating and hatred in children from the very beginning of their school life. It goes on growing more and more destructive and partitive.

In other words, the main objective of education, as stated in the first paragraph of the paper, can only be achieved by adopting an approach different from the existing one. We have to study the human mind and personality more fully and move away from an education that caters to the needs of only the conscious side of the brain. To make the educational process help the individual to fully develop his or her personality in an atmosphere of freedom and cooperation, as a well-fulfilled individual member of the society, we need a different approach. Such an educational process has to begin from a very early stage of childhood.

### **Nature is the Real Teacher**

As a teacher I had soon realised that one of the earliest things to which children ought to be introduced is the play of harmony and rhythm in Nature, for these elements penetrate deeply into the fresh and open mind of the child. Behind this was my conviction in what Gurudev Tagore has said in his essay, *My School*: "The young mind should be saturated with the idea that it has been born in a human world which is in harmony with the world around it."

Today education sits on the child's shoulders as a burden. It must get off from there and become a source of joy for the child and let the growth of the child's mind be under Nature's generous and joyful space and time. Can this kind of growth be generated within a space surrounded by four walls of what is called the classroom! Please allow me to tell you something about an experience I had during my first month in Santiniketan as a student. While talking to my teacher about Nature study, he asked me if I knew the names of the trees in our school grounds. Obviously, a boy who had spent seven hours of each of the six days of the working week within a four-walled classroom could name only a couple or so of the trees that grew there. My teacher suggested that I go to the *Bal Bhawan* (elementary section of the school)

and make friends with one of the children there. He suggested that I then go round the *ashram* and learn from him the names of all the trees growing in the campus. And I did that the next day. This little friend of mine not only taught me the names of the trees but much more about them. I ask myself: Who was really educated - this friend of mine or me - a seventeen-year-old town boy who had passed his high-school education and the first year of intermediate college?

### **Strength to Save Your Soul**

While considering the various aspects of education, I want to mention something about the inherent nature of man, which is made up of natural, native, ancestral and genetic elements and conditioning, etc. If educational planning does not take these factors into consideration, it would not only fail in its responsibility, it could also damage and distort the personality of the individual, eventually doing great harm to the society as a whole. And is it not this that is happening today?

Have we not seen time and again that many an intellectual and student of human behaviour has failed to take action against gross human suffering and injustice for fear of reprisal from the establishment or, for that matter, any such 'powerful' bodies. How many people have often sold their souls to save their skin, knowing well in their hearts that what they were doing was *morally wrong*? There are loads of examples of people, not excluding intellectuals, academics and so-called leaders, violating the dictates of their ethical standards or values for fear of persecution - physical, psychological or political or for money, position and power.

In our country today, to be morally sound and honest is to be impractical or even anti-social. There is hardly any evidence of genuine co-operation or sense of responsibility anywhere in today's world. Why is it so? Why has the concept of responsibility shrunk in modern society? Why are there so few people who *are alive and in their right minds*?

I would like to emphasise that the will to act, especially when the act may invite suffering to oneself, goes far beyond awareness and rationality. Will to act under these circumstances transcends rationality, the realm of our intellectual existence. There is a point where the choice would depend on one's moral maturity, moral discipline. Moral virtue, which the modern psychologists would call integrated personality, comes about as a result of habit, which, in turn, is the product of a

certain kind of lifestyle and inner discipline introduced at the early stages of our upbringing and fostered throughout life. This means that moral virtue should have the fundamental priority in education at home, school and in the community.

Would today's educators give consideration to the points raised above in making their plans? There are many more factors that need to be considered in planning education and these have been discussed in the other papers that are included in this book.

## 02. ART - THE BASIS OF EDUCATION

*The most beautiful things in the creations of the child are his 'mistakes'. The more a child's work is full of these individual mistakes, the more wonderful it is. And the more a teacher removes them from the child's work, the duller, more desolate and impersonal it becomes.*

Franz Cizek

It is neither sufficient nor justified to consider only the adult's approach in planning educational programmes for children, for the one who is at the receiving end is not an adult. The child's approach is very, if not entirely, different from that of the adult. Hence, for good educational planning it is essential to take it into account. Children do not give consideration to the end result of anything that they do or like to do, unless they have experienced its results first-hand. Unlike the adult, the child does not have any value system governing his thinking and action. If there is anything a child considers desirable, it is based on the elements of joy, satisfaction, accomplishment, recognition, and the argument behind the question: If you can do it, why can't I? There is yet another element that plays an important role in this respect - it is the wish to be like adults - not in every respect, but in selective matters, such as those which will allow their spirit of adventure to be satisfied.

### Learning through Experience

Children are looking for new experiences all the time, and want to examine and put everything to test that attracts their eyes or feelings. If they like the experience, they want to repeat it, until something new catches their attention and seems to be interesting or challenging. Things that the child gets attracted to are often those that adults either do not see or are not interested in. In short, there are two different worlds -one is that of the adult and the other is that of the child. The subjects and methodologies of these two worlds also seem to be different.

It is not that the things in which the child gets interested in, the adult is unable to see. The point to note here is that an item may be the same but its function, even its form and the angle from which it is viewed, will be different from the child's point of view. An illustration may be useful in explaining what I mean by there being

two different worlds. Once I was reading a book in the light of a kerosene lamp, the only source of light after sunset available in Sevagram those days. My son, then only two, was sitting near me. Suddenly the light blew off causing some annoyance to me, but the child enjoyed it and laughed whole-heartedly. The object involved and the happenings were the same for both of us, but their effects were different - one was of annoyance and the other of fun.

Every parent knows that children, especially very young ones, find it interesting to 'mess up' around in sand or mud; at that stage they do not have a perception of mud and sand being clean or dirty. The most disturbing scene for a parent can be that of their child 'playing' with, picking up and even crushing dead or live earthworms and insects. They tell the child off and drag him away from such an activity. The fact is children's concepts of clean and dirty, good and bad, beautiful and ugly are not the same as those of adults. Nor can children make a link between values such as social consciousness and spiritual/religious awareness and the consequence of their activities. It is their urge to discover and draw pleasure from whatever they do that matters most to them. If a child experiences joy from an activity, he/she will almost invariably wish to repeat it.

We are going to limit the area of this discussion only to art activities, particularly drawing and painting and allied subjects. We shall explore and identify the various ways in which children enjoy art activities and draw from them a sense of fulfilment. Almost all children like drawing pictures. This fact becomes obvious when you place colours and paper in front of them and ask if they would like to make pictures. Most children will jump at the offer. A few will shy away, some on account of timidity, others from some other reasons. For the time being, let us examine the various ways children enjoy art activities and fulfil their emotional and intellectual needs through such activity. Such an exercise, hopefully, will help teachers and parents to understand children better.

### Friendship with Nature

One of the functions of creativity - art, painting, drawing, modelling, and making of things, etc. - is to bring the child closer to Nature, which implies that the child feels that she is a part of it. It creates awareness of its existence in the child's mind, whether consciously or sub-consciously. It helps in developing the visual faculty of



the eye and understanding of the world around. The strength of the eye depends on its physical health and also on factors connected with educational and psycho-educational processes. One is the subject of medical science and the other of education, but both are related to each other - it means seeing and knowing the world around.

### Grace and Beauty in Life

The other product of art education is the enhancement of gracefulness. Through art activities, a child's personality develops a sense of rhythm and harmony, which penetrates deeply into the mind of the child and takes a powerful hold on it. If education is good, it brings and imparts grace and beauty, if it is bad, the reverse.

Plato wrote: "Good literature, ... good music, beauty of form and good rhythm all depend on goodness of character; I don't mean that lack of awareness of the world which we politely call 'goodness', but a mind and character truly well and fairly formed." Plato then asks: "And are not these the things which our young men must pursue, if they are to perform their function in life properly?" He himself answers: "They must. The graphic are full of sane qualities. And so are the related crafts.... For in all of these we find beauty and ugliness. The ugliness of form and bad rhythm and disharmony are akin to poor quality expression and character, and their opposites are akin to and represent character and discipline."

### Joy of Doing

A carpenter's son, perhaps not even two years old, sees his father working with his tools - using a hammer, chisel, etc. One day, he picks up the hammer and starts banging it around, probably in the manner his father does. Does he feel that by handling the hammer in that manner, he is making something? It is unlikely that he has any such concrete objective in mind. He is unaware of the purpose of the tool, as his father understands it. Yet he derives pleasure and satisfaction from the very exercise of doing something - using the hammer, the use of his muscles, the movement of hands, shoulders and fingers.

Different activities provide different kinds of physical, mental and spiritual satisfaction to the child. Using carpentry tools evokes one kind of response, and using colours, a brush, pencil and paper, evokes another kind of feeling. Apart from

various other aspects of the activity, the mere using of the material or doing something is by itself a pleasurable experience.

### Sense of Accomplishment

Most people, adults as well as children, derive a great sense of satisfaction from the completion of an activity that results in the creation of some object. The sight of tools, clay, painting material, etc., is taken as a challenge by children - as if it were an invitation saying: "Come on! Can you do something with us? Can you make something?" The child cannot resist such a challenge; he/she picks up the material, makes something, and says: "See I have done it!" This sense of satisfaction, derived from having accomplished something, strengthens the self-confidence of the child. An interesting proof of this phenomenon is the expression you witness on the faces of children when they go on staring at their own paintings in an exhibition of their work arranged in their school. I have observed that at the time of the opening of these exhibitions, the first thing that children do is to go and stand in front of their paintings and admire them. I have heard them make comments such as: "Oh! Look, this is my painting. How nice it is!"

### Child's Language

Although children do not have a command over the spoken language to a degree that enables them to express much of what they have stored within themselves, they do have a language that allows them to express their experiences and tell stories fairly effectively. The fact is that their experiences and stories are generally made up of visual forms. For instance, if there is a hill in a story, to them it will take the symbolic shape of a hill and not in the form of the word 'hill'. They will feel satisfied only if they are able to express something as it exists in their inner experience and emotions. There is often no word for a picture in their heads, but concrete forms, through which alone they can tell their stories adequately. Hence, for children, expressing themselves through the language of sculpture, painting, drama, etc. is more natural and satisfying than using the language of words. To be able to express their feelings and experiences successfully is a source of great joy and fulfilment for them.

### Communication

Adults may be able to control their urge to communicate their feelings to others. However, for children it is not only hard but also unhealthy if they are unable or not allowed to communicate their thoughts, wishes and feeling to others. The language of visual forms, expressed by drawing and painting or drama, music and dance, comes to the child more naturally and spontaneously than that of words, which is a kind of 'imposed' skill and belongs to the world of the adults. Therefore, it is important that children are given ample opportunities for self-expression in the language of visual forms such as painting, drama, etc. The degree of satisfaction they derive from successful self-expression is an indication of the growth of the child's personality.

### Dramatic Aspect

In one of my art classes, a young child made a drawing of a motorcar. While making the drawing of the vehicle, every now and then he acted as if his hands were on the steering wheel and he was driving it, occasionally hooting to mimic the sound of the horn. Looking at this aspect of children's art activity I realised that they, like great artists, identify themselves physically as well as mentally with the object they draw or model.

I am not implying that there is no difference in the work of great artists and the art of children, or that the dynamics of the breaking down of the "original distinction of subject from object" is identical in both cases. Nonetheless, it must be realised that due to their innocence, the knowledge that children store in their mind is mostly not 'objective' as they are not yet inhibited by adult values and perspective.

The dynamics of this kind of identification can be partially explained by the fact that to make the visual observation come alive, the artist's body along with his or her mind, absorbs the movements and the spirit of the object being recreated in the work. Children's innocence and directness helps them in making such identification - ordinarily possible for true artists only. However, the important point is that children derive much joy from the dramatic aspect inherent in art activities.

### Imagination

Children are versatile in their imagination and they spend a great deal of time imagining all kinds of things, specially related to the stories they hear from their parents or other elders and the experience they gather in their lives. For instance,

while playing with a heap of sand, a child makes a hole in it and it becomes a house, a palace and the heap of sand, a mountain. A few twigs inserted in the sand become a forest, armies, crowds of men and women, motorcars or what have you.

Drawings made by children during their early years look like scribbling to adults, but for them they can be people, the sun, moon, houses or anything that they may have in their mind at a given time. Art activity helps children expand their world of imagination and encourages them to repeat their experience, whenever they are able to do so.

### Self-expression

Self-expression is a human necessity; it is natural and goes on all the time. Human feelings find their outlet in several ways - a poet gives form to them by writing poems, a painter by painting pictures and a musician by making music. As you go on expressing your feelings, other feelings keep coming, which also need to be expressed. If one's inner feelings do not find adequate and timely outlets, they tend to become stale and often create inhibitions - which can be unhealthy for the development of the personality. The place where feelings dwell in a person is like a container that needs emptying and cleaning every now and then. If the contents remain inside for too long, they may rot and create all kinds of problems. Another factor to be taken into account is that no fresh contents can be put into the container until some of the old ones have been let out.

It is only an accomplished yogi who can control his feelings by conscious effort, not only that, he can even make them non-existent. But for us ordinary folk, we have to find a harmless, feasible, and, if possible, a creative way to deal with our feelings. And when it comes to children, talking about the methods used by yogis, or even mature adults, is meaningless. Children have to be provided with adequate activities to express themselves in a healthy manner.

Art activity is the most effective medium that allows children to express themselves creatively and experience joy in doing so. As an art teacher, it was always a great satisfaction having children of age groups between seven and eleven coming and describing their drawings in detail. It was even more satisfying to listen to children of the nursery section of the school explaining the 'scribbling' they had made in their classes.

### Healthy Outlets to Aggression

It cannot be over-emphasised that if aggressiveness does not get a timely outlet, it aggravates and can lead to further aggression and eventually frustration. Frustration may express itself against others or one's own self in the form of an outburst of violence. It can turn into depression, apathy or self-destruction. Educators believe that one of the objectives of education should be to control aggressiveness right from the very early stages of education. There can be various ways to deal with this matter, depending upon the situation and the nature of aggression.

An example of a situation, not very uncommon in schools and families, will help to illustrate the point. An eleven-year-old child in the Sevagram School had some extra energy, which he tried to let out by hitting or harassing younger children. A body elected every month from the teachers and students managed the school, a self-reliant residential community. It had its own kitchen, in which the teachers and students did all the work. They took turns at performing different jobs. Wood was used as fuel for cooking. Logs of wood had to be split in small pieces with an axe. During one term, this boy was encouraged to take up the task of fuel supply. He organised the job with two other volunteers. It was hard work, but this boy really enjoyed using the axe in which, by the way, he quickly became quite proficient. During his time as the 'fuel supply minister' of the community, it was amazing how satisfied and peaceful he looked after supplying wood to the kitchen everyday. The violence was channelised into cutting and splitting the wood; this must have provided him with an outlet for all the extra energy he had that was waiting to be let out. He became calmer. He started painting pictures of national heroes and heroines, and battle scenes. Drawing and painting does provide an excellent outlet to children's aggressiveness. It can be called sublimation of aggressiveness.

### An Experiment

In this chapter, I have tried to describe some of the important aspects of art activities in which children experience joy, and which generate a sense of satisfaction and fulfilment. Now I want to describe one of the projects we conducted with older children, twelve to fourteen years of age - it was to write and publish a

book. This experiment was aimed at a wide range of factors - emotional as well as intellectual - involved in the personality development of children.

One evening a boy, who used to take a special interest in art activities, came to me and said he had a serious question which was bothering him and which he would like to ask me. The question was - How do people write books? I tried to answer the question in a rather simplistic manner. I said that when someone had something to say, describe or elaborate, he/she writes it down on paper. After revising and polishing the text, it is offered to firms called publishers. If a publisher likes it, they print dozens or hundreds of copies of the book for the market.

The young artist was not satisfied, because what he wanted to know was how one *writes a book*, and not by whom or how it is published. He, perhaps, wanted to know enough on the subject to equip himself to write a book. I told him that if he himself had something to say or communicate to others, he could write it down in the same way as he would write a letter or an essay, as he sometimes did in class. Then I said to him: "If someone has something to tell others he/she can write it in the form of a book. If you wish to do so you, too, can write one." He found the proposal exciting and expressed his wish to write a book. Noticing his enthusiasm, I suggested that he should raise the question in the next art class when all the children would be present, as they too might be interested in trying their hands at it.

The next afternoon, when everyone had come to the art class, this young enthusiast raised his hand and insisted that we should first deal with the question: How do people write books? He presented a report of our previous day's conversation and his decision to write a book. For about half an hour or so, the same kind of conversation, this time in a group, took place with most of the children taking part. Everyone was excited with the prospect of becoming authors of books, previously an unheard of possibility for children of that age. I asked the whole class: "Who among you would like to write your own books?" Almost every one raised their hands. I was not surprised, but I knew that some would drop out when it came to specifics.

The next step was to choose themes for their books; this was a bit tough for some of them. From the thirteen children present in the class, only six were able to take a definite decision to work on the project, which would be of fifteen days duration. They chose their themes too. One chose to write the *Mahabharata*, another

*Ramayana* - the two great epics; the third decided to write the story of Lord Krishna as a child; the other three said that they would write about the lives of their favourite saints - Mirabai, Sakhubai and Gyaneshwara.

After a fairly detailed group consultation, the would-be authors decided that the work on the project would include collecting information, checking it with any of the teachers, revising and editing the text, writing it in some kind of a neat and attractive style with simple decorations on each page to make it look like a proper book, illustrating the story with at least ten paintings of their own, arranging the material in a systematic manner, providing a list of contents and illustrations, and the author's birth date and/or any other information she wanted to give, getting the book bound and launching it.

Every author was free to choose or devise his or her own style. My role in the whole project was mainly to give companionship to the writers, illustrators and calligraphists, bookbinders and publishers. It was a bit taxing for we worked twelve hours a day, continuously for fifteen days, but it was a very creative and enjoyable exercise. It proved to be very enriching.

It was now my task to convince the staff council to allow the experiment to be conducted. The would-be authors were given freedom to go and meet anyone at any sensible time, including some people in the nearby village, to do the research necessary to compile the material for their books. They were exempted from attending classes on other subjects and also from the three-hour morning session of basic craft or agriculture.

It was indeed a unique experience for these six children, in fact for the whole school, but it was more so for me personally. For fifteen days, regularly, these children came to the class, which was next to my residence, started their work at a very early hour of the day and continued until sunset. They had to be literally, physically picked up and pushed out from the classroom when the breakfast, lunch and dinner bell rang. Not even once did I, or for that matter anyone else, have to remind them of their project work that had to be finished in fifteen days.

The task of the authors of the life stories of saints was a bit more complicated than that of the epic writers. Generally speaking, the ears of most children of that community had been saturated with stories from the epics, *Ramayana* and

*Mahabharata*. However, as far as the lives of the saints were concerned, except for some of their songs, which were fairly popular, none of the children knew much about their lives. It was clear to them that whatever they already knew of the life stories and songs of their favourite saints could not be considered as sufficient material for their books. They would have to collect much more than that from every possible source they could find - from teachers, senior members of the *ashram* community and people of the Sevagram village.

Exactly on the fifteenth day, six beautiful books were published. One of the authors went as far as printing, on the back cover of his book, a list of 'Our Publications'. One of the children told me in a deeply emotional tone, "Until yesterday, I had not realised that our books will turn out to be so good." Another shouted from a distance, "Oh, yes, we had no confidence that these will be really books or something else."

### *Anand as the Objective of Education*

The most important outcome of this project was the enhancement of the *self-image* and confidence of these children. For me, it opened new windows into the inner world of the child, and gave me an insight into the inherent potential of childhood. They can accomplish tasks which adults do not dare, due to hesitation and inhibitions acquired during their adulthood. The self-esteem of these children rose to a healthy level. I had known rather well that art helps the creator in knowing him or herself. I also knew that the process of self-expression leads to *self-knowing*. But the above experiment gave me further insight into the power of self-expression. When a child realises that within her there is a rich source of creativity, she feels strong and is drawn to beauty and courage and eventually becomes a fulfilled person-a person who is naturally pre-disposed to goodness, peace and co-operation.

Experiencing joy through creative activities is an extremely important element of child development; and the major reason behind children taking interest in art activities is the joy it provides them. The main point to make here is that if the teacher realises that joy and satisfaction - *anand* -is a major objective of education, art should logically become the basis of education.



### 03. SEEDS OF GROWTH

#### The Child's World is not the same as that of an Adult's

Right at the outset I want to make a plea to all teachers and educational planners - please do not treat the child as a miniature adult.

Once on a Sunday, we were washing clothes using a common metal bucket. Our little son was playing around. All of a sudden he decided that he too should wash clothes. There was another bucket full of clothes to be washed and he started washing these clothes, imitating his mother. We watched him and saw that he was fully engrossed in the act of washing clothes. The bucket was as high as him. The next day we went to the market and bought a tiny toy bucket for him. As parents, we were pleased with ourselves thinking that now our little one would be able to 'wash clothes' more conveniently! Expecting that he would be excited to have it, we gave it to him. He seemed to be somewhat pleased. After turning it around and duly examining it, he put it aside.

The next Sunday, when it was time to wash clothes, we took this bucket with us, put a small piece of cloth in it, I think it was probably a handkerchief, and hoped that our little darling would now find it easier to do the 'washing' To our surprise and disappointment, he did not even touch it! Instead, he went to his mother's bucket and started his activity of washing clothes. He never touched his little bucket, very fondly bought for him by his parents! This was one of my first realisations that toys provided to children are mostly brought by parents for their own pleasure and satisfaction. They have very little to do with the child's life. I then understood that the concept of teaching through toys is a product of the adult's beliefs. I understood that children do not *play*, they *do*. I must however say that some toys -mechanical, electrical, computerised, etc. are of a different creed, though they too belong to the adult's world.

For educational planning, in whatever field, the educator has to peep into the child's world. It is difficult for adults to enter into the world of children. Although we have all passed through that stage, we do not remember, or maybe we do not want to remember, that our past did not allow us to live in our own world for as long as we would have wished too. In the last many decades, or perhaps a couple of

centuries, the character of educational planning turned towards materialistic rationality. The educator - teacher and even parents - want to mould the child to fit into the present environment, styles and norms of life. They address the child: "My dear, you have to live in this world, so better see it for what it is and learn to face it. You should achieve something in life." Though they may not say, "if need be learn to achieve it by hook or by crook", they surely hope for it.

### Children need Recognition

Malu was nearly fifteen years old, but not more than nine or ten mentally. She was shy and quiet. Her teachers treated her as a 'hopeless learner' and hardly noticed her; but being generous, they allowed her to sit in a corner of the class. When she first came to the art class, she sat quietly. I treated her as I did the other children. I also asked her if she would like to paint a picture, but did not pressurise her to do anything. I watched her and treated her as any other child in the class.

One day, a piece of paper fell on my desk from behind. On it was a figure painted in golden-yellow colour. I could see that it was from Malu. Later, when I asked her whose picture it was, she giggled and said, "*Guruji aap hai*," and ran away. That was, I think, a thank you letter to me - "Thank you for recognising my presence".

In the next art class, I pleaded with her to make another picture for me, which she did. It was a picture of an elephant - a typical folk painting that she must have seen her mother drawing on the walls of their house. That gave me inkling about her art potential. Generally, when she entered the art class, I would ask her to paint a different picture each time. She often wrote on her pictures, *Guruji ko (To Guruji)*. Most of the pictures she made, she *gifted* to me! She became our *best artist*.

Being the Chairman of the Institute's Governing Body, Dr Zakir Hussain came to Sevagram at least once a year and stayed at my cottage. Zakir Saheb, as we called him, was himself a great teacher. He adored the work of this child. Whenever he came to Sevagram, the first thing he would do was ask me, "How is our artist?" I always called her to meet him. One day he asked her, "Does your *Guruji* teach you something?" In a rather grudging tone she said, "*Guruji* does not teach anything." After Malu left, Zakir Saheb said to me, "Devibhai, there cannot be a greater compliment to a teacher." Malu gradually became an active and mature member of the school community.

Children have a simple and straightforward way of relating to their environment. It is governed by the pure search to discover and know. They live for and seek achievement.

Instincts and senses govern their interaction with the world around them. And that world is almost completely different from that of the adult. Each child's world is different from another's, though in spirit they are the same. Few adults are able to know what a child's world is like. Sensitive educators can see that world through the windows provided by children themselves. Their self-expression through creative activities is the most effective of these windows.

### **What is Education?**

What is education? Let us take the example of two mothers. Mothers are protective and careful about their children's safety. The first mother puts her child in a playpen while working in the kitchen, in order to stop the child getting near the fire. I would call the playpen a cage. A second mother allows the child its freedom of movement, but keeps a constant eye on the child. She may even allow the child to come near the stove, which has a protective grill around it.

The concern of both the mothers is the same, but one of them resorts to a cage for her child's safety, while the other gives equal importance to the child's freedom to learn from experience. A good mother would let the child experience heat as being unpleasant and even intolerable, while remaining fully alert to any possible danger. Along with being a careful mother, she is also a born teacher.

Meaningful education is achieved only through providing opportunities to children to engage themselves in creative activities. For the fullest possible growth of the child, we need to create new opportunities for sensorial fulfilling experiences and interactions with the environment; and guard the child so that potentially dangerous or life-threatening stimuli are removed from the child's environment.

### **Co-operation and Togetherness**

In the world of child art, experiencing the spirit of cooperation and togetherness is equally important. No preaching can ever help in inculcating this spirit in children. Modern education has done just the opposite. It is divisive instead of being a uniting force. In this regard, I would like to describe an experiment we tried that proved

useful. We got a number of children to work on one large painting collectively! We joined several sheets of paper to make a surface of about six by four feet. We got four colours, properly prepared, with two brushes - a largish one and the other smaller - in each jar of colour. There were seven children of ten to twelve years of age. I too joined the team. Each member of the team could apply only one stroke - of whatever shape, size or colour. If the brush came off the paper, it meant that it was the turn of the next artist. The first artist, in the fixed order, could not quite decide as to what she should do to start the picture. She just put a patch with the larger brush. The second artist had the option of either putting another patch on the paper or trying to make something out of the first one. It was good that she tried to use the brush in a way that suggested that it could be a human face. And that set the ball rolling. In about two hour's time, there was a large painting in front of us. And what joy on everyone's face! Expressions of great achievement and admiration for each other were the product of this experiment.

Lastly, it must be pointed out that intellectual growth helps only one-tenth of the total personality of the individual. The remaining - nine-tenths - remains unlived. If the full personality of the individual has to blossom, avenues of growth for that nine-tenths must be found. Seeds for that growth must be sown during the period of childhood.

## 04. WINDOW TO THE WORLD OF THE CHILD

### Respect for Child Art

Child art provides a window to the world of the child. My experience, over many years of watching through that window, revealed to me a new world, a world that is not the same as that of the adult. In fact, they are two very different worlds - one the adult's and the other the child's. Without proper knowledge and understanding, it is not easy for grown-ups to enter and understand the child's world.

Many people think that the child draws pictures the way she does because of a lack of requisite skills to see things as they are in reality. A child, they believe, cannot draw realistically because she has not yet learnt to translate the three-dimensional visual reality into a two-dimensional surface, i.e. on paper or board. Visually, the three-dimensional aspect, many people think, is an essential element of the art of drawing and painting. There is yet another argument often put forward. The child has to become an adult one day. Therefore the effort of the child to communicate her experiences in the form of pictures is only a part of the larger learning process, i.e. learning to reach adulthood. Hence, children must learn to see visual reality the same way as most adults do. In other words, children can learn to reach adulthood only by imitating adults and through their guidance. I find this argument lacks respect for childhood. It also indicates an absence of a sound educational perspective.

My observations have provided me a different perspective to child development. Experts may probably call it naive or romantic! But I am convinced that if allowed and encouraged to enjoy and live healthily in their own world, and to climb their own ladder, of development at their own space, children will be better prepared for adulthood. As well-fulfilled individuals, they will be prepared to face life boldly and intelligently, and with fewer inhibitions.

There is also the question of the artistic status of children's work. Some well-known authorities on cognitive development and children's art expression use the same yardstick for judging child art and adult art. However, these scholars do accept that children's art has moved many people with its artistic quality; it has allured many a connoisseur. Yet, these experts argue that we cannot evade the issue whether art

holds the same meaning for a youngster as it does for an adult. They question whether or not a child artist is wholly enveloped by the processes of creation or utilises the processes akin to those marshalled by gifted adult artists. I do not understand this approach. True, different kinds of elements are present in the act of children painting pictures - indeed, very different from those that are involved in the work of adult artists. However, they are two very different worlds. And, is it not true that to expect children to follow adult norms and practices is to deprive them of their own world, their childhood?

### Child and Adult - Two Different Worlds

My experience with children expressing themselves through art, coupled with my understanding of the mind of the child, has convinced me that children's art must not be seen through the eyes of adults and judged by their standards. Whatever an uninhibited child does with pencil colours and paper represents that which she has absorbed from the world she sees and *knows*. This is different from what an adult eye and mind sees and knows.

We have to keep in mind that some things the child does bear the characteristics of adulthood. But that kind of work need not be, and is often not, the product of the child's own personality. Whatever the child produces from her child-nature is hers alone; this no adult can produce. It needs to be pointed out that adults, particularly parents, often do not have a grasp of the subject of child art. They are so extravagant in the praise of whatever the child draws or makes that it does not help in channelising the growth of the child. Hence, it is essential that that they try to understand the child and her basic needs.

The child's logic is so different from that of the adult's that one often wonders who is more logical. Franz Cizek once said: "The wonderful logic of the child is often ruined by a spoiled logic of the adult. And wrong education cripples the child spiritually. The child thinks quite simply and logically." For instance, once a girl, seven or eight years old, came to me a bit upset and agitated. "What is the matter?" I asked her. She showed me a picture of a house she had drawn, a typical child's drawing - a triangle for the roof and a rectangle for the front wall. She asked me, "Is this right?" I answered, "Of course." But the child continued, "The teachers said it is wrong if one makes it so." "Why?" I asked and she replied, "He said that the roof

must always project outwards, as otherwise the rain-water will run down along the walls of the house.” But suddenly the child began to laugh. I asked her why she laughed. “Because it cannot rain in a picture,” she answered. How logical a child is!

Franz Cizek was the first to use the term ‘child art’. He gave the child the dignity and freedom to express boldly and artistically. I feel that Cizek’s vision of the child’s mind is the kind of truth that every parent must realise and practice.

Some twentieth century artists were so moved by child art that it became an inspiration for their own creations. This phenomenon is similar to modern artists learning from the drawings and paintings of cave dwellers and tribal people. But the fact is that the artistic status of child art is different and unique; it belongs to the world of the child and not that of the adult.

I want to draw attention to the diagnostic aspect of child art, particularly where it relates to the status of the child in the family. Teachers and parents of child artists must be aware that they can learn a tremendous amount about the mind of their children through their work. It would help them become aware about the needs of children as also about the experiences children pass through.

The individual is by nature an artist, a creator. Whatever she receives is not with passivity - the picture formed in her mind is not an accurate physical representation of the objects felt and/or seen around. In her subconscious, the individual continuously adapts, transforming it and tingeing it with values held to be part of her sentiment and imagination.

### **Art is Essential for Good Education**

The concept of art as essential to good education has been long known to human society. On the influence of art in the early stages of growing up, Plato wrote: “We must look for artists and craftsmen capable of perceiving the real nature of what is beautiful, and then our young men, living as it were in a healthy climate, will benefit, because all the works of art they see and hear influence them for good, like the breeze from some healthy country, leading them from earliest childhood into close sympathy and conformity with beauty and reason.

“And that is ... why this stage of education is crucial. For rhythm and harmony penetrate deeply into the mind and take a most powerful hold on it, and if

education is good, it brings and imparts grace and beauty, if it is bad, the reverse. And moreover, the proper training we propose to give will make a man quick to perceive the shortcomings of works of art or nature, whose ugliness he will rightly dislike. Anything beautiful he will welcome gladly, will make it his own, and so grow in true goodness of character. Anything ugly he will rightly condemn and dislike, even when he is still young and cannot understand the reason for so doing, while when reason comes he will recognise and welcome it as a familiar friend because of his upbringing. ... In my view that is the purpose of this stage of education.”

Music is one of the most powerful of mediums creating and influencing rhythm and harmony of the soul. Hence, firm bondage created between art and the soul will in turn generate grace. One who has received that kind of education, i.e. of the inner life, will have the skill to understand particular arts as well as Nature. With good taste she will adore truth, draw joy from it and internalise it in her personality. She will dislike the bad and evil and decry it openly, even in her youth when she may not be fully aware of the reasons behind it. In other words, according to Plato, proper art education helps the individual to develop a sense of good and evil.

### Creative Activities Provide Discipline

Creative activities provide discipline, in which the senses intuitively seek unity, harmony, proportion and wholeness of experience. The use of mediums and tools - clay, cotton, wool, leather, wood, stone, brushes, the potter's wheel, the saw - impose a discipline by their very physical nature. Moreover, they draw the creator closer to Nature, which alone is the supreme example of harmony, sympathy and union. These are the same laws on which the human community depends for its own unity and integrity.

Art activities create a deep sense of freedom in the child, which leads to fruition of all his/her gifts and talents, to true and stable happiness in adult life. Art, actually, leads the child out of himself/herself. Children engaged in spontaneous creative activities are happier than those who may do well in their academic work but do not take part in art activities.

Children's spontaneous paintings are a direct evidence of their psychological and physiological disposition. Child art has more clinical value than any other form of evidence. Creative activities also help develop self-confidence in the child. Art



activities can liberate individuals from their aggression and other repressed instincts accumulated during early childhood.

### Language of the Child's Inner World

In many homes I have observed that children who are engaged in art activities are happy and more alert. They have a close relationship with their families and become a source of joy for their parents. Even at a very early stage, if the child is given an opportunity to handle simple art material, she starts scribbling in order to experiment with the material. She uses it to convey the urges of her inner world to a sympathetic spectator, to the parent from whom she expects an encouraging response. It provides an opportunity for dialogue between the child and parent. Until the age of three or four, the average child has not developed a spoken language to the extent of being able to communicate with someone who is prepared to listen. However, artistic activities provide the child with the language she needs to give expression to her inner self. If the child is unable to express freely, her feelings get distorted and often become destructive. It is not sufficient for the child to be able to express herself through art. She needs an audience that will give her recognition and appreciate her work.

Franz Cizek, the Viennese painter, described one of his experiences: "After drawing and painting for an hour, I discussed with a dozen children, aged from three to seven, their pictures. That means we discussed them together. I had finished when six-year-old Susan started sobbing. When I asked her why she cried, she said, 'But you have not criticised my picture/ Needless to say, I had done it, but I did not know that Susan was outside when I discussed and praised her picture. Susan was a shy child, but when she did not get *significance* or thought she had not, she asked for it."<sup>2</sup> A child needs this kind of recognition for building a healthy self-image. The role of the family is even more important in this regard. The child needs messages from his parents, which will assure him that they trust him and respect his personality. After all, the health of the family depends upon the degree of intimacy in relationships and recognition of and respect for each other's personality. A family is happy in which the children are happy and active. Can human society be considered healthy if its units individual families - are not happy? Creative activities, during every stage of childhood, prepare the individual to communicate freely and

courageously and at the same time to become an integral part of Nature and life as a whole. I will conclude with a quote from Schiller: "One of the most important tasks of culture is to submit man to the influence of form, even in his merely physical life, to make this life aesthetic by introducing the rule of beauty wherever possible; because only from the aesthetic, and not from the physical state, can morality develop."

## 05. GANDHI THE EDUCATOR

### The Beginning

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, the architect of Indian's freedom through non-violent struggle, was born in 1869 in Porbander, Kathiawar, a princely state, now a part of Gujarat. His father and grandfather were- chief ministers in Kathiawar. On completing his school education, he went to London to study law. After returning home he practised as a lawyer in Bombay and Rajkot, but without much success. On receiving an unexpected offer he went to South Africa, where two experiences transformed his life. The first took place when he went to the court in Durban where the judge asked him to take off his turban. This hurt his national pride. The second was a real eye-opener in racism. Despite having a first class railway ticket, he was literally pushed out of the compartment with his luggage. This prompted him to reflect: "Should I fight for my rights or go back to India, or should I go on to Pretoria without minding the insults? ... It will be cowardice to run back to India without fulfilling my obligation. ...I should try, if possible, to root out the disease and suffer hardships in the process. Redress for wrongs I should seek only to the extent that would be necessary for the removal of the colour prejudice."

An incident during his school days also left a deep impression on Gandhi. "There is an incident which occurred at the examination during my first year at high school and which is worth recording. Mr. Giles, the Education Inspector, had come on a visit of inspection. He had set five words to write as a spelling exercise. One of the words was 'kettle'. I had mis-spelt it. The teacher tried to prompt me with the point of his boot; I would not be prompted. It was beyond me to see that he wanted me to copy the spelling from my neighbour's slate, for I had thought that the teacher was there to supervise us against copying. The result was that all the boys, except myself, were found to have spelt every word correctly. Only I had been stupid. The teacher tried later to bring this stupidity home to me, but without effect. I never could learn the art of 'copying'

### Rejection of the Existing School System

Gandhi's experiments in education started in South Africa in 1897 when he decided against sending his two young sons and a nephew to the schools for European

children. In his *An Autobiography* he wrote: For one thing, the medium of instruction there would be only English or perhaps incorrect Tamil or Hindi, which too could be arranged not without difficulty. I could not possibly put up with this and other disadvantages. I was making my own attempt to teach them but that was at best irregular and I could not get hold of a suitable Gujarati teacher.

“I was at my wit’s end. I advertised for an English teacher who would teach the children under my direction. Some regular instruction was to be given by this teacher and for the rest they had to be satisfied with what little I could give them irregularly. So I engaged an English governess for £7 a month. This went on for some time but not to my Satisfaction.”

In the same chapter of *An Autobiography* he says: “Had I been without a sense of self-respect, and satisfied myself with having for my children the education that other children could not get, I should have deprived them of the object-lesson in liberty and self-respect that I gave them at the cost of the literary training. And where a choice has to be made between liberty and learning, who will not say that the former has to be preferred a thousand times to the latter?”

### School at Tolstoy Farm

In 1911, the Tolstoy Farm was formed near Johannesburg for *satyagrahis* to stay together with their families. The need for providing education for boys and girls grew with the growth of the Tolstoy farm. The community could not afford to pay high wages to qualified teachers, who even otherwise were scarce and would not be prepared to go to a place as far as twenty-one miles away from Johannesburg. At the same time, Gandhi knew that the kind of education the so-called qualified teachers were capable of giving was not what he was looking for. “I did not believe in the existing system of education, and I had a mind to find out by experience and experiment the true system.”<sup>5</sup>

The passion with which he set to find out the true system by experience and experiment can be witnessed from the chapters in Part four of his *An Autobiography*, which deals with the education of the children in Tolstoy farm. The keynote behind his thoughts on education at that time was: “Our ancient school system is enough. Character building has the first place in it and that is primary education. A building erected on that foundation would last.” He was not yet near

the true system that could be offered for wider application. What he knew and was fully convinced about was that if education does not help in building a character based on moral values and certain individual qualities, it was bad education. Therefore, in conducting the schooling of the children of the Tolstoy farm, he put the greatest stress on “the culture of the heart or building of character”.<sup>6</sup> He was confident that moral training could be given to all alike, no matter how different their ages and their upbringing, He decided to live amongst them all the twenty-four hours of the day as their father. He also believed that if the foundations of education were firmly laid on the ideals of character building, the children would learn all the other things themselves or with the assistance of friends.

At the Tolstoy Farm, daily physical training of the children was deemed important. There were no servants and all the work, from cooking down to scavenging, was done by the inmates- There were some fruit trees that were also looked after by the children under the guidance of an inmate who had the necessary expertise. Similarly, vocational training also became an essential part of the educational programme. The intention was to teach youngsters some useful manual vocation. One of Gandhi’s colleagues went to a Trappist monastery and learnt shoe making, another knew carpentry. So they had classes in shoe making and carpentry. Every youngster, of course, learned cooking. An important feature of the teaching tradition laid was the rule that the youngsters should not be asked to do what the teachers did not do. Therefore, when they were asked to do any work, there was always a teacher co-operating and actually working with them.

Gandhi, it seems, was ambivalent about what he called ‘literary training’. “I had neither the resources nor the literary equipment necessary; and I had not the time I would have wished to devote to the subject. The physical work that I was doing used to leave me thoroughly exhausted at the end of the day, and I used to have the classes just when I was most in need of some rest, instead, therefore, of my being fresh for the class, I could with the greatest difficulty keep myself awake. The morning had to be devoted to work on the farm and domestic duties, so the school hours had to be kept after the midday meal.”<sup>7</sup> However, it should be noted that he did appreciate the necessity of literary training for the children. So classes in the mother tongue of the children were conducted with whatever resources and skills

were available among the inmates, which were not adequate, except that the needs of the pupils were rather rudimentary. "These youngsters were for the most part unlettered and unschooled. But I found in the course of my work that I had very little to teach them, beyond weaning them from their laziness and supervising their studies. As I was content with this, I could pull on the boys of different ages and learning different subjects in one and the same classroom."

The question of spiritual training, Gandhi said, was much more difficult than physical and mental training. He did not rely on religious books. Nevertheless, he believed that every student should be acquainted with the elements of his or her religion and have a general understanding of its scriptures. He also learnt as he went along: "As I came into closer contact with them (children) I saw that it was not through books that one could impart training of the spirit. Just as physical training was to be imparted through physical exercise, and intellectual through intellectual exercise, even so the training of the spirit was possible only through the exercise of the spirit. And the exercise of the spirit entirely depended on the life and character of the teacher. The teacher had always to be mindful of his p's and q's, whether he was in the midst of his boys or not." Again Gandhi emphasised on character building, "To develop the spirit is to build character and to enable one to work towards knowledge of God and self-realisation."

### From the Laboratory to the Field

Gandhi returned to India in 1915 to face a new challenge. He was no longer in a *laboratory situation*. In India, he did not have to provide education merely to a few children living in a small community. Here the problem was of the educational reconstruction of a whole nation - a nation that had been deprived of its own traditions built over centuries.

The first task was to get rid of the colonial educational system, which was totally unrelated to adult people's lives -let alone the lives of children. The contents of history or geography, or for that matter any subject the school taught, were alien to the child's environment. Speaking about school books, Gandhi once said: "There seems to me to be no doubt that in the public schools the books used, especially for children, are for the most part useless, when they are not harmful. That many of them are cleverly written cannot be denied. They might even be the best for the

people and the environment for which they are written. But they are not written for Indian boys and girls, not for the Indian environment. When they are so written, they are generally undigested imitations, hardly answering the wants of the scholars.” The point that Gandhi makes is that real education should draw out the best from the child. It cannot be done “by packing ill assorted and unwanted information into the heads of the pupils. It becomes a dead weight crushing all originality in them and turning them into mere automate.” More significantly, Gandhi states that if Indians had not been the victims of the British Indian education system, “we would long ago have realised the mischief wrought by the modern method of giving mass education, especially in the (sic) case like India’s.”

Gandhi’s second task was to construct a system, which would give the people a sense of self-respect and the skills to be able to educate themselves in a way that would make them take responsibility for their own lives, individually as well as collectively. He was to become the innovator of a new approach and strategy for national liberation. The newness about it was that unlike all the other leaders of the anti-colonial struggle, he believed that real self-government did not mean government by a few representatives of the people sitting in Parliament and deciding the fate of the people. He said in 1925: “I hope to demonstrate that real *swaraj* will come not by the acquisition of authority by a few but by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when abused. In other words, *swaraj* is to be attained by educating the people to a sense of their capacity to regulate and control authority.”

How can people reach a stage in which they will be in a position to plan and direct the course of their own lives? Not by enforcing plans and discipline from the top. For people to be responsible for their own lives, they should go through a process of conscientisation, and that is education, education not through books or lectures and preaching, but through living and learning to exercise one’s own rights and duties towards oneself and the community at the same time.

### National Reconstruction

In May 1915, Gandhi set up his *ashram* in Sabarmati near Ahmedabad where he started a school for the *ashram* children based on his experiences in South Africa. It was a community in which new people also joined, which necessitated the

reiteration and elaboration of the principles that governed the life of the group living together. On 16th

February 1916, Gandhi gave a talk at the YMCA Madras, in which he said: "... I shall venture this morning to place before you the rules that have been drawn up and that have to be observed by everyone who seeks to be a member of that Ashram ...". Then he elaborated on the five *yamas* or tools for self-discipline - the vow of truth, the doctrine of ahimsa, the vow of celibacy, the vow of control of the palate and the vow of non-thieving. To these he added the vows of fearlessness, *swadeshi* and the one regarding untouchability. Education should be through the vernacular and everyone should do manual work. In addition, he stated: "Politics are [sic] a part of our being; we ought to understand our national institutions, and we ought to understand our national growth and all those things. We may do it from our infancy. So in our Ashram, every child is taught to understand the political institutions of our country, and to know how the country is vibrating with new emotions, with new aspirations, with a new life. But we want also the steady light, the infallible light of religious faith, not a faith that appeals to the intelligence, but a faith that is indelibly inscribed on the heart. First, we want to realise that religious consciousness; and immediately we have done that, I think the whole department of life is open to us. It should then be a sacred privilege of students and everybody to partake of that whole life, so that, when they grow to manhood and when they leave their colleges, they may do so as men properly equipped to battle with life. Today what happens is this - much of the political life is confined to student life. As soon as students leave their colleges and cease to be students, they sink into oblivion; they seek miserable employments [sic] carrying miserable emoluments, rising no higher in their aspirations, knowing nothing of God, knowing nothing of fresh air or bright light, and nothing of that real vigorous independence that comes out of obedience to these laws that I have ventured to place before you."

In terms of ideology, the above gives a fairly comprehensive idea of Gandhi's educational philosophy. However, in the context of India and its struggle for independence, the *true system* needed to be wider in scope. It needed to include the element of national reconstruction so as to make people of all ages aware about freedom, and to prepare them to be the makers and citizens of a new India



reconstructed on its historical and cultural foundations. Thus were sown the seeds of the system that was to be born later and called *Nayee Talim* (New Education).

Gradually, *Nayee Talim* schools were set up all over the country. However, over a period, the quality of *Nayee Talim* schools gradually fell. The main reason behind *that failure* was that the elite of the country, who ran the government, did not care for an educational system which they thought was for villagers only. Ironically, they remained attached to the so-called modern education that India had inherited from its colonial past.

## 06. GANDHI'S NAYEE TALIM

### Education in India under Colonial Rule

As part of her struggle for freedom, India needed a fresh approach to educational planning. First of all, it was necessary to get rid of the educational system imposed by the colonial rulers on the country after destroying its indigenous traditions and institutions. Secondly, there was a need to design its own educational system so as to build a genuinely liberated and egalitarian India.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, a significant degree of awareness of one's own identity had developed among the educated elite of the country. It was the dawn of a period of social reformation and growth of Indian nationalism. At that point of time in the freedom struggle, there were two distinct ways of looking at the issues of reconstructing the social fabric of the country. Some of the leaders were of the opinion that to be able to rise to the level of the British rulers, Indians must educate themselves in the English system. They established educational institutions that aimed at that particular goal. Although they too were interested in discovering their original roots, they probably had a feeling that the British were able to rule India because of their superiority over us in many ways.

At the same time, movements grew to motivate people to go back to their Vedic culture - in other words, to discover the classical roots of Indian civilisation. They founded *gurukuls* and other traditional institutions of learning and teaching. According to them, India became weak because she had drifted away from her own way of life. Neither of these approaches faced the real issues, issues that were related to the question of real liberation and self-reliance.

India had been severely impoverished and to a great extent her population was extremely demoralised. Indian masses had almost completely lost the taste for freedom. During the period after the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny, the morale of the people had fallen very low. Moreover, the British rulers having experienced the tenacity of the Indian soldiers and realizing that militarily they could not enslave India, permanently, cunningly and systematically disarmed the nation. So much so that a simple farmer could not own an ordinary gun to protect his crops from the menace of wild and stray animals.

## Indian Industry

According to Romesh Dutt, India was, until the middle of the eighteenth century, one of the leading industrial countries of the world. By the end of the nineteenth century, Indian industry had been nearly totally destroyed. India, which had supplied a great variety of textiles to many countries of the world, especially north Europe, was now importing cloth from Britain for most of its needs.

Several nations had their ships built by Indian shipbuilders in Indian ports. Reginald Reynolds quotes in *White Sahebs in India* from a document (1670) of the East India Company: "Many English merchants and others have their ships and vessels yearly built. Here is the best and well-grown timber ... best iron upon the coast.... They have an excellent way of making shrouds, strays and any other rigging for the ships."<sup>2</sup> He also quotes from Taylor's book *History of India*: "The arrival in the Port of London of Indian produce in Indian-built ships created a sensation among the monopolists which could not have been exceeded if a hostile fleet had appeared in the Thames. The shipbuilders of the Port of London took the lead in raising the cry of alarm... An obliging Government saw to it that the Indian industry perished."

## Social Structure

Creation of the worst kind of landlordism damaged long existing human relationships and divided the society into strata that were completely alien to the Indian experience. The planned destruction of the *panchayat*, the system of local government and administration, including the judiciary, had an even worse effect on social relationships.

The colonial rulers were not satisfied with destroying India's industry, agriculture, administrative and legal institutions and their national defence system - they were hoping to enslave India permanently. The British knew that only materialistic enslavement was insufficient for that purpose, psychological enslavement was the most effective mechanism to reach that goal. It was thus that education became their biggest prey. Their greed for wealth and power made the colonisers take immediate steps to build a long-term strategy based on *educational reforms*- They had understood that they would have to take every possible step to weaken the

educational traditions that were deeply ingrained in the culture of the Indian people, as it was responsible for retaining the Indianness of the Indian masses for such a long period.

We should also note the attitude of the colonisers regarding our culture and literature. Lord Macaulay's *Minutes*' are well known. He wrote in this document: "I have no knowledge either of Sanskrit or Arabic, but I have done what I could to form a correct estimate of their value. I have read translations of the more celebrated Arabic and Sanskrit works. I have conversed both here and at home with men distinguished by their proficiency in the Eastern tongues. I am quite ready to take Oriental learning at the valuation of the Orientalists themselves. I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia." Although there were some critical comments on Macaulay's *Minutes* by some British bureaucrats, the Governor General, Lord Bentinck said about them, "I give my entire concurrence to the sentiments expressed in *Minutes*."

In spite of such a calculated onslaught on Indian culture, especially its educational traditions, a significant proportion of these institutions had survived until at least 1835. Adams, an officer in the Education Department of Bengal, conducted an inquiry into the number of schools in that region at that time. According to his calculations, there was a school for every thirty-two boys and these schools were provided in most of the 15,000 villages.

### National Awakening

As stated earlier, the end of the last century saw the re-emergence of movements for national awakening, but this time of a different kind - very different from the wars of Tipu Sultan and the Sepoy Mutiny. To begin with, they were, more of a reformist nature. The emergence of the Arya Samaj, Prarthana Samaj and Brahma Samaj brought about much awareness among the people of their cultural heritage and this gave them a sense of self-identity.

The National Congress, which had a political character, was formed in 1885. It started talking of Indian self-rule, Indians' participation in the administrative services, etc. However, the majority of the Congress leadership was English-educated. They did not speak the language of the people, who, therefore, did not

understand what the Congress was talking about. These leaders had no contact whatsoever with the masses, implying that the Congress did not have any popular following.

During the beginning stages of the growth of the Indian National Congress, the British took advantage of the situation and, to some extent, were able to entice the Indian elite by co-opting them and neutralising their effect, if any, on the masses. But this time they could not stop *the tide of liberation*. They could only slow it down by their classical technique of *divide and rule*.

### Gandhi's Educational Work in South Africa

It was at this point of time that Gandhi returned to his own country. He reached Bombay with Kasturba, his wife, in 1914. Before going into Gandhi's educational experiment in India, we should briefly discuss his experiences in the area of education in South Africa.

While working with the Indians living in South Africa in their struggle for self-dignity, Gandhi went through various experiences. These experiences made him search for *a better life* more intensely and with greater commitment. He conducted experiments to find an alternative approach to conflict resolution and re-structuring social relationships through non-violence. Among these experiments, those on education are the most important in the present context.

Gandhi read Ruskin's *Unto This Last* and was deeply influenced by it. "I believe that I discovered some of my deepest convictions reflected in this great book of Ruskin and that is why it so captured me and made me transform my life." The teachings of *Unto This Last*, as he grasped it, were:

- The good of the individual is contained in the good of all;
- A lawyer's work has the same value as the barber's, inasmuch as all have the same right to earn their livelihood from their work;
- A life of labour, i.e. the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsman, is a life worth living.

Gandhi wrote in his *An Autobiography*: "When I landed at Durban in January 1897, I had three children with me. My sister's son aged ten, and my own sons aged nine and six. Where was I to educate them? I could have sent them to the schools for

European children, but only as a matter of favour and exception for no other Indian children would be allowed. For these, there were schools established by Christian missions, but I was not prepared to send my children there, as I did not like the education imparted in those schools.” Gandhi’s struggle continued. On the one hand, he totally rejected the existing system of education, but on the other, he did not have a clear alternative to replace it. He had no idea of *what* tasks to set and *how* to go about educating the children of his extended family. On the other hand, he was deeply convinced that only that education was desirable which developed a healthy self-image and inculcated certain values in the individual.

Gandhi was also editing and publishing the journal *Indian Opinion* from Durban. He thought the team should move to a farm on which everyone should work and draw the same living wage, and attend to work at the press in their spare time. After a discussion with his colleagues about his ideas, with which they all agreed, *Indian Opinion* was moved to the countryside, to Phoenix, situated fourteen miles from Durban. The Phoenix Settlement was thus started in 1904. It became a well-knit family of committed people trying to live their lives under Gandhi’s guidance. Once the journal was well established, Gandhi set about starting a school for Indian children. On 13 January 1905, he wrote a letter to Prof. Gokhale asking for his support. Following is an extract from it: “It is also my intention, if my earnings continue, to open a school on the grounds, which would be second to none in South Africa, for the education primarily of Indian children who would be resident boarders, and secondly of all who want to join the school but would also reside on the premises. For this too, volunteer workers are required. It would be possible to induce one or two Englishmen or English ladies here to give their lifetime to this work, but Indian teachers are absolutely necessary. Could you induce any graduates who have an aptitude for teaching, who bear a blameless character and who would be prepared to work for a mere living? Those who would come must be well-trying first-class men. I would want two or three at least but more could certainly be accommodated, and after the school is in working order, it is intended to add a sanatorium with open-air treatment on hygienic lines. ...” Eventually the school had fifty children.

Gandhi’s next experiment was at Tolstoy Farm, near Johannesburg, which he started for *satyagrahis* and their families in 1911. He was very conscious about the need for

the education of members of the Tolstoy Farm, especially the children. He wrote in *An Autobiography*: "As the Farm grew, it was found necessary to make some provision for the education of its boys and girls. There were among these, Hindu, Musalman, Parsi and Christian boys and some Hindu girls. It was not possible, and I did not think necessary, to engage special teachers for them. It was not possible as qualified Indian teachers were scarce, and even when available, none would be ready to go to a place twenty-one miles distant from Johannesburg on a small salary. ... I did not believe in the existing system of education, and I had a mind to find out by experience and experiment the true system."

Gandhi was determined to discover *the true system*. He took some time to discover this, especially the kind that could be offered for wider application in a country as large as India, for he knew that his home was India and not South Africa.

### The Satyagraha Campaigns

On Gandhi's return to India, the wise man that he was, he did not plunge straightaway into Indian politics or even pass any judgment on the situation here. He spent an entire year going round the country, acquainting himself with the life of the people and their feelings. He wanted to have first-hand knowledge of the rural as well as urban conditions in which the common man and woman lived. This was also the advice given to him by Gopal Krishna Gokhale, who was like a *guru* to him in political matters. The question of discovering the right kind of educational system, however, remained his primary concern.

Within two or three years, Gandhi had to undertake three major Satyagraha campaigns. The Ahmedabad Satyagraha related to the textile mill-hands' strike, the Kheda Satyagraha to the payment of land revenue by farmers, and the Champaran Satyagraha was against the exploitation of the indigo farmers by the British plantation owners.

The Champaran Satyagraha was Gandhi's first major non-violent struggle in India after returning from South Africa. It was aimed at uplifting the physical conditions and morale of the indigo farmers and liberating them from the grip of the British indigo plantation owners, who were exploiting them in a most inhuman manner. The Satyagraha proved to be the first profound victory of non-violent struggle against the exploitation of the White plantation owners. However, even while the Satyagraha

was still going on, he was thinking of ways to improve the conditions of the poor of Champaran district.

In *Satyagraha in Champaran*, Rajendra Prasad wrote: "He (Gandhi) was convinced from the very beginning that it was impossible for any outside agency to improve their lot, unless their mental and moral condition was improved. This implies to the whole of India, but it can be demonstrated beyond contradiction in Champaran. ... Mahatmaji had accordingly decided that arrangements for the spread of education were as necessary among them as the redress of their grievances. Sometime before the Enquiry Committee commenced its work, Mahatmaji had written to some friends about it and told them what sort of volunteers he needed for social work."

Gandhi did get some educated people from various parts of India to run the schools he started. Unfortunately, very few educated people from Bihar joined him. Describing the plan, he wrote to a government official: "In the schools I am opening, children under the age of twelve only are admitted. The idea is to get hold of as many children as possible and to give them an all round education, i.e. a good knowledge of Hindi or Urdu, and through that medium, a knowledge of arithmetic, rudiments of history and geography, simple scientific principles and some industrial training. No cut-and-dried syllabus has yet been prepared because I am going on an unbeaten track. I look upon our present system with horror and distrust. Instead of developing the moral and mental faculties of the little children it dwarfs them. ... "Five schools started functioning in the area. Some of his closest companions were with him to carry out the plans, about which he wrote: "I shall endeavour to avoid the defects of the present system. The chief thing aimed at is contact of children with men and women of culture and unimpeachable moral character. That to me is education. Literary training is to be useful merely as a means to that end. ..."

The Champaran Satyagraha came to a successful end. In his *An Autobiography*, Gandhi wrote: "The *ryots* (tenants), who had all along remained crushed, now somewhat came to their own, and the superstition that the stain of indigo could never be washed out was exploded.... It was my desire to continue the constructive work for some years, to establish more schools and to penetrate the villages more effectively. The ground had been prepared, but it did not please God, as often before, to allow my plans to be fulfilled. Fate decided otherwise and drove me to



take up work elsewhere.”<sup>12</sup> Those schools functioned for a while but were closed after a while for lack of workers and the vision required to continue such pioneering work.

### Sabarmati Ashram

At the time of leaving South Africa, the Phoenix family was faced with the dilemma about where they should settle in India. At the suggestion of C. F. Andrews, the whole group went to Santiniketan, the educational centre set up by Poet Rabindranath Tagore (Gurudev) in Bengal in 1901.

There Gandhi tried various experiments with the help of Tagore and the teachers, especially concerning the way of life that educational institutions should encourage. No doubt he must have drawn some creative ideas from his and his colleagues' experiences in Santiniketan. However, Santiniketan was not the place for him to build his activities and conduct his own experiments. His need was to experiment with the perspective he had developed for the future of India. The Phoenix family left Santiniketan and went on to Gujarat - first to Kochrab and finally to Sabarmati, a place just outside Ahmedabad, where Gandhi eventually set up his *ashram*.

In addition to his preoccupation with national politics, there was one other subject that preoccupied his head and his heart, namely, the reconstruction of the educational system for the people of India. He knew what 'education' had meant in ancient India. At a conference on education in Allahabad on 23 December 1916, he gave a talk on education that was reported in *The Leader*. Here is an extract from that report: "Mr. Gandhi then described the ancient system of education ... even elementary education imparted by the village teacher taught the students all that was necessary for their occupation. Those who went in for higher education became fully conversant with the *Artha Shastra* and the *Dharma Shastra*. In ancient times, there were no restrictions on education. ... It was due to such a system of education that Indian civilisation had outlived so many vicissitudes through thousands of years. ... No doubt the wave of a new civilisation had been passing through India. But he (Gandhi) was sure that it was transitory, it would soon pass away and Indian civilisation would be revived. In ancient times, the basis of life was self-restraint but now it was enjoyment.

The result was that people had become powerless cowards and forsook the truth...."

Gandhi was getting closer to his ideal educational system but he still had to experiment further before discovering *the true system*. This eventually emerged later and was called *Nayee Talim*, which he said was his last and best gift to India.

### Educational System for Free India

After Sabarmati Ashram was well established, Gandhi began planning a national school. Describing his plans in the prospectus of the school, he wrote that the basic principles would be: "The education will be physical, intellectual and religious. For physical education there will be training in agriculture and hand-weaving and in the use of carpenter's and blacksmith's tools. ... In addition, they will be given drill, and as part of this, they will be taught how to march in squads and how each one may work with quiet efficiency in case of accidents such as fire.... They will have instructions on how to preserve health and on home remedies for ordinary ailments, with as much of physiology and botany as may be necessary for the purpose. ... For intellectual training, they will study Gujarati, Marathi, Hindi and Sanskrit as compulsory subjects.... There will be no teaching of English during the first three years." The medium of instruction was to be Gujarati (mother tongue/local language) right up to the highest stage. The syllabus included the usual subjects such as mathematics, book keeping, history, geography, chemistry and astronomy. By way of instruction in religion, general ethical principles were to be taught. It was hoped that, "the teachers will demonstrate by their conduct that the essence of religion is good character." He also made it clear that no fees would be charged from the students and that all other expenses of the school would be met by donations.

The aim at that time, as Gandhi explained, was that after a few years of such education, the student's equipment would approximate to that of a well-informed graduate. It is obvious that although he was more or less clear about the contents of his ideal education, he was not yet quite ready to suggest an educational set-up different from the existing one, which taught different subjects in different classes, i.e. the education structure created by the West.

Gandhi was clear and firm about the key aims of education. For instance, education must be imparted through the mother tongue at all its stages. In the speech at the Second Gujarat Educational Conference in October 1917, he could not have been

more emphatic about this issue: "It should be obvious to everyone that the first thing to do in this connection is to come to a definite decision about the medium of instruction. Unless that is done, all other efforts, I fear, are likely to prove fruitless."<sup>14</sup> Gandhi also put great stress on the desirability of having a common language for the whole country. He enumerated five requirements of a national language. It should be:

- Easy to learn by government officials;
- Capable of serving as a medium of religious, economic and political contact between all parts of the country;
- Be the speech of a large number of Indians;
- Easy for everyone to learn; and in choosing such a language, consideration of temporary or passing circumstances should not count.

It was evident that English did not fulfil any of these requirements. "Which language then fulfils all the five requirements? We shall have to admit that it is Hindi." He pleaded for the script of Hindi (eventually Hindustani) to be written in Devanagiri and Urdu. In explaining his argument for Hindustani, he considered almost all other Indian languages and their potential for being adopted as the national language.

Drawing the attention of the Conference to the subjects that are not taught at all, he first mentioned, "building character" was something "all education must aim at." Observing what English education had done to this aspect of human behaviour, Gandhi emphasised the building of character as the major task of education. The other items he put emphasis on were music and physical training. He also strongly pleaded for the education of women.

The lure of degrees was one great obstacle in the way of educating the youth of the country. "We think that our entire life depends on success at examinations." India, Gandhi said, "... never knew the institution of examination. The method is of recent introduction. ... The system has lent itself to serious abuse, every subject being taught with an eye on the examination and the conviction firmly planted in the pupil's mind that passing the examination was all that was necessary. ..." In his scheme for national education, it was stated: "Having regard to the view that examinations are quite undesirable, pupils in this institution will be tested

periodically from two points of view - whether the teacher has made the right effort and whether the pupil has followed it. The pupil will be freed from the fear of examinations...”

### National Universities - Vidyapeeths

After the First World War, India waited in vain for a change of heart on the part of the British. Instead, she received the Rowlatt Act, which was greatly resented by the people. In April 1919, more than a thousand innocent unarmed people were massacred in Jallianwalla Bagh in Amritsar by the English army. This outrage wounded India’s pride and she rose in revolt against foreign domination. Gandhi said that Jallianwalla Bagh was only the beginning: “We must be prepared to contemplate with equanimity, not a thousand murders of innocent men and women, but many thousands before we attain *a* status in the world that shall not be surpassed by any nation. We hope, therefore, that all concerned will take rather than lose heart and treat hanging as an ordinary affair of life.”

On 1 August 1920, he wrote to the Viceroy, “I can retain neither respect nor affection for a government which has been moving from wrong to wrong in order to defend its immorality.” The Congress and Gandhi called for a total boycott of legislative bodies, government schools and law courts. The Gujarat Political Conference held on 27 and 29 August 1920, passed a resolution stating that:

- Title-holders and persons holding medals should renounce the titles and return the medals;
- Lawyers should try to settle disputes privately and should give up practice in law courts;
- Parents should withdraw their children from any school that had any connection with the government; and college students should stop attending colleges;
- Voters should refuse to vote for any of the candidates seeking election to a Council, and candidates should withdraw their candidature;
- Every man and woman and child should follow the rule of *swadeshi* and should spin cotton. Although it was a solely political campaign, it had a profound impact on the educational scene of the country.

With the call for boycotting all schools and colleges having any connection with the government, it was necessary to establish alternative educational institutions. This marked the beginning of the establishment of Vidyapeeths - national schools and colleges all over the country. In November 1920, Gandhi founded the Gujarat Vidyapeeth. Such national institutions also came up in Calcutta, Patna, Aligarh, Bombay, Benaras and Delhi. The Jamia Millia Islamia - the National Muslim University - was founded by the joint efforts of Gandhi and Mohamed Ali.

These institutions contributed significantly to the political awakening and educational awareness of the Indian people. Bringing these centres of learning into being was a step towards a new approach to education. These institutions drew the attention of the students to their cultural heritage. They also served to instil a spirit of freedom in the students, an element essential for the development of a healthy personality. Thus was prepared a cadre of freedom fighters for the next *battle for liberation* - the Salt Satyagraha of 1930. More importantly, they served as experimental centres for Gandhi to explore the structural side of his educational scheme when the first nationwide work on *Buniyadi Talim* (Basic Education) was started in 1937. By that time, institutions like Gujarat Vidyapeeth and Jamia Millia Islamia had fully developed their systemic structures so as to enable a trial of the scheme of Basic Education.

### Tagorean Elements in Basic Education

Between 1920 and 1937, the Independence movement gained momentum all over the country and therefore in these institutions too. The country's general awareness of its cultural foundations, knowledge of the damage done by the colonial rulers to Indian traditions, the socio-political conditions in the country, together with Gandhi's understanding of life, made it imperative that for rebuilding India as a healthy nation, two elements - education of the individual and national freedom - be considered as two sides of the same coin, i.e., liberation. It was clear in Gandhi's mind that without gaining freedom from foreign rule, building a new and independent educational programme was not possible. And it is from this angle that the development of his *Nayee Talim* has to be understood.

Most of these institutions, apart from some exceptions such as Santiniketan and the Vidyapeeths, had lost their original relevance or had become dependent on

government recognition. Some continued catering to the needs of the elite who looked for government patronage. Gurudev deliberately kept Santiniketan apolitical. Some individuals -students and teachers - occasionally took active part in the freedom struggle, but otherwise it remained free from politics. Without going into a discussion on the 'why' of this matter, I shall try to show the relationship between the Tagorean concept of education and *Nayee Talim* as developed under Gandhi's guidance.

The most useful point here is to see the positive aspects of the two systems - their conceptual similarities and differences - and see how close they are to each other in the ultimate analysis. According to Tagore, there are three essential elements of education:

- Mother tongue, not only as the medium of instruction but also as the major means of mutual communication between people;
- Nature of which we are an inseparable part;
- Creative activities.

Interestingly, the education scheme - Basic Education or *Buniyadi Talim* - as presented to the nation by Gandhi in 1937 also had three similar elements. Gandhi was absolutely firm in his conviction that the medium of instruction in schools and colleges must be the mother tongue or the language of the area. He also insisted that the language of communication between people of various regions ought to be that which most people understood and/or could easily learn. In other words, it should be an effective tool for community relationships.

According to the Basic Education scheme, the fulfilment of most of the human needs - physical as well as spiritual – depend on the relationship between human society and Nature. Hence, the Basic Education scheme gave top priority to man's relationship with Nature. In Tagore's educational programme, which had already begun in 1901, Nature was the most important source of knowledge, creativity and livelihood.

The next element is *creative activities* according to Gurudev, while Gandhi called it *meaningful manual work*. In this matter, there is some difference of approach. Gandhi associates manual work with one's livelihood and source of knowledge.

Tagore, however, does not talk of the economic side of creative activities. For him it is art - in the classical sense - and includes every activity that *creates*, makes things for human use, including those for religious and emotional purposes. Gandhi, on the other hand, perceived it as a means for, learning a vocation for livelihood, along with it being a way for gaining knowledge.

I do not think the difference between the two is crucial. In fact, to me, the main difference between the two approaches is that of class. Whereas Gandhi's approach is universal, Gurudev's is elitist. It is amazing that nearly a century ago Gurudev offered the world a unique holistic educational philosophy, which included creative activities as one of the most important elements of education. Gandhi had the advantage of drawing from Gurudev's educational experience.

### The Spread of Basic Education or *Buniyadi Talim*

The fruit that Gandhi was nurturing for the last two decades or so was now nearly ripe. The political situation in the country had somewhat changed. After the 1935 elections for Legislative Assemblies, the British government had to accept the formation of Congress Ministries in nine Provinces. In addition to whatsoever these Congress governments were hoping to do, Gandhi offered them an educational plan to replace the existing system of education.

In October 1937, Gandhi called a conference that was attended by many eminent education experts of the country and Education Ministers of several Provinces. He presented his scheme, *Buniyadi Talim* or Basic Education, to them. The Conference passed a resolution, which agreed that:

- *Free and compulsory education should be provided to every child between seven to fourteen years of age;*
- *The medium of instruction should be the mother tongue;*
- *The process of education throughout this period should centre around some form of manual productive work, and all the other abilities to be developed should be integrally related to the handicraft chosen with due regard to the environment of the child;*
- *This system of education should gradually be able to cover the remuneration of the teachers.*

A little later, the Hindustani Talimi Sangh, an all-India organisation, was formed to develop the Basic Education scheme all over the country and run experimental schools. The first experimental school was set up in Sevagram, Gandhi's *ashram*, which also became the central office of the Hindustani Talimi Sangh. The second experimental school was set up in Jamia Millia Islamia, founded by Dr. Zakir Hussain and Mohamed Ali. Shri E.W. Aryanayakarn became the General Secretary and Gandhi chose Dr. Zakir Hussain, the head of Jamia Millia Islamia, as the Chairperson of the Sangh.

A wave of educational reconstruction seemed to pass over the country. Some Provinces appointed Education Reorganisation Committees. Teachers' Training and Refreshers' Training Centres were opened in various parts of the country. Some Basic Schools were opened and some primary schools were converted into Basic Schools. New literature on Basic Education was published for the use of teachers within the Provinces. Experienced teachers prepared a seven-year syllabus for their subjects.

In his report after two years of work, Shri Aryanayakam wrote: "... basic education was being carried out as an educational experiment by the Governments of Central Provinces, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa, Bombay, and Kashmir and a few non-Government institutions. In all there were twelve Training Schools and two Training Colleges, seven Refreshers' Training Centres and over five thousand, schools carrying out the experiment of basic education."

Towards the end of 1939, Congress Ministries resigned, resulting in the closure of the schools run by the government in all the seven Provinces. Those run by voluntary bodies continued, which implied that it had attracted the interest of the people. For example in Orissa, there was so much enthusiasm that even when the Orissa Government closed its Basic Schools in the second year of the experiment, the people of the Province continued the work on their own. Out of the fifteen Basic Schools, seven continued functioning. Basic Schools run by voluntary bodies continued until the launch of the Quit India struggle in 1942, after which most of the active workers were arrested, including those engaged in Gandhi's Constructive Programme. Gandhi himself was the first to be arrested.



The Resolution passed by the Second Basic Education Conference held on the campus of Jamia Millia Islamia gives an idea of the results attained by the Basic Schools during the short period of a little over two years: "This Conference records with satisfaction that the reports on the working of Basic Schools run by the governments, local bodies and by private enterprise are almost unanimous that general standards of health and behaviour as well as intellectual attainment are very encouraging. The children in basic schools are more active, cheerful, and self-reliant, their power of self-expression is well-developed, they are developing habits of co-operative work, and social prejudices are breaking down. Considering the difficulties inherent in the initial stages of a new scheme of education, involving a new ideology and a new technique, the progress reported holds out the promise that even better results can be expected in future."

### Non-Violent War of Freedom

The Quit India Movement of 1942 proved to be an important learning experience for the country, especially since it provided an opportunity to look back and review the achievements and difficulties faced by of the freedom struggle led by Gandhi. Within a couple of days, the entire cadre of the freedom movement, including Gandhi, was arrested. Only those workers remained outside who either went underground or were

co-opted - willingly or otherwise -by the State machinery. Members of political parties who were not in favour of the Quit India call also remained out of prison. However, in the present context we are only concerned with those who were close to Gandhi and were genuinely connected with his Constructive Programme.

Gandhi was in prison for nearly two years. That was probably the hardest period in his life. His two closest life companions died in the same prison - his wife Kasturba and Mahadev Desai, his right-hand man. During that period he must have done a great deal of introspection and reviewed almost everything he had done or wanted to do in his life. His life-long *tapasya* as a teacher must have made him wonder as to why he had not yet been able to find *the true system*, which he has been searching for since he started teaching the children of his large family in South Africa. He must have asked himself many questions, including those regarding his experiment with Basic Education and its future.

When Gandhi was released from prison on 6 May 1944, he had two major concerns. Firstly, he wanted British rule in India to end as soon as possible. Secondly, he wanted to educate the people of India to be prepared to use that freedom to raise themselves from the conditions they had been pushed into during the last two centuries or so, such as stark poverty, pessimism, ignorance and helplessness.

For the last quarter of the century, Gandhi, unlike all other social revolutionaries of the last few centuries, was fighting 'the non-violent war of freedom' on two fronts - on the political as well as on the socio-economic front. He encouraged people to develop alternatives in nearly all aspects of life. The eighteen-point Constructive Programme aimed at replacing the existing systems and institutions, for instance the development of indigenous industries (textile, food), Basic Education, health and sanitation, social equality and co-operative living.

Whenever anyone suggested any improvement or change in some aspect of Indian life, and when Gandhi felt that the suggestion warranted attention, he immediately found people to take up responsibility to organize that particular activity. The Leprosy Campaign is a case in point. Traditionally, leprosy is a misunderstood disease and anyone suffering from it is considered lower than an 'untouchable'. Gandhi had been working against misconceptions about the disease on both the medical and social front. In 1946, a man who had been cured of leprosy came and told Gandhi his remarkable story. I remember him telling this gentleman: 'You have been sent to me by God with the hope that you will organise and lead an all India movement against this most inhuman attitude.' The Leprosy Campaign thus became one of the eighteen items of the Constructive Programme.

At the beginning of the Second World War, when the Japanese started bombing the borders of India, he developed a concept of non-violent national defence and took some initiative in that direction. It was, however, rejected by the Congress party. Gandhi was taking these steps with the hope that once India became a free nation, she would have a fully ripe and tested pattern of political, economic and social structure in public life to replace the existing one, the one with which he did not want to continue.

### Education for Life and through Life

Gandhi's internment in the Aga Khan Palace was a time of introspection for him. After being released from prison in 1944, he said: "I have been thinking hard during the detention over the possibilities of *Buniyadi Talim* until my mind became restive. We must not rest content with our present achievements. We must penetrate the homes of the children. We must educate their parents. Basic education must become literally the education for life.... It had become clear to me that the scope of Basic Education has to be extended. ... A basic schoolteacher must consider himself a universal teacher. ... His village is his universe. ..."

A *Nayee Talim* conference was called in the month of December-January, 1944-1945. In his introductory comments, Gandhi introduced an entirely revised and enlarged map of the system. He addressed the Basic Education workers: "Although we have been working for *Nayee Talim* all these years, we have so far been, as it were, sailing in an inland sea which is comparatively safer. We are now leaving the shores and heading for the open sea. So far our course was mapped out. We have now before us uncharted waters with the Pole Star as our only guide and protection. That Pole Star is village handicrafts.

"Our sphere of work now is not confined to children from seven and (sic) fourteen years; it is to cover the whole of life from the moment of conception to the moment of death. This means that our work has increased tremendously. Yet workers remain the same. But that should not worry us. Our guide and companion is Truth, which is God. He will never betray us. But Truth will be our help only if we stand by it regardless of everything. There can be in it (sic) no room for hypocrisy, camouflage, pride, attachment or anger.

"We have to become teachers of villagers; that is to say, we have to become their servants in the true sense. Our reward, if any, has to come from within and not from without. It should make no difference to us whether in our quest for Truth we have any human company or not. Nor is *Nayee Talim* dependent on outside financial help. It must proceed on its own way, whatever critics might say. I know that true education must be self-supporting. There is nothing to feel ashamed of in this. It may be a novel idea if we can make good our claim and demonstrate that ours is the only method for the true development of the mind. Those who scoff at *Nayee Talim* today will become our ardent admirers in the end and *Nayee Talim* will find

universal acceptance.... Whether this is a mere dream or a practical reality, this is the goal of *Nayee Talim* and nothing short of it. May the God of Truth help us to realise it.

“I want to draw your attention also to another thing. I consider the Sevagram centre to be an ideal centre for conducting the central experiment in *Nayee Talim*, as it is here that the Charkha Sangh (All-India Spinners Association) is carrying out its main experiment. Wardha is the centre for the other village industries. ... Sevagram does not stand alone; there are nearly 20 villages lying about it in close proximity. Therefore, if experiments in *Nayee Talim* in its most natural form can be carried out anywhere, it is here.”

The *Nayee Talim* scheme of education proposed by Gandhi was for the education of everybody in the community. It included:

- Adult education for the whole community, including parents of newborn babies;
- Pre-basic education for children between two-and-a-half to seven years; devoted to rehearsals connected with the celebration of festivals and special occasions related to all religions. Children and teachers, especially the art teacher, decorated the place with *alpana*, flowers and textiles. Stagecraft and management were an integral component of *Nayee Talim*. We also had arrangements for simple sports and games - mostly non-equipment games. Yet another feature that ought to be mentioned here is the character of festivals celebrated and the daily prayer conducted in the *Nayee Talim* school community. Festivals of all religions were celebrated in the best way possible, and the school prayers were the same as those in Gandhi’s Ashram, i.e. inclusive of all religions. It had a very positive impact on the children.

It is necessary to point out that in *Nayee Talim* there was no place for textbooks as such, but students were constantly encouraged to use the library. Gradually, *Nayee Talim* schools were set up all over the country, drawing inspiration and guidance from the work of Sevagram. Jamia Millia Islamia was another central institute that worked in close cooperation with Sevagram.

At last Gandhi discovered what he called *the true system*. It had all the human elements of education as understood by great educators and *gurus*. It did not have

those elements that divided human society within itself and from Nature and the Universe.

There is so much to relate and explain about *Nayee Talim* that it is impossible to give it full justice in this paper. There is much material, though not sufficient, that is available for further study about the subject. What is still lacking is an analytical study of *Nayee Talim*. For example, a question that is often asked is: "In spite of *Nayee Talim* being such an ideal and practical system of education, why did it not spread?"

One day a thorough study will have to be done into this system of *true education* formulated by Gandhiji. For the present purpose, the above should suffice.

## 07. TAGORE'S WARNING

*Rescue the Human Soul from the Chains of Greed and the Path of Destruction*

Rabindranath Tagore

### Tagore's Early Environment

Tagore was born and brought up when India had just started becoming aware of its own identity. For the people of India, it was an awakening after a long period of darkness and a life of slavery. Leaders of this renaissance were trying to rediscover the ancient traditions and culture of India. At the same time, they were accepting Western culture and its values with an almost a totally uncritical mind. Names of Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Syed Ahmed Khan come to mind in this connection. They tried to introduce English education in India. They succeeded in their efforts with the help of the rulers who were keen to turn, at least the top layer of the population, into a class of its own - a set of English educated clerks who would help in the continuation of the Raj. Their enthusiasm for Western values led them to a serious study of English literature and Western philosophy. They probably believed that India's salvation lay in modernising it on Western lines.

At the same time, a revival of Hindu culture was taking place in different ways and under different leaderships. Some of the leaders were common to both, the revivalists as well as the modernising forces. The Brahmo Samaj in Bengal, the Arya Samaj in the North and the West and the Prarthna Samaj in the South were the major forces behind this revival. They tried to create a new sense of self-dignity among the people by saying that the Vedic culture was the highest and every Indian should be proud of inheriting it.

### Struggle for Freedom

Tagore's environment was saturated with both the above elements; its impact on him was profound and long lasting. Towards the end of his life he had said that during the Second World War, when the West had taken a posture of hatred and destruction, the image of British liberal humanity that he had in his mind in his youth had made so deep an impression that something of it lingered even then, even in those days of graceless disillusionment. The Tagore family had already produced

three generations of highly able men, Tagore's grandfather, Dwarikanath, was one of the pioneers of Western education in India and his father, Debendranath had come to be known as *Maharishi* (sage), for his spiritual attainments and compassion. This family background, highly aristocratic, endowed with artistic and literary qualities, and its important role in the national renaissance, was an asset in the development of Tagore's personality.

It was also the period when attempts were being made to gain independence for the nation. However, the Indian intellectual had not yet lost faith in the generosity of the English as a race. This faith was so deeply rooted in the sentiments of the Indian leaders that it led them to hope that the victor would of his own grace pave the path of freedom for the vanquished. This illusion, however, disappeared early enough in Tagore's life, and he started facing the realities of India, a nation living in slavery for over a hundred years.

In his last speech, entitled *Crisis of Civilisation*, written on his 80th birthday in April, Tagore mentioned that early period of his life. "Born in that atmosphere, which was moreover coloured by our intuitive bias for literature, I naturally set the English on the throne of my heart. Thus passed the first chapters of my life. Then came the parting of ways, accompanied with a painful feeling of disillusionment when I began increasingly to discover how easily those who accepted the highest truths of civilisation, disowned them with impunity whenever questions of national self-interests were involved. There came a time, when perforce I had to snatch myself away from the mere appreciation of literature. As I emerged into the stark light of bare facts, the sight of the dire poverty of the Indian masses rent my heart."

It was this realisation that brought Tagore so intimately close to the people of his country. They look him to be their own poet, their Gurudev, their great teacher. It was this awareness of the suffering of the masses that compelled him to live in simplicity and in a kind of voluntary poverty. He gave up the limited world of the poet and became a messenger of liberty and universal peace. He spoke not only for India but also for the whole of humanity.

C.F. Andrews wrote an article entitled *Rolland and Tagore* in 1926. In this article he also described his experience with Tagore during, and just before, the First World War. In the month of May 1914, Tagore wrote a poem called *The Destroyer*. In it he

wrote about some impending disaster to humanity, which his own spirit vaguely felt to be almost immediately imminent. It was written before people had even heard the faintest rumour of the War. Such was the sensitivity of the poet! *Deen Bandhu*. Andrews wrote how intense Tagore's suffering was in the early days of the War. He went away into solitude and wrote poems on this world disaster. The cup of evil had actually brimmed over. There was no turning back along the old courses. Humanity had to face the storms ahead on its voyage to undiscovered shores, A poem written at that time reads as follows:

### *The Oarsman*

*All the black evils in the world have overflowed their banks;*

*Yet, Oarsman take your place with the blessing of sorrow in your soul!*

*Whom do you blame, brothers?*

*Bow your heads down!*

*The sin has been yours and ours*

*The heat growing in the heart of God for ages*

*The cowardice of the weak, the arrogance of the strong, the greed of fat prosperity,*

*The rancour of the wronged pride of race, and insult to man -*

*Has burst God's peace, raging in storm*

*Like a ripe pod let the tempest break its heart into pieces, scattering thunders.*

*Stop your bluster of dispraise and of self-praise.*

*And with the calm of silent prayer on your forehead,*

*Sail to that unnamed shore.*

### *Rejection of Militarism*

Tagore rejected militarism in the strongest possible language. When he went to Japan in 1916, he was received by the multitude with enthusiasm and applause. But when he saw that the teal Japan was being destroyed by its fierce militarism and nationalism, and when he denounced it forcefully in a speech at the Imperial



University of Tokyo, the Japanese Government silently but effectively ignored him. In their war-fever, the Japanese papers called him the poet of a defeated nation.<sup>2</sup>

According to Tagore, neither the colourless vagueness of cosmopolitanism nor the fierce self-idolatry of nation-worship is the goal of human society. He called his school the Indian guesthouse of the universe, but he refused to fly the Indian national flag anywhere in the campus.

It is important to repeat that Tagore came out of the limited world of the poet-philosopher. He was an activist at the same time and therefore he faced the disaster by taking positive action. The school, first called Bhramacharyashram, was transformed into a centre of world fellowship and culture. Santiniketan became the abode of peace and a meeting place of minds from different lands and cultures - a place where people would discover that the human spirit was one, and to preserve its oneness it was necessary to live in fellowship. Despite the fact that great prophets had earlier realized the freedom of the soul in their consciousness of the universal spiritual kinship of man, "human races, owing to their external geographical condition, developed in their individual isolation, a mentality that is obnoxiously selfish. In their instinctive search for truth in religion, either they dwarfed and deformed it in the mould of primitive distortion of their own race-mind, or else they shut their God within temple walls and scriptural texts safely away, especially from those departments of life where His absence gives easy access to devil-worship in various names and forms. They treated their God in the same way as in some forms of governments the king is treated, who has traditional honour but no effective authority. ... One of the potent reasons for this our geographical separation - has now been nearly removed.

"The races of mankind will never again be able to go back to their citadels of high-walled exclusiveness. They are today exposed to one another, physically and intellectually. The shells, which have so long given them full security within their individual enclosures, have been broken, and by no artificial process can they be mended again." His *ashram* was one of the first attempts of the twentieth century at building bridges between nations and cultures, and it certainly became known as such all over the world.

A third rate copy of English education had replaced the indigenous educational traditions of the country. The kind of nationalism being transfused into Indian society by the revivalist leaders could not be acceptable to Tagore. In one of the essays, *Nationalism in India*, included in the book, *Nationalism*, (Macmillan & Co., 1917), he wrote: "Even though from childhood I had been taught that idolatry of the nation is almost better than reverence of God and humanity, I believe I have outgrown that teaching, and it is my conviction that my countrymen will truly gain their India by fighting against the education which teaches them that a country is greater than the ideals of humanity." He tried to impart precisely that kind of education at Santiniketan.

### Social Reconstruction

Tagore was convinced that unless poverty was totally eradicated from the villages of India, the quality of life of the country would not improve and to do that it was essential that people helped themselves.

"It was my conviction that what India most needed was constructive work coming from within itself. In this work we must take all risks and go on doing the duties which by right are ours, even in the teeth of persecution, winning moral victory at every step by our failure and suffering. We must show those who are over us that we have in ourselves the strength of moral power, the power to suffer for truth. It would be mischievous if the gifts we wish for were granted to us at once, and I have told my countrymen, time and again, to combine for the work of creating opportunities to give vent to our spirit of self-sacrifice, and not for the purpose of begging."

So he went to the villagers and told them that self-government lay at their door, waiting for them. "No one has tried, nor is it possible for anyone even if he does try, to deprive us of it. We can do everything we like for our villages - for their education, their sanitation and the improvement of their communications - if only we make up our minds to set to work, if only we can act in unison. For this work we do not need the sanction of a government badge."<sup>11</sup> When Tagore talked about social reconstruction, it was not known that Mahatma Gandhi was also thinking on somewhat similar lines. However, it will be correct to say that Tagore's pioneering work in this direction must have helped Gandhi develop his ideas, which took the

shape of a full-fledged Constructive Programme for the reconstruction of Indian life. Santiniketan's rural institute, Sriniketan, had already been established when Gandhi launched his Constructive Programme.

There is a similarity in Tagore and Gandhi's approach in this matter. On 11 March 1905, Tagore gave a lecture in Calcutta, which was published in *Bangadarshan* in April 1905, under the title *Saphalatar Sadnpay*. It could have been Gandhi speaking on non-violence. Tagore said: "Considering one's own responsibilities as light and others' responsibilities as heavy is not a legitimate moral code. When sitting in judgement on British behaviour toward ourselves, it is well to note their human fallibility and the difficulties which they face; but when searching out our own lapses, there must be no excuses or palliatives, no lowering of standards on the basis of expediency. The rousing of indignation against the British government may be an easy political method, but it will not lead us to our goal; rather, the cheap pleasure of giving tit for tat, of dealing shrewd blows, will detract from the efficient pursuit of our own path of duty. ... If anger be the basis of our political activities, the excitement tends to become an end in itself, at the expense of the object to be achieved." In the same lecture he repeatedly said that, "Our education is the thing which we should first of all take into our own hands."

When Gandhi met him for the last time in 1941, Tagore handed over a letter to him stating that Santiniketan was his greatest gift to the nation and that he would like him (Gandhi) to look after it from then onwards. He could trust Gandhi, for he knew that Gandhi put the greatest emphasis on education as the most effective tool for social revolution.

### Education - The Process of Self-creation

Whether Santiniketan was Tagore's greatest gift or not is not the subject of our discussion here. However, it is indisputable that his contribution to the educational revolution of the twentieth century is unique and profound and we of the present day have a tremendous amount to learn from it. Education for him was, "the process of self-creation". To the extent that we are using our resources (which Tagore would call 'divine' in the sense that all our powers and potentialities are not demonstrable, and that they are 'given' to us by an authority greater than ourselves), we are able to grow into an awareness of and establish a conscious

relationship with 'God's purpose in creation'. The school he built had this very purpose.

Education ought to provide opportunity and guidance in the spirit of fellowship with the whole of humanity and Nature, of which human society is only a part. The process is not merely intellectual, it is one in which both - the mind as well as the body - grow in harmony with each other. "Childhood should be given its full measure of life's draught, for which it has an endless thirst. The young mind should be saturated with the idea that it has been born in a human world, which is in harmony with the world around it. And this is what our regular type of school ignores with an air of superior wisdom, severe and disdainful. It forcibly snatches away children from a world full of mystery of God's own handiwork, full of the suggestiveness of personality."

We are born on this earth and this is our home. We need to fully accept it as such and not merely to 'know' it. 'Knowing' here does not mean knowledge in the Vedic sense but as it is understood today, namely as a process of accumulating information and as a means of power. Tagore said that the highest education is that which does not merely give us information but which brings our lives in harmony with all existence. And it is this education that is being systematically neglected in the school system. From the very beginning, information is forced into the minds of children so that they are alienated from Nature. Instead of accepting the earth as its home, humankind sets itself in competition with it and makes schemes to exploit it as if it were its servant.

"We rob the child of his earth to teach him geography, of language to teach him grammar. His hunger is for the Epic, but he is supplied with chronicles of facts and dates. He was born in the human world, but is banished into the world of living gramophones to expiate for the original sin of being born in ignorance. Child-nature protests against such calamity with all its power of suffering, subdued at last into silence by punishment."

Tagore himself could not go through the school education he was admitted to. He gave it up at a very early age. He received his education at home. He wrote; "What tortured me in my school days was the fact that the school had not the completeness of the world. It was a special arrangement for giving lessons. It could

only be suitable for grown-up people who were conscious of the special need of such places and therefore ready to accept their teaching at the cost of disassociation from life. But children are in love with life, and it is their first love. All its colour and movement attract their eager attention. And are we quite sure of our wisdom in stifling this love? Children are not born ascetics, fit to enter at once into the monastic discipline of acquiring knowledge. At first they must gather knowledge through their love of life, and then they will renounce their lives to gain knowledge, and then again they will come back to their fuller lives with ripened wisdom.”<sup>10</sup>

What did Tagore mean by “renounce their lives to gain knowledge” and then coming back? The logic of modern life and of the educational system today is that since we are not allowed to accept the world we are born into, we are unable to give ourselves to it. Only one who has received can give. Hence, in modern life there is neither sympathetic acceptance nor voluntary renunciation.

Our consciousness of the world, merely as a sum total of things that exist, and as governed by laws, is imperfect. But it is perfect when our consciousness realises all things as spiritually one with us, and therefore capable of giving us joy. For us the highest purpose of this world is not merely living in it, knowing it and making use of it, but realising our own selves in it through expansion of sympathy; not alienating ourselves from it and dominating it, but comprehending and uniting it with ourselves in perfect unison.

### Simplicity of Living

Related to it is the question of simplicity of living. When Tagore started his school, he introduced simple living essentially as an educational principle. Many critics exclaimed that he was glorifying poverty and taking the inmates of his *ashram* back to the medieval ages. Tagore, however, was certain that luxuries are a burden for children. They are actually the burden of other people’s habits, the burden of the vicarious pride and pleasure that parents enjoy through their children. He argued that poverty was the school in which humankind had its first lessons and its best training. “Even a millionaire’s son has to be born helplessly poor and begin his lesson of life from the beginning. He has to learn to walk like the poorest of children, though he has the means to afford to be without the appendages of legs. Poverty brings us into complete touch with life and the world, for living richly is living mostly

by proxy, thus living in a lesser world of reality. This may be good for one's pleasure and pride but not for one's education. Wealth is a golden cage in which the children of the rich are bred into artificial deadening of their powers. Therefore in my school, much to the disgust of the people of expensive habits, I had to provide for this great teacher - this bareness of furniture and material - not because it is poverty, but because it leads to personal experience of the world."

We need this kind of understanding more urgently now than in the days when Tagore founded Santiniketan at the beginning of the century. In this age of affluence, schools go on accumulating junk in the name of educational equipment. We judge schools by their buildings, the size of their libraries, the number of textbooks they use, the educational material they possess, and their capacity to go on adding more and more to it. Tagore, on the other hand, lays maximum emphasis on the elements that help the seed to sprout and the bud to blossom - sunlight and spring, for instance. It is not that he could not have raised sufficient funds for acquiring such gadgets for his school. He gave least importance to them because he believed that they nurture greed and selfishness and dwarf the spiritual and social side of human relationships, although they may help in gaining materialistic knowledge.

### Follow the Natural Yearning of Your Soul

Addressing students he once said: "You who are young do not need for the guidance of your conscience the props of readymade maxims or the pruning hooks of prohibition, or the doctrines from the dead leaves of a book. Your soul has a natural yearning for the inspiration of the sunlight and spring and for everything that secretly helps the seed to sprout and the bud to blossom. ... You are here with the gift of young life, which like the morning star, shines with hope for the unborn day of your country's future.

"You know that fairy tale, the eternal story of youth, which is popular in almost all parts of the world. It is about the beautiful princess taken captive by the cruel giant and the young prince who starts out to free her from his dungeon. When we heard that story in our boyhood, do you remember how our enthusiasm was stirred, how we felt ourselves setting out as that prince to rescue the princess, overcoming all obstacles and dangers, and at last succeeding in bringing her back to freedom. Today the human soul is lying captive in the dungeon of a Giant Machine, and I ask you, my

young princes, to feel this enthusiasm in your hearts and be willing to rescue the human soul from the chains of greed. ...

“We in the East once tried to muzzle the brute in man and control its ferocity, but today the forces of intellect have overwhelmed our belief in spiritual and moral strength. Power in animals was at least in harmony with life, but not bombs, poison gases and murderous airplanes - the weapons supplied by science.

“We should know that truth, any truth that man acquires, is for everyone. Money and property belong to individuals, to each of you, but you must never exploit truth for your personal aggrandisement; that would be selling God’s blessing for a profit. ... Science is also truth; it has its place in the healing of the sick, and in giving more food and leisure for life. When it helps the strong to crush the weak, and rob those who are asleep, it is using truth for impious ends. Those who are thus sacrilegious will suffer and be punished, for their own weapons will be turned against them.

“The time has come to discover another great power, that which gives us the power of sacrifice, the strength to suffer, not merely to cause suffering. This will help us to defeat brute greed and egotism, as in the pre-historic age intelligence overcame the power of mere muscle.

“The great human societies are the creation not of profiteers, but of dreamers. The millionaires who produce bales of merchandise in enormous quantities have never yet built a civilisation, it is they who are about to destroy what others have built. Come to the rescue and free the human soul from the dungeon of the machine. Proclaim the spirit of man and prove that it lies not in machine-guns and cleverness, but in a simple faith.”<sup>12</sup>

It is now fifty-six years since Rabindranath Tagore spoke the above words, yet they sound fresh and more relevant today than ever before.

*Our soul has its anandam, its consciousness of the infinite, which is blissful. This seeks its expression in limits, which when they assume the harmony of forms and the balance of movements, constantly indicate the limitless. Such expression is freedom, freedom from the barrier of obscurity. Such a medium of limits we have in our self, which is our medium of expression, it is for us to develop this into ananda-rupam amrtam, an embodiment of deathless joy, and only then the infinite in us can no longer remain obscured.*

*This self of ours can also be moulded to give expression to the personality of a business man, or a fighting man, or a working man, but in these it does not reveal our supreme reality and therefore we remain shut up in a prison of our own construction. Self finds its antmda-rupam, which is its freedom in revelation, when it reveals a truth that transcends self, like a lamp revealing light which goes far beyond its material limits, proclaiming its kinship with the sun. When our self is illuminated with the light of love, then the negative aspect of its separateness with others loses its finality, and then our relationship with others is no longer that of competition and conflict, but of sympathy and co-operation.*

*I feel strongly that this, for us, is the teaching of the Upanisads, and that this teaching is very much needed in the present age for those who boast of the freedom enjoyed by their nations, using that freedom for building up a dark world of spiritual blindness, where the passions of greed and hatred are allowed to roam unchecked, having for their allies deceitful diplomacy and a widespread propaganda of falsehood, where the soul remains caged and the self battens upon the decaying flesh of its victims.*



## 08. GANDHI'S EDUCATIONAL REVOLUTION

### Background

The colonial rule had destroyed the Indian system of education, for surely they had a *purpose* in building a new school system. The East India Company successfully attempted to create a distinct class among the Indian people which was to be educated in the Western mode. The purpose of this class was to fill the minor positions in the administration, which were considered neither sufficiently dignified nor sufficiently lucrative for the English. They had to do much more, as Sir Claude Hill said: "We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions we govern; a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and intellect." The educational system that the British Raj introduced in India not only touched the great mass of people but brought an end to the age-old system of teaching in traditional schools such as *madrasas* and *pathashalas* by the learned of the community.

Before the advent of the educational system of the British Raj, education in India was widespread. Campbell, the Collector of Bellary district, wrote in a report in 1823 that at that time there were 80,000 indigenous schools in Bengal, which meant that there was a school for every 400 of the population. There was 100% literacy and a large portion of the income of the government was available for the promotion and organisation of education, Adams, an Education Officer in Bengal, (1835) reported that "schools still existed in all the larger villages as in the towns" and that the curriculum "included reading, writing, composition of letters, elementary arithmetic and accounts, either commercial or agriculture or both."

Max Mueller also wrote: "There is such a thing as social education and education outside books; and this education is distinctly higher than in any part of Christendom. It is an education not in the so-called three R's, but in humanity." Ludlow says in *History of British India*: "In every Hindu village which has retained its old form, I am assured that the children generally were able to read, write and cipher, but where we have swept away the village system, as in Bengal, there the village school has also disappeared."

A flourishing indigenous education system naturally would not favour the growth of a foreign rule. The new rulers realised that to be successful in their colonial aims, complete destruction of this education system and industry was essential. The Raj was successful in impoverishing the villages to the extent that hardly any indigenous educational framework was able to survive, as is evident from the 1823 report: "There are innumerable people who are unable to give the benefit of indigenous education to their children, the reason being mounting poverty on account of the destruction of the Indian textile industry and the introduction of British cloth into this country. While the native rulers used to spend their income generously within the country, the new White administrators have orders not to spend anything in India, even on a temporary basis." The following quote from *India*, a book published at that time, explains the situation clearly: "Wherever we have destroyed the *gram panchayats* (the village councils), for instance in Bengal, village schools have also disappeared." In British India, the education given in government schools and colleges was completely unrelated to the life of the community and tended to wean them away from their own people and their culture. In spite of this, there were of course some intellectuals and reformers who took what was good in English education and combined it with the old wisdom and learning of their own culture and tradition. An outstanding figure among them was Raja Ram Mohan Roy, who tried to combine the best of Indian and European cultures. He brought about the revival of India's old culture and with the help of some very able followers started the Hindu College in Calcutta. A movement for the revival of Indian culture and education grew and reformers like Swami Dayananda, Swami Shradhananda and Swami Vivekananda started several educational institutions based on classical lines. It was in fact the beginning of a national awakening, which later led to India's freedom under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi.

### The Mango Grove University

Before we discuss Gandhi's educational system - or should I say, educational revolution - I must write a few lines about the other educational revolutionary and poet, Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore said that lack of education was the cause of all evils in India. He described his model school to be, "... situated in the midst of woods and under the open sky, where teachers will engage themselves in study and teaching. If possible, there will be some land attached to the school for cultivation.

Pupils will help in agriculture, dairy farming and gardening. In this manner, they will be in contact with Nature, not only emotionally, but also through manual work.” When Tagore started Santiniketan, which is often called ‘The Mango Grove University’, he put forward some objectives before his pupils. “If we all succeed in our endeavours, you will all be courageous men, you will not lose courage because of fear or pain, and sorrow will not make you restless. You will not give up even if you lose. Wealth will not make you arrogant, you will not fear death, you will be seekers of truth and you will keep untruth away from your mind, speech and work. If for conviction or duties’ sake, worldly possessions or even life have to be given up, you will do so without losing your peace of mind. If we succeed, India will rise again. Wherever you will be, there will be joy.”

Santiniketan was founded in 1901 and reached its peak in the twenties and thirties. Tagore’s educational philosophy inspired the educational world everywhere. His emphasis on one’s mother tongue, contact with Nature and creative work still remain key factors in the field of education and life.

### Self-supporting Education

In 1937, after the Indian National Congress had formed ministries and assumed responsibility for government in the Provinces, Gandhi launched his new system of national education, *Buniyadi Talim* or Basic Education, based on the same principles.

One of the main programmes of the Congress ministries was to bring about total prohibition. At that time, it was argued by many that the loss of excise revenue would affect the spread of education, as this revenue solely financed the Education Department. Gandhi was not prepared to accept this. He said: “The cruellest irony of the new reforms lies in the fact that we are left with nothing but the liquor revenue to fall back upon in order to give our children education.” In one of the talks Gandhi gave after the Congress ministers took office, he stated: “... that is the educational puzzle but it should not baffle us. We have to solve it and the solution must not involve the compromise of our ideals of prohibition, cost whatever else it may. It must be shameful and humiliating to think that unless we got the drink revenue, the children should be starved of their education. But if it comes to it, we should prefer it as a lesser evil. If only we refuse to be obsessed by the figures and by the supposed necessity of giving our children the exact kind of education that

they get today, the problem should not baffle us.” Gandhi then set about bringing the educationalists of the country together in order to evolve a system of education, which was at once inexpensive and in consonance with the needs of India’s vast rural population.

In his article, *Education*, published in the *Harijan*, he states: “How to solve the problem of education is the problem unfortunately mixed up with the disappearance of the drink revenue. ...” Until then, the expenditure on education came from excise revenue. “As a nation we are so backward in education that we cannot hope to fulfil our obligation to the nation in this respect in the given time during this generation, if the programme is to depend on money. I have therefore made bold, even at the risk of losing a reputation for constructive ability, to suggest that education should be self-supporting. By education, I mean all-round drawing out of the best in child and man - body, mind and spirit. Literacy is neither the end of education nor even the beginning. It is only one of the means whereby man and woman can be educated. Literacy in itself is no education. I would therefore begin the child’s education by teaching it a useful handicraft and enabling it to produce from the moment it begins its training. Thus, every school can be made self-supporting, the condition being that the state takes over the manufacture of these schools.

“I hold that the highest development of the mind and the soul is possible under such a system of education only. Handicraft has to be taught, not merely mechanically as it is done today but scientifically, that is, the child should know the why and wherefore of every process. I am not writing this without some confidence because it has the backing of experience. This method is being adopted more or less completely wherever spinning is being taught to workers. I myself have taught sandal-making and spinning on these lines with good results. This does not exclude knowledge of history and geography but I find this is best taught by transmitting such general information by word of mouth. One imparts ten times as much in this manner as by reading and writing. The science of the alphabet must be taught later, when the pupil has learnt to distinguish the wheat from the chaff and when he has somewhat developed his tastes. This is a revolutionary proposal, but it saves immense labour and enables a student to acquire in one year what he may take much longer to learn. This means all-round economy. Of course the pupil learns

mathematics whilst he is learning his handicraft.” He suggested that taxing the rich might raise the required money for education. “This is not a fanciful picture. If we would but shed our mental laziness, it would appear to be an eminently reasonable and practical solution of the problem of education that faces the Congress Ministers and therefore the Congress.”

### *Buniyadi Talim through Basic Schools*

An educational conference was convened in Wardha in October 1937, where Gandhi’s scheme, *Buniyadi Talim*, was thoroughly discussed. Most of the distinguished educationalists welcomed it as sound, though some had their doubts about Gandhi’s insistence that it should be self-supportive. That it would substantially contribute to offset the expenses of the school was generally accepted. In Dr. Zakir Hussain’s words, “Work to be educational has to be good work and all good work is productive.” A committee was set up under the chairmanship of Dr. Zakir Hussain to work out the details of the *Buniyadi Talim* scheme and prepare the syllabus. The first Basic School was started in Sevagram. The process of education in this school was cantered round some form of productive work and the physical and social environment of the child, with only a minimum of formal teaching. Sevagram being a cotton-producing area, the children could participate in the entire process of cloth-making. They planted cotton seeds, cared for the plants, picked cotton, ginned, carded it and turned it into slivers, spun the yarn and helped the teacher in weaving the cloth. They could then wear the cloth they had produced themselves. During these activities, they learnt arithmetic, watched the plant grow, heard the teacher talk about the different areas of the world where cotton is grown, how primitive man first learnt to make cloth, the different fibre lengths of different kinds of cotton, how it affects the fineness of cloth and many other interesting things. The observation of plant and animal life was another theme. In the hands of an imaginative teacher, all this offered endless opportunities for awakening the eager interest of the students, and the children learnt in a natural way almost without effort. This does not imply that books were not used. Books became all the more useful when children took them up to find answers to some of the questions they had encountered in life, and the reading became all the more interesting when related to their experiences.

The social life of the child was another main centre of education. As and when festivals were celebrated in the village, the teacher taught the students their significance and how they originated. Quite a bit of teaching of history was done in this way. Awareness of local, national and world affairs was an important concern. Managing their community democratically, taking full responsibility in running its specific aspects, and experiencing conflict and its resolution was part of the educational process of the Sevagram school community.

According to Gandhi, all activities in the child's life, even the mistakes the child and the teacher might make, are of educational value and should be made use of. The child then learns in a natural way without even being conscious of learning. Once his interest is aroused, all the books and the entire world are there for him to find out things for himself, and according to his own individual capacity. Gandhi's philosophy was, 'Education for life and through life'.

The all-round development of the individual child was certainly at the centre of this scheme of education, but it also had a very revolutionary social content. By having education centred round some handicraft, it at once abolished the division between intellectual and manual work. It meant that skill and ability in work was as highly regarded as intellectual achievement. In fact, the two were developed side by side. Thus, it sought to do away, in society at large, the division between the labour classes and the intellectuals. The complete human being will work with his hands as also with his brain, and no necessary work can be considered as being too low for anybody, however intelligent he may be. It is true that some people will excel in one thing or another, as some may be naturally more skilful with their hands, whereas others may be better equipped at solving mathematical problems or learning grammar. In Gandhi's scheme of education, all useful work received equal respect, and applied on a nationwide scale, it had the potential for bringing down the whole class structure.

### *Wider Scope of Nayee Talim*

When Gandhi was released from prison after the Quit India campaign in 1944, he explained his new ideas, "It has become clear to me that the scope of Basic Education has to be extended. It should include the education of everybody at every stage of life."

In December 1947, in a speech he said: "Basic education is generally interpreted as education through craft. This is true to a certain extent but it is not the whole truth. The roots of *Nayee Talim* (New Education - the name Gandhi gave to his system when he extended its scope) go deeper. It is based on truth and non-violence in individual and collective life. This true education must be easily available to everyone. It is not meant for a few hundred thousands of city people but must be within easy reach of millions of villagers. This education cannot be given through the dry leaves of books. It can only be given through the book of life. It does not need any expenditure or money. It cannot be taken away by force."

The Indian Government appointed a University Commission in 1949. In its report, the Commission stated: "The method outlined in its rudiments by Gandhiji is not just a way of meeting the educational needs of little children. He has stated the essential elements of the universal method of education, from the time a little child shares in its mother's work, through the whole process of growth of personality, to the time when the mature man of disciplined mind and character works at the side of the Master in the achievement of a great design. The sense of this philosophy is that education should combine practice in the everyday process of living and working with more formal training. This is a fundamental concept which is steadily gaining support and application in the educational world."

In conclusion, let me quote the definition of his educational system that Gandhi once gave: "The spearhead of silent revolution is fraught with the most far-reaching consequences. It will check the progressive decay of our villages and lay the foundation of a just social order in which there is no unnatural division between 'haves' and 'have nots' and everybody is assured of a living wage and the right to freedom."

## 09. TRUE EDUCATION IS EDUCATION FOR SATYAGRAHA

### The Pre-Independence Period

In 1916, Mahatma Gandhi made the following comment on the state of education in India: “Despite this infatuation for education, hardly anyone pauses to consider what education really is, whether the education we have so far received has done us any good, or good commensurate with the effort put in. We think as little about the meaning of education, as about its aims and objects! For most people, the main aim seems to be to qualify for some kind of a job. Usually people belonging to different trades or vocations, on receiving this education, give up their traditional modes of earning a livelihood and look instead for jobs and, when they succeed, think that they have risen a step higher. In our schools we find boys belonging to various vocational communities such as masons, blacksmiths, carpenters, tailors, cobblers, etc. But on receiving education, instead of improving the standards of their traditional vocations, they give them up as something inherently inferior and consider it an honour to become clerks. The parents too share this false notion. Thus, disloyal both to caste and to the functions most natural to us, we sink deeper into slavery.”

Almost at the same period, Rabindranath Tagore wrote about his own experience as a child. “So long as I was forced to attend school, I felt an unbearable torture. I often counted the years before I would have my freedom. My elder brothers had finished their academic career and were engaged in life, each in their own way. How I envied them when, after a hurried meal in the morning, I found the inevitable carriage that took us to school, ready at the gate. How I wished that by some magic spell, I could cross the intervening fifteen or twenty years and suddenly become a grown-up man. I afterwards realised that what then weighed on my mind was the unnatural pressure of a system of education which prevailed everywhere.”

From Gandhi’s statement, you get a deep feeling of sadness about the way our social and economic fabric was destroyed by the so-called processes of education. Tagore deals with the other aspect of the growth of the individual. For instance, he compares the school with a prison or factory and shows how the personality of the child was humiliated and dwarfed in the school system. In a talk given to a group of



teachers, he stated: "In this critical period, the child's life is subjected to the education factory - lifeless, colourless, and dissociated from any contact with the universe, within bare white walls staring like eyeballs of the dead. We are born with that God-given gift of taking delight in the world, but such delightful activity is fettered and imprisoned, muted by a force called discipline which kills the sensitiveness of the child's mind which is always on the alert, restless and eager to receive first-hand knowledge from Mother Nature. We sit inert, like dead specimens of some museum, while lessons are pelted at us from on high, like hailstones on flowers."

I believe that both Mahatma Gandhi and Gurudev Rabindranath have shown that the system of education that was imposed on India by the British Raj was not only unsuitable for the country, but was in every sense destructive. That it was destructive and vicious is more than evident from Lord Macaulay's statement: "Our English schools are flourishing wonderfully. We find it difficult, indeed in some places impossible, to provide instruction for all who want it. At the town of Hoogly, fourteen hundred boys are learning English. The effect of the education on the Hindoos is prodigious. No Hindoo who has received an English education ever remains sincerely attached to his religion. Some continue to profess it as a matter of policy but many profess themselves pure deists, and some embrace Christianity. It is my firm belief that if our plans of education are followed up, there will not be a single idolater among the respectable classes of Bengal thirty years hence. And this will be affected without any effort to proselytise, without the smallest interference with religious liberty merely by the natural operations of knowledge and reflection. I heartily rejoice in the prospect."

### Wisdom Dawns upon India

We should be grateful that despite it all, India has not lost her culture and spiritual heritage, and Indians woke up at the right time and began remoulding their social and economic life. This is not an occasion to go into the history of educational awakening. If I have to go into that, a large number of experiments and personalities will have to be mentioned. Here, though, our task is to only discuss Mahatma Gandhi's educational goals and the method to achieve them. Nonetheless, it seems

necessary to me to mention briefly the beginning of the story - that is, Tagore's work on education.

Tagore's work on education had its seeds in his own experience as a school-going child. He wrote in his well-known essay, *My School*: "...this was the cause of my suffering when I was sent to school. For all of a sudden I found my world vanishing from around me, giving place to wooden benches and straight walls staring at me with the blank stare of the blind." He writes about the school system: "It is a mere method of discipline which refuses to take into account the individual. It is a factory specially designed for grinding out uniform results. It follows an imaginary straight line of the average in digging its channel of education. But life's line is not the straight line, for it is fond of playing the seesaw with the line of the average, bringing upon its head the rebuke of the school. For according to the school, life is perfect when it allows itself to be treated as dead, to be cut into symmetrical conveniences. But childhood is the period in one's life, when it is necessary to have more freedom from the necessity of specialisation into the narrow bounds of social and professional conventionalism."

To have a glimpse of the environment of true education, it will suffice to quote his description of his *ashram* from the *My School* essay. "All round our Ashram is a vast open country, bare up to the line of the horizon, except for sparsely growing stunted date palms and prickly shrubs struggling with ant hills. Below the level of the field there extend numberless mounds and tiny hillocks of red gravel and pebbles of all shapes and colours, intersected by narrow channels of rainwater. Not far away towards the south near the village can be seen, through the intervals of a row of palm trees, the gleaming surface of steel-blue water collected in a hollow of the ground. A road used by the village people for their marketing in the town goes meandering through the lonely field with its dust staring in the sun. Travellers coming up this road can see from a distance on the summit of the undulating ground, the spire of a temple and the top of a building indicating the Santiniketan Ashram among its *amaleki* groves and its avenue of stately *sal* trees."

A poet's school indeed! But is life worth living without the poetry that life is and which makes life creative? True, not many Santiniketans can be created in the country. Tagore's conviction was that true education could not be imparted in an

artificial atmosphere, which the modern city and town have become. His idea was the old forest school where the students live in their master's home like the children of the house, without having to pay for their boarding and lodging or tuition. The teacher pursues his own study, living a life of simplicity, and helping the students in their lessons as a part of his life and not of his profession.

### A New National Educational Approach

Gandhi admired the work Tagore was doing for the reconstruction of education in India and learnt and borrowed a great deal from it for his own plans. However, his dream was to make good all the harm the Raj had done to each and every village in India. Moreover, his scheme was historically a step ahead. He was working for *swaraj*, which was not only political in content but included the reconstruction of the life of the Indian society and each of its members.

Mahatma Gandhi's goal, especially in the twenties, was to gear every branch of Indian life and every section of its population to the attainment of liberation in such a way that it developed the spirit of freedom in the Indian mind. His call to start national schools was probably the first effort on his part to devise a new national educational approach. It was more than fifteen years before he was actually able to offer the country an educational philosophy and educational scheme under the name of Basic Education or *Buniyadi Talim*. However, his mind was clear about the basis of true education. For instance, in 1924 he wrote in *Navajivan*: "... mere knowledge of books cannot satisfy me. In government schools, where they set before themselves the object of employment in government service - a clerkship - only reading and writing are taught. But this object, which national schools are placing before them, is *swaraj*, freedom and self-reliance. Therefore in these schools, along with the knowledge of reading and writing, the student should also be trained to cultivate strength of heart and the dignity of manual labour. In the national schools, instead of regarding reading and writing as an end itself, we should regard it as a means of development of character and achievement of *swaraj*. For imparting purity and strength of character to the students, we should have teachers who are men of pure and strong heart."

It is clear that learning as such cannot achieve much there is something else that should go with it. Learning becomes meaningful only if it is internalised and

expressed in action. What sort of action should it be? It is to be in keeping with the spirit of sacrifice and goodness. Mahatma Gandhi had introduced the philosophy and technique of non-violence in the struggle for achieving *swaraj*. At the opening of the Gujarat Vidyapeeth on 15 November 1920, he told the students gathered for the inauguration ceremony: "We must meet the satanic violence of the alien Government with our peaceful and spiritual movement. We must plant and water the seed of liberty so that it may, in God's good time, grow to become the fine tree of *swaraj*. And it can only grow by force of character. All will be well with us if your teachers always bear this in mind. I know they are ready to live and if necessary to die, for it is to live indeed."

### Freedom of the Country and the Individual

At the risk of repetition, I must point out at this stage that whenever Mahatma Gandhi talked about *swaraj*, it was in both the senses - national freedom from British rule as well as the freedom of the individual to develop her personality to the full. When he initiated the scheme of Basic Education in 1937, there were already several organisations and institutions (all set up by him over the course of the freedom struggle) trying to rejuvenate different sections of the population. All these programmes were put together to form the Constructive Programme. This Programme was distinctly separate and independent from the political wing of the freedom struggle. It is notable that the Constructive Programme workers were not to take an active interest in the political activities of the Congress. Their task was to awaken the sense of self-reliance among the people. For instance, the Khadi and Village Industries Programme was there to redesign the total economic and industrial life of the country. It was an out and out socialistic programme, without calling it so. The word politics could not be associated with it. It worked for economic equality, which is the master key to non-violence and independence.

Another item in the Constructive Programme list was sanitation and hygiene. Gandhi called on workers to concentrate on helping people realise the value of personal and village cleanliness and maintaining it at all cost. He also worked to eradicate the practice of untouchability. He Encouraged women to liberate themselves from suppression under custom and law for which man has been responsible. All these

programmes were basically educational and the one thing that united them into a whole was nobility of character, courage, fearfulness and respect for life.

Similarly, the scheme for national education, first called *Buniyadi Talim* or Basic Education, was a scheme to impart, along with creative and intellectual skills, the preparedness to sacrifice one's own comforts and privileges for the sake of other needy individuals and the community as a whole. The Dr. Zakir Hussain Committee set up to work out the plan of Basic Education in October 1937, submitted its report at the end of the same year. In it there was a section explaining the ideas of citizenship implicit in the scheme. I quote a few words from it: "... teachers and educationists who undertake this new educational venture should clearly realise the ideal of citizenship inherent in it. The new scheme which we are advocating will aim at giving the citizens of the future a keen sense of personal worth, dignity, efficiency and will strengthen in them the desire for self-improvement and social service in a co-operative community."

During the 1937 stage of the Basic Education movement, the scheme was just a part of the Constructive Programme. Even though some States (provinces at that time) accepted Basic Education as their official policy, the programme ended abruptly on account of the political situation in the country. In fact, the time was not yet ripe for Basic Education to reach its maturity. Mahatma Gandhi had yet to realise that to make his philosophy work, a new education scheme had to be launched that would embrace each and every item of social change and also be totally independent of the State, political parties, etc.

Mahatma Gandhi was arrested after he gave the famous Quit India call to the British. At that time, he probably hoped that the call to 'Do or Die' would inspire the nation to finally apply the principle of non-violence and non-co-operation in the fight against the British in India. He perhaps had too high a hope from the Congress leadership, and of course from the hundreds of thousands constructive workers, to implement the call to the end. It was a tremendous upheaval and I remember, as a participant of the Quit India Movement, that for a moment it felt as if the British would run away. But that was not to be. Was the leadership too unimaginative or was the call unrealistic? I do not know. It now seems more likely, with hindsight, that, in general, the sense of sacrifice, the urge for freedom and the faith in non-

violence was not strong enough to sustain the non-violent struggle for as long a period as was necessary.

### *Buniyadi Talim to Nayee Talim*

Mahatma Gandhi must have gone through a very agonising period brooding over these questions, for when he was released from prison in 1944, he stated: "We must not rest content with our present achievements." Later, in 1947, he said in a speech: "Education is that which gives true freedom. Untruth and violence lead to bondage and can have no place in education. ... It can have nothing to do with teaching sectarian dogmas or rituals. It teaches the universal truth common to all religions."

This is identical to the objectives of *Satyagraha*. The qualities that Gandhi ascribes to a *satyagrahi* are the same that true education ought to impart to its recipients. And a truly educated person is automatically a *satyagrahi* for he or she will neither be afraid to stand up against injustice nor use violence of any kind in facing the situation. Like a *satyagrahi*, a soundly educated person has also learnt the lessons of life through hardship and often through self-sacrifice. In the following passage, a *satyagrahi's* character is described: "The *satyagrahi's* course is simple. He must stand unmoved in the midst of all the crosscurrents. He may not be impatient nor be irritated. He must know that his suffering will melt the stoniest heart of the stoniest fanatic ...." The character of a truly educated person will be no different.

The point is that *Satyagraha* is not basically a fight or a confrontation; it is a perspective of life of a civilised, courageous, fearless, truthful and humble person. A truly educated person will neither tolerate oppression or exploitation nor will he impose these on others. Such a person will always be alert to the situation around and will go to anybody's help when help is needed. Such a person will be both truly educated as well as a *satyagrahi*.

At the end, I should relate it to the present situation in the world, particularly in our own country. It is not very encouraging, I am afraid. What has gone wrong in our country despite the fact that we had the greatest educators of this century, if not of all times? Both Rabindranath and Gandhi tried to take us on the path of truth and love but we failed them. Why? I think it will be an important search into truth if scholars could find some answers to this burning question. We are told that the so-

called new education policy will create men and women of great character. Will it? Has it the elements to make any such impact? After all, in what way is our present educational system any different from the one we inherited from the British Raj?

## 10. EDUCATION FOR A NON-VIOLENT SOCIAL ORDER

### What Does a Non-Violent Social Order Mean?

Before trying to answer this question, let me state what I think *does not* make a *non-violent* social order. A social order that encourages violent responses from individuals against other individuals or groups, or the administration of which tries to solve the internal problems of the country by physical force and/or prepares the country militarily to solve its conflicts with other countries and goes to war or even threatens to do so is *not a non-violent social order*.

One does not have to exercise one's mind to envisage a society where people behave in an orderly way; where, in case of conflicts, rather than solving them on the principle of *might is right*, people go to courts and solicit legal assistance; where there is enough police vigilance to prevent thieves from stealing and make it easy enough for people, especially women and children, to move about without fear of mugging, rape or abduction; where people do not have to bribe administrators to obtain permits to buy a few bags of cements, seeds or fertilisers; and where those who are prepared to do a day's work honestly do not starve. But where all this works only because people feel that 'big brother' is watching them, it will not be a non-violent social order, precisely because the fear of reprisal is the ordering principle.

During the last two decades or so, many dictatorships throughout the world have claimed that they have brought peace, order and social and economic benefits to the people. Yet, time and again, it has been seen that peace, order and social and economic benefits brought about in such a way have not continued for long. In reality, they have hindered genuine growth towards a peaceful social order. The absence of crime, physical violence and so forth is not a sufficient condition for a peaceful society. The absence of 'big brother' or even his shadow is also an absolute necessity for creating a non-violent social order.

Some people have tried to project a social order in which violence has been eliminated from the internal policies of a country, but which is fully equipped militarily to defend the country in case of an invasion. There are others who wish to organise and develop institutions based on non-violence, for the purpose of national defence against any invader. They do not think that this would essentially require



changes of structure within the country. Both kinds of projected schemes suffer from gross contradictions. A social order based on violent values cannot prepare itself for non-violent defence. Nor can a non-violent society find itself organising a highly violent institution like the military.

Violence is usually understood to mean bodily injury that is inflicted deliberately. The injury can vary in degree. It can be anything from minor physical hurt to a most painful death. It can also be a prison sentence, whereby one is physically prevented from living a normal life. Violence can also be psychological, and the effect can be as painful as or worse than physical violence. Also there is another kind of violence - a violence built into the social structure itself. These apparently different forms of violence have the same impact on human relations. Killing a person by a bullet or killing him or her by starvation is practically the same. In one case, death can occur almost instantaneously, in the other it may take months or even years. Both are means of physical destruction. Economic deprivation, racial and sexual discrimination, caste system, all make for a violent society, for all these practices are destructive for human life and human relationships.

It would be hard to find a country where the rate of crime has not been constantly increasing, where more and more prisons are not being built, and in which the defence expenditure has not increased manifold during the last three or four decades. In spite of the fact that most colonial countries have liberated themselves from foreign rule and that the remaining ones are on their way to independence, their people have not felt the taste of real independence. They live either under dictatorships, military or civilian, or under political systems that are becoming more and more bureaucratic and being taken over by technocrats. With some difference in the jargon used or in matters of detail, the development programmes of most newly independent (from colonial rule) countries are imitative of Western economies. They seem to be more interested in increasing their GNP and the amount of energy produced and consumed per capita. In most of these countries, there is not much happening in terms of equality. Their political leaders and their intellectuals are not prepared to listen to the prophetic warnings of some Westerners thinkers that their own system is on its way to collapse.

**What then can be called a Non-Violent Social Order?**

There is a parable in the New Testament that provides just a glimpse of a social order based on non-violent principles:

For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard.

And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into the vineyard.

And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the market place.

And said unto them: Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right, I will give you. And they went their way.

Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise.

And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and said unto them: Why stand ye here all the day idle?

They said unto him: Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them: Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatever is right, that shall ye receive.

So when even was come, the Lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward - call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first.

And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny.

But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny.

And when they had received it, they murmured against the good man of the house.

Saying: These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day.

But he answered one of them, and said: Friend, I do thee no wrong. Didst not though agree with me for a penny?

Take that thine is, and go thy way. I will give unto this last even as unto thee.

**Matthew, 20:1-14**

The essence of the parable is in the sentence, "Call the labourers and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first."

One of the things that make the present society violent is its means of wealth distribution. Those on the top decide first and get what *they* think they deserve. By the time it is the turn of the lowest and the last in the hierarchy, nothing or almost nothing is left for them. This applies not only to material possessions but also to the power of making decisions in regard to every aspect of life - social, political, educational and spiritual.

According to the above parable, those at the bottom of the pyramid receive first. As far as the idea of just distribution is concerned, it is satisfactory, but it has not worked out in reality. Why? It is because the pyramid has remained intact. Whether it is in capitalist countries or in those countries that are called socialists or in many of the mixed sort, those on the top of the pyramid continue to be the privileged ones. Moreover, they have devised such sophisticated methods of control that it has become increasingly difficult to challenge their authority.

The 'snag' in the New Testament parable is that it required the 'Lord of the vineyard' to order an equal distribution of wages to all workers. Moreover, it is not mentioned in the parable as to how many pennies the Lord himself received. It does not help to point out that in the case of this parable, Christ himself is the Lord. Christ was not a landlord, and not many Christian landlords are Christ-like. Therefore the parable, as it is, cannot serve as a model for building a non-violent social order. The scenario has to be altered. It is necessary to make the 'Lord of the vineyard', the least important in the story. As long as there are people at the top to decide, "Whatever is right, that shall ye receive", there will be need for stewards and others to see that the decisions of the Lords are carried out promptly and efficiently. It is risky to depend upon a Lord, even if he is a benevolent one who keeps only a penny for himself, for who knows when his mood will change or when a new Lord will replace him. Such dependence is always destructive in terms of buildings relationships among the labourers themselves.

How can the people get the Lords off their back? Is it by violence? The answer can no longer be given in the affirmative, because violence becomes the source of further violence. It goes on escalating until the people are either defeated or betrayed. If

the question were to have been posed before the beginning of this century, the answer probably would have been, 'yes'. At that time, there was not much of a quantitative difference between the violence of the establishment and the violence of the people who wanted revolution. The difference was one of quantity. Therefore it was possible for a good-sized revolutionary force of the people to defeat an unpopular ruler. Today, however, the character of the violence of the establishment has entirely changed, its potential phenomenally increased. On the other hand, the weapons of violence at the disposal of the people are comparatively of a much lower quality. The few new methods, such as hijacking or taking hostages, have already become ineffectual.

More importantly, the political thinking has radically changed during this century. Traditional politics has become outdated, especially because its foundations are violent. Several developments have contributed to these changes: the death of colonialism, emergence of new-colonialism and centralisation of power, awareness about the dehumanising results of modern industrialisation, the failure of the Socialist State and growth of state capitalism, and above all the birth of the nuclear bomb and the realisation that militarism is bound to lead to total destruction. The pious promise of the Marxists that the State will wither away seems to have evaporated forever. The term 'liberation' has acquired new connotations and there is greater insight into the dynamics of power, particularly power politics.

Most of the political philosophies of the past had drawn blueprints of their Utopias. To construct social structures on the basis of blueprints requires that people fit into a set pattern. Educators build educational systems to make men and women ready to become part of their ideal society. Tolstoy wrote in *On Popular Education*, "All of them, beginning with Plato and ending with Kant ...They wish to guess what it is that man needs, and on these more or less correctly divined needs, they build their new school." This kind of structure is bound to end up in authoritarianism and violent relationships, growth of power politics and militarism.

To change the trend, emphasis should be shifted from the top to the bottom. People should educate themselves in a way that will give them the competence and courage to be responsible for their own lives - individually as well as collectively, without

direction or interference from above. In short, the pyramid has to be flattened. Mahatma Gandhi called it real *swaraj*, self-rule.

By *swaraj* he did not mean only the overthrow of a foreign rule, but of constructing a society in which people, both individually and collectively, will be conscious of their power and will be able to exercise it. *Swaraj* is a “continuous effort to be independent of government control ...” It is an ongoing revolution in which people keep alert and active about their responsibilities and right at all times. *Swaraj* does not mean the acquisition of authority by a few representatives of the people, however honest and loyal, but “the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused.” It is the establishment of the entity and development of self-confidence of the individual in society -the qualities that the present systems destroy totally.

### Education of the Individual in Society

The establishment and their beneficiaries design public education to condition people, and make it compulsory. It is materialistic, competitive and performance-oriented; it teaches people to be obedient and submissive. Theodore Rozak writes: “This is why schools in their eagerness to advance the regimenting orthodoxy of state and corporation - power, property, productivity - have to distort education into indoctrination. That is why so much is incurably wrong with the schools ... the compulsion of the system, the tyranny of ‘right answers’, the surrealistic charade of lesson plans, methods and learning resources, the obsession with discipline, above all the mercenary manipulation of competitive favours - grades, gold stars, good opinion, awards, jobs, status, power.” Rabindranath Tagore hated school as a child. Describing his experience of the classroom he wrote: “The rooms were cruelly dismal with their walls on guard like policemen. The house was more like a pigeonholed box than a human habitation. No decoration, no pictures, not a touch of colour, not an attempt to attract the boyish heart. The fact that likes and dislikes form a large part of the child’s mind was completely ignored. Naturally our whole being was depressed as we stepped through its doorway into the narrow quadrangle - and playing truant became chronic with us.” Again about his boyhood days he wrote: “Some people get hammered into shape in the book-learning factories and these are considered in the market to be goods of a superior stamp.” Although Tagore wrote

this about three quarters of a century ago, it is equally applicable to the present day educational system. From the very beginning, information is forced into the brains of children in such a way that they are totally alienated from the realities of life and from Nature.

Peter H. Wolff, a Professor from Harvard Medical School, described to me how some students from the Harvard Faculty of Education had undertaken to experience directly what it is like to go to High School, when one is no longer involved in the day-to-day struggle of survival. "Each graduate student accompanied one pupil for the entire school day; and each independently was shocked to discover that going to school consisted of six hours of unrelenting boredom; that the teachers were so overwhelmed by the mere task of keeping order, they had little energy left even to serve up the programme curriculum packaged for them at some institution of higher learning, and had no time whatsoever to find out what students might be thinking. All potentially embarrassing intellectual encounters between teacher and pupil were assiduously avoided; and the hours ground on until the final bell of the day released both parties from their tedium."

The process has to be reversed if the purpose of education is to prepare people for participating in the building of *swaraj*. Rather than teaching discipline and obedience, the purpose of education should be to foster the intellectual and ethical competence of individuals, and to develop their independence and mind so that they will have the tools and courage to challenge untruth and social injustice. Most children, at least before they go to school, have a natural urge to develop intellectual competence, to ask questions and to find such answers as will satisfy them. This quality - the urge to discover truth - is destroyed by the educational system today.

Gandhi believed that "non-violent resistance is the noblest and the best education. It should come, not after the ordinary education in letters of children, but it should precede it. It will not be denied that a child, before it begins to write its alphabet and to gain worldly knowledge, should know what the soul is, what truth is, what love is, and what powers are latent in the soul. It should be essential of real education that a child should learn that in the struggle of life, it can easily conquer hate by love, untruth by truth, violence by self-suffering." During his last years,

Gandhi gave the highest priority to education. The *Nayee Talim* scheme, both in its spirit as well as programme, was education for a life of *Satyagraha*.

*Satyagraha* has two aspects: discovering and living truth by creating alternative programmes of a constructive nature; and resisting untruth, social injustice, discrimination and exploitation. Unlike in the present system, education for a non-violent social order will be geared to real-life situations and will directly participate in the processes of social change and development. In his editor's note in *Basic Education* by Mahatma Gandhi, Bharatan Kumarappa wrote, "that true education of the individual, which is all-round development, of his faculties, is best obtained through action. If biological thinking develops in man only as an aid to action, as revolutionary psychologists tell us, then Gandhi's scheme of education bases itself on the sound and indisputable fact that knowledge and understanding develop in relation to problems set by action." Instead of textbooks, life itself becomes the centre of education. Education for life is, therefore, education through life.

Action for participating in life processes will be at three levels and a balanced programme for all the three will be required. These three levels are:

1. The individual - integrated development of the body and the mind;
2. The individual in the community - social, cultural and political life; and
3. The human community as part of Nature. The above categories of action cannot be considered in isolation. For instance, the development of the individual is inseparable from both the community as well as Nature. Similarly, a community's life will be interesting and free from exploitation only if the individual's conscience and capacities receive the necessary encouragement and opportunity to blossom, and only when there is a creative accord between the human community and Nature.

### 1. The Individual

A. S. Neil believed that there is an inherent goodness in the child, and "that an average child is not born a cripple, a coward or a soulless automaton, but has full potentialities to love life and to be interested in life." Children brought up with *self-regulation* grow fearlessly. By self-regulation, he meant "the right of a baby to live freely, without outside authority in things psychic and somatic. It means that the

baby feeds when it is hungry; that it becomes clean in habits only when it wants to; that it is never stormed at or spanked; that it is always loved and protected.” There is a clear distinction between freedom and license. Neil comments, “In a disciplined home, the children have *no* rights. In the spoiled home, they have *all* the rights. The proper home is one in which children and adults have equal rights. And the same applies to school.” Children brought up with self-regulation will develop the quality of love, reason and integrity.

Productive manual work, which is regarded as inferior to intellectual work today, should become an essential part of education, not as a separate item in the curriculum but as a centre of education. By planning education around creative activities, an integrated development of the mind and body is insured; at the same time the emotional side of the individual’s personality is allowed to express itself. It also has deep relevance to the relationship between the individual and the community as well as Nature.

## 2. The Individual in the Community

The school run at Sevagram, Gandhi’s centre in the 1940s and continued until the late 1950s, was far from perfect. However, its experiment in developing community and political consciousness provides a useful model. It was planned on self-government lines. One of its objectives was to build a self-sufficient, non-discriminatory, egalitarian community. Each student and teacher had one vote. They shared all the responsibilities equally. The general assembly made or repealed the laws and also supervised the practising of these laws. The most important gains from this experiment were that the members of the community, both children and adults, had first-hand experience of democratic principles, of the dynamics of authority, of conflicts and their resolutions by discussions, and of fearlessness, forgiveness and cooperation.

## 3. Community and Nature

Rabindranath Tagore had pointed out, decades ago, that the greatest fault in the educational system was that it had created a wide gap between Nature and human beings. His was basically a spiritual and aesthetic approach. Gandhi adopted this approach and added the economic dimension to it. Within the framework of education for a non-violent social order, the relationship between human society



and Nature will be that of two cooperating parties rather than what it is today, both in school and in industry - one exploiting the resources of the other. There is enough literature on the subject of ecology to show how desperate is the need to reverse this approach.

“On the whole, whether it is a question of education of the mind and of intellectual functions or education of the ethical conscience, if the right to educate implies that it envisions full development of the human personality and strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedom, it is important to understand that such an ideal cannot be attained by any of the common methods. Neither the independence of the person, which is assumed by this development, nor the reciprocity that is evolved by his respect for the rights and freedoms of others, can be developed in an atmosphere of authority and intellectual and moral constraints. On the contrary, they both imperviously demand a return by their very make-up to a lived experience and to a freedom of investigation outside of which any acquisition of human values is only an illusion.”

The above is a quotation from Jean Piaget’s essays to UNESCO. It states the whole issue in a nutshell. Whatever one may plan or envision concerning bringing about a non-violent social order, it will not have the desired results *without providing lived experience and freedom of investigation*.

The premise that human beings suffer from the guilt of original sin, and therefore they should free themselves from the guilt by suffering and repentance and return to the stage of innocence, is not the right approach to build any educational system. Such an approach cannot allow *self-regulation*, nor can it generate confidence in the inherent goodness in human beings. Some believe that since a part of each individual is beast, some outlets have to be provided to sublimate the aggressive instincts so as to liberate the individual from the beast.

Both the above approaches show a serious lack of faith in the innate human capacity to reject oppression and challenge authority. Human beings have a profound capacity to think rationally and sit back and reflect intelligently; in other words, the natural gift and the urge to ask questions and find satisfactory answers. *A non-violent social order will come into being when this natural gift will be able to blossom in a climate free from authority and intellectual and moral constraints.*

## 11. EDUCATION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

### Transformation of Man

According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "Adult education, in its broadest sense, signifies any form of learning undertaken by or provided for mature men and women." Naturally, due to the very wide scope of this definition, various interpretations can be and are given to it, each depending upon the notions about education and social values prevalent in a society. Moreover, it is a matter for consideration as to what one means by 'adult' and 'mature' in this context. But let us first see what is meant by *education* and what its objectives are. Why, after all, is there any need for it? Do other animals have systems that can be called education? If they do, what then is the difference in those systems and what we call education?

An answer to these questions is the theme of a poem by Rabindranath Tagore. It is the twenty-eighth poem of *Balaka*. The *Poet/sadhaka* is addressing his God. "You have given the song to the bird, which it sings. In return it gives no more. You have given me only my voice and *swara* but I return much more - I sing. You have endowed the air with freedom and have not tied it down with limitations. You have placed so many burdens on my shoulders; I walk tottering and staggering, throwing them all off one by one, at last to arrive one day at your feet. I reach you after merging all the burdens into *mukti* (liberation). You have adorned the full moon with a smile and wealth, which it goes on scattering on this earth. You have given me so many sorrows and sufferings; but on the night of our meeting, I come to you after cleansing them with tears and transforming them into *ananda* (Joy)."

The Poet complains, "To everyone else you give but from me alone you expect." In the last five lines, however, he makes the point, "Whatever I can give with love, you walk down from your throne to come to me and accept it in your lap smilingly." He adds with a tremendous sense of pride, "In return you receive much more than what you give with your own hands."

The above statement points out not only to the difference between human beings and other living forces of Nature, it also gives an idea of human pursuits. There is yet another point made in the poem, namely, that human beings are blessed with the potential and are empowered to become what they ought to be. We do not come

into this world well versed with the *ragas*, but we are gifted with a voice that can be trained to make a variety of sounds. We are also bestowed with the sensitivity and capacity to judge the effects of different sounds and their combinations. We are able to create relationships between a variety of sounds and our emotions and intellectual faculties.

Similarly, we are capable of controlling our emotions, drawing a line between good and evil, right and wrong, the beautiful and the ugly, the obscene and the divine, and the mundane and the sublime. Whereas the bird, air and moonlight in the poem have no choices open to them, humans have a vast variety of pursuits to choose from. These pursuits can be, and often are, contradictory. On what factors, then, does this freedom of choice between contradictory pursuits depend?

### Education Liberates

The classical view of man is that he is both an angel and an animal. He has often to choose from contradictory inclinations. Some of the inclinations may be rooted in the irrational, which is stronger than the rational. Eventually, the choice will depend on the awareness of what constitutes good and evil and of the consequence of one choice against the other. Mere awareness of these factors is not sufficient -it should be accompanied by the will to act.

Unfortunately, present-day education does not prepare one to make the right kind of choices, which our old system of education did. Let us look into the ways *education* was defined in our culture. There is a classical saying, according to which, education that does not inculcate humility in the student is like a mother whose breast is filled with poison instead of milk. While talking to some of us once, Vinoba Bhave said that you should consider yourself truly educated only if doing service to others becomes an integral part of your personality. Or, true education is that which liberates one from all bondages, physical as well as mental. Gandhi wrote that real education must secure the student economic, social and spiritual freedom. Shri Shankaracharya defined peoples' education as, in essence, "the elimination of man's tendencies to evil". It is also said that the true object of education is to give man "the unity of truth".

None of the above definitions or for that matter objectives described by great cultures and teachers mention literacy and accumulation of information as the major

aim of education. Yet, modern education puts all its efforts and investment in collecting information and playing with it. It has become something like the pulp of a fruit, the juice of which has been totally extracted. This is not the occasion to go into the reasons behind this change - in fact aberration - in the thinking on education in this modern age. However, it might be of some use to reflect a bit on the question.

While talking about “the unity of truth”, Rabindranath Tagore once observed: “Formerly, when life was simple, all the different elements of man were in complete harmony. But then there came the separation of the intellect from the spiritual and physical; the school education put its entire emphasis on the intellectual and on the physical side of man. We devote our sole attention to giving children information, not knowing that by this emphasis we are accentuating a break between the intellectual, the physical and the spiritual life.” The spiritual world is not anything separate from this world. Matter and force have no meaning for us unless they are related to something that is our own, something infinitely personal, the nature of which is in human love, in the desirability of the good, and in the inexpressible beauty of Nature.

The irony is that hardly any educationist of standing, and who is in a position of influence, refutes these aims of education. In actuality, they even quote them as ideals in the preambles of their policy statements. And yet, the race continues in the single direction of physical growth and development. This is despite the fact that Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi were able to demonstrate on a practical scale that it is within our reach - both materially as well as morally - to plan and organise good wholesome education for all members of our society - children, men and women of all ages. The crux of the problem is that such a decision can be taken only if we have the will to change our approach and attitude towards development and our lifestyle.

### **Adult Education and its Responsibility towards Human Rights**

It is hard for me to make any real distinction between ‘education’ and ‘adult education’. Principles that apply to the education of children also apply to the education of adults. What else is college and university education if it is not adult education? Or is the ‘adult’ who is supposed to be the recipient of what is generally

called 'adult education', fundamentally different from the 'adult' who goes to college? Is it so only because he or she does not know how to read and write? If that is the criterion, then there must be something wrong somewhere. It is a fact that many a man and many a woman in our society who lack the ability to read and write are more educated and wise than the so-called educated.

As early as 1909, in his little book *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi had warned those who considered literacy as the sole purpose, or even the basis of adult education. "A peasant earns his bread honestly. He has ordinary knowledge of the world. He knows fairly well how he should behave towards his parents, his wife, his children and his fellow villagers. He understands and observes the rules of morality. But he cannot write his own name. What do you propose to do by giving him the knowledge of letters? Will you add an inch to his happiness?" For Gandhi, teaching, reading and writing was not the 'adult education' that people wanted or needed. Unfortunately, literacy still continues to be the only programme of adult education of official organisations working in this field.

In spite of all the emphasis given to literacy, I wonder what would be the proportion of people who have attended 'adult education' classes, to those who have on their own learnt to write letters to their family and friends, keep their account books and read their *Ramayana* or *Koran*, and newspaper. Figures given by concerned people in the field invariably include those who have been taught to write their names and put it down as their signatures - with some difficulty. That surely is not literacy, let alone adult education. Experience shows that despite the wish to learn to read and write, very few actually succeed in doing so, unless that skill proves to be of some use in improving the quality of their life and making them more independent. At the same time, there are skills, which if effectively imparted, would be useful and welcomed by the majority of the adult population. One of the tasks would be to improvise and choose tools that suit the culture of the people and are within their reach. Even if the above goal is accomplished, it will be only one of the essential components of what, in all honesty, can be called adult education. When Gandhi said that to the poor, God comes through bread, he meant that bread was the way and not the goal. For him the goal was God. To reach God, or whatever one calls the ultimate objective, the journey cannot end with bread alone. It should aim at improving the quality of life of society at large. The quality of life of the community

or the nation depends basically on the level of maturity of its members. Hence the other task of adult education, equally essential, is to nurture the spirit and capacity of the population to make mature and wise decisions on social matters, and the strength to implement them.

### Respect for the Fundamental Rights of all Human Beings

Elements that make a community friendly and creative are a sense of one's own social responsibility and the awareness and respect for the fundamental rights of all human beings. These two elements are interlinked. I would like to give an illustration to make the point. A has the right 'to freedom of thought, conscience and religion' (Article 18 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* of the United Nations). Nobody should be able to deprive A of that basic right, whatever its personal interpretation may be. However, A has also the responsibility to make absolutely certain that none of his or her actions, manifest or concealed, will in any way violate B's (or for that matter of anyone else's, living nearby or in any other part of the world) right to freedom of thought and conscience and the practice of religion. What it means is that in a sane society, rights and responsibilities merge into one another. One's freedom cannot be real freedom unless others are also equally free. It is this realisation that can give humility and wisdom. I think it is on account of this factor that Gandhi and many other wise people have not spoken as much on the question of *basic rights* as they have on *personal duties*. It seems sensible to say that if everyone performs one's duties conscientiously, the world will be a much better place to live in.

It was probably so at the time when most communities lived in more or less self-contained and self-contented units; when codes of behaviour were strictly followed by the dictates of traditions and the clergy. Now, when the old has nearly all disappeared and the new has not yet emerged, there is near chaos in thought, action and even expectations -personal as well as social. It is hard to reach a consensus on most matters. Again, let me give an illustration. It may not be the right way of putting it, but it will make the point and is relevant to adult education. Patriotism is considered one of the highest virtues of a citizen. Most national constitutions in the world have an article or two declaring that 'defence of the motherland is the sacred duty of every citizen', in the opinion of the State, if an act on the part of a citizen is

interpreted as a violation of this constitutional requirement, it is considered a punishable offence. In some cases, the punishment can be as severe as a death penalty.

Article 3 of the Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations says, "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person". Some religions also propagate non-killing as part of their doctrine. The *Sermon on the Mount* clearly commands, 'Thou shalt not kill'. Such religions, therefore, do not allow their members to join the armed forces. In other words, they are against the use of military weapons. There are several other groups who believe that as everyone should have the right to life, they should also not take anyone's life. They consider human life to be sacred and which, under no circumstances, should be destroyed. Believers of this kind of philosophy will not join military service. They will be considered traitors and will be punished if there is conscription in their country. Whereas the Human Rights Declaration allows them freedom of religious belief, the State punishes them. Even today, when the concept of one world has become universally accepted and the dynamics of nationalism is losing its hold, all States, the majority of parliaments of supposedly democratic countries, and the majority of the intelligentsia everywhere do not hesitate to inflict severe punishments on those who refuse to participate in establishments like the army, which involve killing of human beings.

### Right to Life

What do you do when someone's so-called duty comes in conflict with a fundamental right of another person? The problem of 'right to life' is not limited to militarism only. Killing men, women and children by bombs and bullets is a violation of human rights. It is one thing to be killed in a natural catastrophe but another thing altogether to be killed by forces that are man-made. Gross socio-economic disparity is not natural. It is the result of selfishness and greed of some people and of wrong structures and instruments of planning and administration. If a State allows it to happen, then it also should be held responsible in this matter. According to the Declaration of Human Rights, it is a violation of the right defined in Article 25, which is self-explanatory:

"Everyone has a right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including food, clothing, and housing and medical care and

necessary social services; and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

“Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.”

When the UN General Assembly adopted the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, there were fifty-eight member countries in the organisation. India was one of them. The adoption of the Declaration was unanimous. It unambiguously meant that the signatories were fully convinced that there are some fundamental rights, of which not a single one should be denied to any citizen of their respective countries.

Immediately after its adoption, the General Assembly forcefully called upon all member countries to publicise the text of the Declaration and “to cause it to be disseminated, displayed, read and expounded, particularly in schools and other educational institutions without distinction based on the status of countries or territories.” In other words, it was expected that the Declaration should have been ceaselessly utilised as an important instrument of education for people of all ages and for education for peace, equality, true freedom, sound development and national and international understanding.

I shall be surprised if one in ten teachers of our schools and colleges and institutions that are engaged in adult education knows about the Declaration and its profound educational significance. How many of the staff of social-work institutions and centres are taught and motivated to utilise the Declaration as a tool for education and development? I should, in all fairness, mention here that the Declaration in this context is a Declaration of agreement on principles that should be observed in a certain matter - not binding by law but observed by honour.

The Declaration covers almost every aspect of human concern. A quick look at it will show that it clearly defines the personal, civil and political rights of the individual. It also specifies the social, economic and cultural conditions required for building a just society. In my opinion, the Declaration does not go far enough in the direction of the principles and scenarios discussed earlier in the present paper. Nonetheless, it can be a good beginning. An imaginative treatment of the principles put forward in it can be used to radicalise the work of adult education. It will definitely be useful



to give people a wider perspective on social life and international mutuality at the peoples' level.

### Life-Long Education for the Good of All

The last point I wish to make here is even more important for building a sound approach to adult education. Education, whether it is of children or adults, is a continuous process. We should not assume that the education of the adult is a temporary phase in the life of the individual. It is not like running a school to which students come for a certain number of years. It is a movement. There can never be a time when human society will not feel the need for education as a continuous process of development.

The final question, however, is that of objectives. Do we want to remain trapped in the shallow materialistic race and let the world remain divided between the rich on one side and the vast majority of poor people on the other side; between those who enjoy all the privileges of modern life and who usurp others' rights on one side and those who are deprived of even the most basic human rights such as food, work and shelter, on the other side, whatever may be the reasons behind it? Or do we want to change the course of things in the direction of building a world in which people will exercise their responsibilities and fundamental rights wisely for the good of all? Adult education in its true sense can make a profound contribution in this direction.

## 12. CREATIVE, HENCE A PEACEFUL SOCIETY

*The kind of sadness and destruction we are experiencing all over the world is due to the increasing power of man's distorted intellect and selfish attitude. Economic or political steps may seem to bring change, but they are temporary. Change will be permanent only if steps other than those leading to physical indulgence and self-interest can be taken and practiced.*

*Music, literature and art provide those kinds of possibilities. Healthy human attitudes are built by them. Rhythm and harmony between the specific and the whole - one and many - is their gift to human kind.*

*Nandalal Bose*

### Conscientious Objectors - Making their own Decisions

Once, while travelling in Scandinavia in 1966, I had a meeting with nearly one hundred or so Swedish men of draft age in a training camp for Conscientious Objectors (CO). They had declared themselves against military service on the grounds of conscience and opted for alternative civilian work. That year nearly six hundred draftees had declared themselves as Conscientious Objectors. Towards the end of the meeting, I asked the group if they knew the total number of conscripts that year. "Over twenty-five thousand", one of them answered. Then I asked if they could explain why on earth only six hundred out of twenty-five thousand had opted for CO status, especially as life for a CO in Sweden was easier than that of a conscripted soldier -they could go home every week and their girl-friends and relatives could visit them every now and then?

The answer to my question came after the meeting, when about twelve of them suggested that we continue the discussion informally in the bar. In short, what came out of this discussion was, as one of them said, "The fact is that they are afraid of making their own decisions." Another said, "Most young men dislike military service, yet to write 'No' on the form is difficult. After a period of dilemma they just sign 'Yes' on the form, designed precisely in a manner that will put the draftee in that particular dilemma."

In countries with military-conscription, men of draft age receive their orders to personally report for registration - a constitutional requirement. A would-like-to-be a CO has to submit a special application for obtaining that status. The mechanism for obtaining CO status is such a deterrent that most young men decide to go for military service. It is the easiest way to escape the unpleasant experience of going through the exercise - filling up special forms, producing proof of their pacifist conviction and facing tribunals, etc. They console themselves by thinking that after all life in the military, especially in peace time, is not too bad, and its length is four months shorter than that for doing alternative service. The essence of all this is that in one case the decision is made *for you* and in the other *you* have to make *your own decision*.

I have described only one situation, i.e. with regard to compulsory military service in some countries. However, in all the countries of the world there are traditions, laws and practices that train and condition individuals not to be able to make their own decisions on many issues that they face in day-to-day life. The crux of the matter is that in spite of the claims of modern up-bringing and education - that it prepares the individual to face life sensibly and courageously - men and women are the least prepared to confront the challenges and dilemmas of life intelligently and courageously. Just like the young men who put 'Yes' on their draft forms when they faced the dilemma, most people do not know what they actually want and must do.

### Learn to Know Thyself

There is a beautiful anecdote from the seventh century philosopher Azid ibn Muhammad al Nasafi. "When Ali asked Mohammad, 'What am I to do that I may not waste my time?' The Prophet answered, '*Learn to know thyself.*'" The tragedy is that modern education spends most of its time and resources in teaching facts about the universe and going into space, etc., but totally ignores the need for *self-knowledge*, which alone can help in resolving the dilemmas that are presented at every new step one takes in life. The large majority of Swedish conscripts who could not take a concrete step, in spite of their dislike for military conscription, illustrate their ignorance about self as well as of the objective reality. They remained victims of the situation created by the State, using the narrow concept of nationalism and lack of a sound educational system. If they had learnt and practised the art of *knowing one's*

*self*, many more among the twenty-five thousand would have refused military service. The same applies to many other aspects of life in most regions of the world.

The awareness of the need for *self-knowledge* is further scuttled by the introduction of fear in several ways from the beginning of one's life as a child. Educational principles such as 'reward and punishment' and emphasis on performance do more harm than good to the growing individual. They create fear in several forms, e.g. fear of failure, fear of losing, fear of death. At the same time, I must say that it need not always be so. I remember the Greenham Common Protest Camp initiated by a small group of women, who felt desperate about the prospects of the U.S. cruise missiles being positioned in their country. These women acknowledged their fear of nuclear weapons and tried to gain confidence to take action. They said, "Fear is the starting point". Yet, in spite of having enough fear of nuclear weapons and their disastrous consequences, millions have never taken any such action in their lives. They have not realised that fear can be the starting point. The women of Greenham Common, however, transcended their fear and transformed it into action. For them the action they took was, "For building a life worth living."

### Real Education Alone Can Help

In our present context, I am convinced that education plays a very crucial role. What is education after all? Before dealing with this question, I would like to put before you a problem. For many years, scientists and so-called enlightened people have been talking about the question of environmental pollution. Take, for example, the degree of pollution in Delhi. In the last five years, Delhi's environment has becoming increasingly polluted. It is difficult to even see an object like a tree clearly in the late afternoon. A large number of people have started suffering from throat diseases, lung problems, etc. But neither the administration nor the public has done or has been able to do anything to overcome the problem. I am extremely impressed by the qualitative as well as totally ignore the unconscious, the *id*, which contains the passion and the source of all energy. According to Freud (1940), the *id* is unorganised, the *ego* organised; the *id* observes the pleasure principle, the *ego* the reality principle; the *id* is emotional, the *ego* rational; the *id* confirms to the primary processes which ignore differences and are oblivious of contradiction and of space and time, the *ego* conforms to the secondary processes which are analytical and

respect the principle of contradiction and categories of space and time. Under the impact of present-day educational practices and also the kind of upbringing, the *id*, the *unconscious*, does not only remain *unlived* but is also repressed.

Herbert Read explains it very well: "The whole ideal of education is intellectual. It tends to become even narrower than that, the ideal ... is scientific. Even in subjects that are described as 'liberal' - philosophy, literature and history -the spirit of teaching becomes increasingly 'objective' ... and all questions of 'value' are rigidly excluded...."

"I agree to a limited extent in discipline of the will as given in games education. I do not deplore the time given to games in our schools - on the contrary, it is often the only time well spent. But the moral discipline thus inculcated is of very limited duration - it has no depth, it does not involve the imagination or the emotional life in any profound sense. Games morality, the team spirit, has become indeed just one more social convention, though to be 'a good sport' generally means to behave like a human being rather than a conventional citizen - which means, in other words, to disregard 'morality'. But 'morality', in the sense of code of right and wrong, has to be distinguished from the moral values of good and evil. Morality itself has been intellectualised, codified, and made a matter of rational judgment instead of spontaneous action. Moral education

in the ancient world, when Plato and Aristotle handled the theme, meant the learning of something like good manners or good form, good doing and good making; it was a dynamic concept, a concept of mobility, of wisdom, of courage. ... But I am quite sure that our existing systems of education lead right away from social union, and dissolve the subtle bonds of love and fellowship, and leave us a nerve-ridden aggressive herd,"<sup>3</sup>

The present system of education is partitive. Instead of uniting, its tendency is to divide. Instead of fostering mutual aim and love, it generates competition and hatred. It is based on a caste system and hierarchical divisions, not only in age and professional groups, but also by deciding that certain tests should determine the right of an individual child to proceed beyond a particular stage. Within each group, similar tests and examinations determine the place of the individual child within the

group. The procedure has the effect of pitting child against child in an unhealthy struggle. This process accentuates the sense of social disunity.

Education which accentuates disunity cannot foster a sense of community, and where there is no sense of community, in other words, no sense of belonging; it cannot be expected to give any importance to social responsibility or values which recognise the need of human beings to live with each other in a community based on sharing and mutual help. Fullness of life cannot be realised in a disunited society, and where there is no evidence of fullness of life, there cannot be real knowledge of the integrated self.

I do not need to elaborate on the development of the individual's personality during the first three or four years of life. Freud, his followers and many other psychologists have convincingly pointed out some facts about the existence of aggressive and destructive instincts in human beings. We are not born with these instincts, but these are an inevitable consequence of the infant's adaptation to external reality. The strength of these instincts depend upon the degree of severity of the experience beginning from the time of birth and the early months and years of one's life. These experiences of infancy get buried in the unconscious and are *forgotten*, but they find their way under disguised forms in adult life. Unless these instincts have the right outlets at the right time, they turn inwards, with destructive effects. The period of infancy is a difficult one in the relationship of the infant with its parents, which again can result in problems of adjustment with the world around. But I shall not go further into that discussion here.

The issue is two-fold. One aspect is concerned with the need to liberate the personality from those fears and complexes that have accumulated during infancy and the early years of one's life. The other aspect is related to the orientation of the personality in the direction of social integrity. One demands healthy outlets for the energy, which has regressed into destructive tendencies, and the other requires growing in the direction of creativity and social good. Again, it is the task of education and educators - I do not leave out parents from this category - to ensure that the processes of growing up, and the environment in which the individual develops all his or her faculties, makes the journey of life fulfilling and socially constructive.

### Experiences from Child Art

As a teacher myself, I have observed that children who engage themselves in spontaneous creative activities are happier children than those who do well academically, but do not take part in either sports or creative activities such as craft-work, painting and music. I have also found that children's drawings that are the result of spontaneous activities are a direct evidence of their physiological and psychological disposition. These spontaneous activities of self-expression create a great deal of self-confidence, a healthy self-image in children. After all, self-expression is self-improvement and self-realisation.

Freedom to be close to Nature - to be one with it - is to gain one's own freedom to grow in fullness. Child art not only allows but also encourages the artist to enter the world of freedom, to the full fruition of all his gifts and talents, to attain true and stable happiness in adult life. Art leads the child out of himself or herself, and helps the individual in becoming an integral part of not only the community but also of the larger unity between Nature and human society.

From my own experience in the field of *child art and education*, I have seen that art activities in general also have a therapeutic quality, which liberates individuals, to a great extent, from their aggression and other repressed instincts accumulated during and from childhood. My experience with our rural population has also convinced me that people who live on land farming and gardening, people who earn their livelihood from art and handicrafts, making things of daily use for themselves and their communities, are, by and large, more disinclined towards war and war-like activities than those who do intellectual type of work in both rural and urban areas. This disinclination towards war in peasants and artisans can be attributed to two factors. The work that they do provides them with healthy outlets for their emotions and violent urges, probably because it sublimates their aggressive instincts. It may sound simplistic, but it is true that after engaging in weeding out unwanted growth in the field, one feels liberated from the violence one may feel within. Another important factor is that their activities make them one with Nature and the natural material they handle. However, this phenomenon is no longer as powerful as it was

before society became as materialistic as it is today. But the truth of the matter is still relevant and this can be observed through children.

### Education through Aesthetic Activities

The crucial point is that unless we as individuals consider ourselves as part of the *whole*, we cannot experience the *whole*, which is the ultimate aim of the human mind. And without that experience we cannot be happy and feel fulfilled. Art actually assists in creating the desired unity with the Universe. Let us see how the dynamics works.

I can give an endless number of examples of children's capacity to get totally absorbed, not only in the act of painting or doing any other art activity, but in the drama that is the subject matter of a picture or model. A child of ten once made a picture of a landscape with a bullock tied to a tree across a brook. A boy was trying to cross the brook to bring the animal to the shed as it had started raining. He was holding an umbrella. The boy slipped and fell down and the umbrella flew away. As this young artist was giving the finishing touches to his work of art, he suddenly kept it at a distance to have a good look at it. I was quietly observing him from a window. After placing the picture against a wall, he started moving backwards. His right hand assumed a position as if he had an umbrella in his hand. All of a sudden he acted as the falling boy and moved as if to catch an umbrella that had flown away. As an artist myself, and having known many a serious artist, I was able to understand the need of the boy to feel that what he was representing was his own reality.

According to Indian and Chinese aesthetics, it is of supreme importance that the maker should completely identify with the object that he or she makes. Writing on Chinese painting, Coomaraswamy states, "The Chinese artist does not merely observe but identifies with the landscape or whatever it may be that he will represent. The story is told of a famous painter of horses who was found one day in his studio rolling on his back like a horse, reminded that he might really become a horse; he ever afterwards painted only (the) Buddha. An icon is to be imitated not admired. In just the same way in India, the imager is required to identify himself in detail with the form to be represented. Such identification, indeed, is the final goal of any contemplation, reached only when the original distinction of subject breaks



down and there remains only the knowing, in which the knower and the known are merged.”

If what Coomaraswamy wrote seems at all strange to us (the Western and the Westernised), whose concept of knowledge is always objective, let us at least remember that an ‘identification’ was also presupposed in medieval European procedure; in Dante’s words, “He who would paint a figure, if he cannot be it, cannot draw it.”

At this juncture, I must make a point that I think is of some importance. Art here does not mean, what it is often understood to be. “Art today”, wrote Herbert Read, “is too often a wayward, partial, even perverse expression of universal harmony. It is too often but an expression of personal fantasies, of egoistic and aggressive impulses. It is prostituted to purposes which destroy aesthetic nature.” The idea here is to experience and develop the unity into which we are born, by learning from Nature, and in the process of creation, all the necessary information and knowledge is gathered. After all, creative activities are related to the external world. To make an efficient table, a pot, a house or music it is necessary to know arithmetic, even history and geography. The natural way to acquire that knowledge is through the unconscious discipline that is possible by aesthetic activities. It is this procedure that makes education an unconscious process and therefore, natural.

What I am trying to convey here is that to be able to experience and act, and act creatively and constructively, one has to be *predisposed* to taking certain steps in one’s life. These steps are not occasional acts in one’s life; one’s whole life is a series of these steps. I am asking no more than what Maria Montessori had suggested in her message to the International Congress against War and Militarism held in Paris in the month of August 1937. “If at some time the Child were to receive proper consideration and his immense possibilities were to be developed, then a Man might arise for whom there would be no need of encouragement to Disarmament and Resistance to War because his nature would be such that he could not Endure the state of degradation and of extreme moral corruption which makes possible any participation in war.”

Maria Montessori asks for a lifestyle and educational programme that would make individuals *predisposed* to a beautiful and peaceful society. It is exactly what

Nandalal Bose says in the quotation given at the beginning of this paper. *“Music, literature and art provide those possibilities which build healthy human attitudes. Rhythm and harmony between the specific and the whole - one and many - is their gift to humankind.”* One may call it a Utopia. Every time in history a revolutionary idea is born, it is first termed Utopia. But, haven’t we seen that only Utopias have succeeded?

### 13. EDUCATION FOR A PEACEFUL WORLD

#### A World without War

A former U.S. ambassador to Russia said in a speech last year: “We have gone on piling weapon upon weapon, missile upon missile ... like the victims of some sort of hypnotism, like men in a dream, like lemmings heading for the sea ...”

I want to ask a question: Why do we behave like lemmings? Why do we allow it to happen? Lord Mountbatten once asked: “How can we stand by and do nothing to prevent the destruction of our world. ... Do the frightening facts about the arms race, which show that we are rushing headlong towards a precipice, make any of those responsible for this disastrous course pull themselves together and reach for the brakes?” Mountbatten said that the answer is “NO”.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1981, the evening before the great demonstration against nuclear weapons took place in London, Nicholas Humphrey gave the Bronowsky lecture on the BBC. He said: “I want to ask why the answer can be ‘No’... As a psychologist I am concerned with the feelings, perceptions and motives of individual human beings. When a lemming runs, it is not pushed or pulled by outside forces; it runs to its destruction on its own four feet. It is as individuals that we can and might apply the brakes, and as individuals that we can and do fail. Responsibility for this disastrous course begins right here.”

Unfortunately, not enough people are either mentally prepared or willing to take the responsibility on themselves as individuals to apply the brakes, to say, “No, I shall not allow it”. As an educationist and artist craftsman, I want to explore the reasons behind this inability in individuals to act and be counted.

Before going into the main thesis of this paper, I want to point out that we have used fear as a major tool of motivation. In religion, in education and in politics, fear has played a central role. But it has not worked. On the contrary, it has deadened our sensitivity and our humanity. Fear destroys initiative and spontaneity. It is not a reliable factor to be used for motivating people to act against evil and injustice. I should explain what I mean by fear not being a reliable factor to be used for motivating people to act. Here I shall give an example.

In 1943, Bengal suffered from very severe floods. As student volunteers, some of us went to the nearby affected villages to do relief work. Water levels were rising rapidly when two of us reached a house, which already had two feet of water around it. There was a pair of bullocks and a cart in the yard. Two small children were scraping the last grains of rice from a bowl on the verandah, which would also soon be submerged under water. The family could load the cart with their possessions in five or six minutes but they had not done it when we reached them. We tried to persuade them to come with us to a safe place. There was no response whatsoever. The picture of that moment has been engraved so deeply in my mind that I can never forget it. There was death standing right in front of them, and by their side there were people to help - asking and persuading them to escape. Yet the family, especially the couple, young and strong in looks, and an old man, perhaps the grandfather of the children (who were too young to know what was happening), stood completely stunned with no wish left to move. Death for them had reached so close that all motivation to live had evaporated. We had to actually drag them away, which was easy enough because they had no resistance left in them. There seems to be a borderline somewhere in the middle of the scale of fear, which neutralises motivation, and beyond which there develops a mechanism against any thought of fear. At that point, one loses all initiative.

Nicholas Humphrey cites an experience. "When I was a child, we had an old pet tortoise called Ajax. One autumn Ajax, doubtless looking for a winter home, crawled unnoticed into the pile of wood and bracken my father was collecting for Guy Fawkes' Day. As days passed and more and more pieces of tinder were added to the pile, Ajax must have felt more and more secure; everyday he was getting greater protection from the frost and rain. On 5 November, the bonfire was lit and the tortoise was reduced to ashes." Are there some of us who still believe that the piling up of weapons- upon weapons adds to our security - that the dangers are nothing compared to the assurance they provide?

Recently, I studied the various activities and publications of the peace movements in different parts of the world. And I am extremely impressed by the quality of information these movements are providing to the experts as well as the public on the dangers of wars in general, and nuclear weapons in particular. It seems that today we have all the information, technical and political, about the destructibility

of war, and also of the means to communicate that information to the masses of population around the world. And, yet, when it comes to taking drastic action against the dangers that hang on our heads, most of us lack the courage to say as individuals: "I shall not allow it to happen".

### Moral Self-Discipline

The thesis is that a warless world cannot be created by providing information and developing intellectual virtues, but by fostering *moral self-discipline* and by adopting an *aesthetic approach to education* for developing man to his full humanity.

A person may have all the knowledge as to how to act in a given situation but be unable to control his or her impulses and desires. One may have all the understanding but be a creature of bad habits. Knowledge and self-discipline are, therefore, two different virtues. Intellectual virtue can be codified and generally accepted as a system of beliefs and customs, but moral virtue is the inner dynamics of our psychological make-up. It is necessary to explain the word *moral* that I have used here. Unfortunately, the concept of morality is largely attached to religion or understood as rationalistic or legalistic codification of right and wrong. But, morality is neither a mystery nor a judgement. It is the exercise of free choice. It is a spontaneous act of volition. Its basis is neither in faith nor in reason, but in a particular kind of discipline. The only problem is how to develop that kind of discipline and to ensure that the right choice will be made.

I agree with all those psychoanalysts who give great importance to awareness. However, their position is based on rationality. But I do not think that awareness can generate the *will to act*. As has been stated earlier - in spite of all the possible awareness, it is very hard to take an action, which is certain to cause pain. Have we not seen time and again that many a great intellectual and student of human behaviour and mind has failed to take action against gross human suffering and injustice for fear of reprisal from the establishment. How many of them have often sold their souls experience. Creative activities cannot be spontaneous without such a relationship. Nor can such relationships be created in an environment that is divisive - between man and man and between man and Nature - and therefore deadly.

Let nobody jump to the conclusion that I expect that once creative activities become the centre of education, a world without war will come into being and a new lifestyle will emerge. I am suggesting no such thing. What I wish to convey is this: to abolish war it is essential that men and women must be predisposed to peace, i.e., free and courageous enough to choose the path of love and unity with all human beings, instead of the path of hatred and fragmentation of human society.

What I have tried to convey here is that the path to that kind of development is of aesthetic discipline - the path of creativity. Unless more and more men and women are able to realise "the state of degradation and of extreme moral corruption which makes possible any participation in war", and are able to experience goodness and harmony within themselves, people will easily be deceived and put down. There is only one way to peace and that is to "condition" ourselves to peace and human unity right from the early years of our lives.

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### About Author

Devi Prasad graduated from Rabindranath Tagore's school in Santiniketan. He participated in the Quit India Struggle and Vinoba Bhave's Gramdan movement. In 1944, he joined Gandhiji's ashram, Sevagram, where he worked on child art and education and also edited *Nayee Talim* till 1962. He became Secretary General of War Resisters' International, London, and later its Chairman (1962-1975). He returned to his art activity as a potter in 1972 and continued working with the peace movement.

He came back to India in 1983 with his wife Bindu Prasad and established his pottery studio in New Delhi. Since then, he has been a teacher of pottery and has been instrumental in making studio pottery a viable Indian artistic activity. Devi Prasad has taught Ceramics and Peace Studies at various universities, including Viswa Bharati. He has several publications on subjects such as Gramdan, child art, Tagore's philosophy on education and art, peace education and the anti-war movement.