

Thoughts on Education

Vinoba





Thoughts on Education

By
VINOBA

Translated by
Marjorie Sykes

ISBN
978-93-83982-07-3

Published by
Sarva Seva Sangh Prakashan
Rajghat, Varanasi



Translator's Note

By far the greater part of the material translated in this book is taken from *Shikshan Vichar* (Hindi edition, 1956). A few selections have also been made from speeches of more recent date. Particulars of the sources of all extracts are given in an Appendix.

The title '*Thoughts on Education*' is intended to describe the nature of the book. It contains no fully worked-out system, no ready-made pattern of education. On the contrary, Vinoba utters repeated warning against the dangers which threaten education from systems, regulations and rules. The essays and speeches which are translated here are *occasional* writings in the best sense of the word; that is to say, they are called forth by, and designed for, particular and special *occasions*. They are talks given to particular groups of people in particular places at particular times; they were given in order to help those people, to suit *their* circumstances, to answer *their* questions, to meet *their* difficulties. These *Thoughts on Education* are the response of a true teacher to the doubts and needs of the real people who assembled to hear him. In other words, they are themselves illustrations of an educational principle which Vinoba often reiterates, the principle that teaching should be given only when it is called out by an actual situation, and that only teaching which is relevant to that situation should be given.

In one of the passages translated (No. 40) Vinoba describes how other books of his (*Gita-Pravachan*, *Swarajya-Shastra*, *Mool-Udyog-Katna*) have originated in his response to the needs of actual groups of people, such as his fellow-prisoners in jail. They are the record of a face-to-face teaching situation. *Thoughts on Education* has been made in the same kind of way, and because of that its message is alive and relevant for other men in other circumstances also.

An attempt has been made to group the extracts chosen according to their subject, but without doing violence to the context in which the teaching was given. In a very few cases (indicated in the Appendix on Sources) passages found in two separate letters or articles, but bearing on the same point, have been brought together. In one or two places local or topical references have been omitted; once or twice it has seemed desirable slightly to rearrange the order of sentences or phrases



in order to make clear for the reader what a gesture, or an inflection of the voice, would have made clear to the listener on the spot.

The collection is not by any means exhaustive. Vinoba has made many speeches on educational topics which have not been included. There is, for example, a moving and sensitive study of the spiritual foundations of human language, illustrated from the basic meanings of Sanskrit roots and their derivatives; this has been omitted with regret because it seems practically untranslatable. Many other talks are omitted because they repeat, with the varying emphasis suited to various audiences, the same basic ideas which have already found expression in the book.

The rigid, literal mind, looking for a logically coherent system, will easily find "inconsistencies" in Vinoba's varying expressions of his thought. But in education as in religion, "the letter kills, but the spirit gives life." Those who penetrate to the underlying unity of spirit which inspires this whole approach to education will find themselves inwardly sitting at the feet of the guru and sharing in the give-and-take, the stimulus and response, the deepening of understanding and clarifying of vision, which real teaching evokes. Vinoba has something greater to offer than a system; he has the insight of a sage and the spirit of a pioneer.

"A pioneer." It is significant that our favourite pictures of Gandhiji, those which convey to us most of his indomitable spirit, are those which show him, staff in hand, on the march. And Vinoba too is a pilgrim on the march. On the road, moving onward in the clear starlight before dawn, or sitting in some way-side field to watch and pray at the rising of the sun, he is Seeker and Teacher in one, the embodiment of his own ideal of the *sannyasi-guru*. In 1951, when he set out from Paunar on his pilgrimage to Delhi, there were young students with him who had just completed the Post-Basic course. For them, the life of the road became a walking university. Hundreds of men and women, old and young, "literate" and "illiterate," have had their lives touched by that university and have had at least a fleeting glimpse of what a living education might be. It is many years now since the great poet-teacher Rabindranath Tagore described his dream of a pilgrim-school. Vinoba has made the dream come true.

.



Contents

PRELUDE—KNOWLEDGE, SERVICE, JOY

PART I: THE NATURE OF EDUCATION

1. The Education of the Inward Man
2. Learning and Living
3. The Secret of Depth
4. The Tradition of Learning in India
5. Commentary on Learning
6. Self-Reliance and Freedom
7. Four Principles of Education
8. Fundamentals
9. Words and Realities
10. Perfect from Perfect

PART II: BASIC IDEAS OF NAI TALIM

11. The Function of Nai Talim
12. Compulsory Free Education
13. Nai Talim: A Seed Thought, not a System
14. Brahma-Vidya and Craft
15. Bread Labour and the New Society
16. The Threefold Vision of Nai Talim
17. The Social Purpose of Nai Talim

PART III: PRINCIPLES OF A NAI TALIM SYLLABUS

18. Education Must Never Grow Old
19. A Triple Educational Programme
20. Taking our Bearings
21. Education means Character-Building
22. Teaching
23. Some Common Misconceptions of Nai Talim
24. A Workshop School
25. The Educational Principles of a Basic Craft
26. The Choice of a Basic Craft



PART IV: ASPECTS OF THE SYLLABUS

- 27. Religious Teaching for Children
- 28. Truthfulness
- 29. Aspects of Character-Development
- 30. Two Notes on Language Teaching
- 31. Self-Knowledge and Science
- 32. The Teaching of Science
- 33. Tables without Tears, or, All about an Acre
- 34. The Approach to Social Studies
- 35. History is Dangerous!
- 36. The Materials of Drawing
- 37. The Place of Art in Education
- 38. The Charkha in Education
- 39. The Education of Young Children: Sense-Training

PART V: TEACHER AND STUDENT

- 40. Guru and Disciple: A Creative Relationship
- 41. "Only Teaching"
- 42. The Village Teacher
- 43. The *Vanaprasthi* as Teacher
- 44. The Family School
- 45. The Duties of Students
- 46. The High Calling of the Teacher

PART VI: SOME EDUCATIONAL ANOMALIES

- 47. Manu for Today
- 48. Why does Nai Talim not make Progress?
- 49. Queer Facts about Schools
- 50. Change the time of Holidays

PART VII: THE ORGANISATION OF EDUCATION

- 51. The Root Purpose of Education
- 52. A One-Hour School
- 53. Education in One Hour a Day
- 54. Village and Town Education
- 55. The Educational Community



56. Nai Talim and Government

PART VIII: EDUCATION AND PEACE

57. The Spirit of Non-Violence

58. Education, Democracy and Peace

59. The Growth of Fearlessness

APPENDIX—Sources of Materials used



Prelude

I

Knowledge

Thirty-Seven years ago I left college and set out to look for knowledge. In college they had taught me many things, but knowledge was not one of them. After I had left the college behind, the infinite gateways of knowledge were opened to me. To this day I follow with reverence after knowledge.

June 1953

II

Service

In *Nai Talim* knowledge and work are one, they come to us in the same guise. Of work comes knowledge, of knowledge comes fruitful work; of the union of knowledge and work comes the development of intelligence. Many of us do not yet realise that there is very little connection between true mental development and the mere amassing of information. It is enough if the children know how to obtain items of information when they have a use for them, and it is the task of education to teach them how. But truthfulness, practical skill, a readiness to serve—these are the big things. If this kind of education can be put into practice throughout India the gulf between high and low, rich and poor, will disappear; labour will receive the honour that is its due, society will be well served and well protected, and every village will be self-reliant.

III

Joy

In a *vidyalaya*, God should be revealed as joy. God has, to be sure, an infinite variety of forms, but among these we think chiefly of three: Truth, Intelligence, Bliss—*sat, chit, anand*. In the world of life and labour Truth is primary. In the caves of the hermits and the libraries of the learned, Intelligence is primary. But the *vidyalaya* takes the road of devotion, and all that is done there is done for the sake of Bliss.

•



PART I: THE NATURE OF EDUCATION



Chapter 1

The Education of the Inward Man

According to Rousseau, "we receive education from three sources, Nature, men and things. The spontaneous development of our organs and faculties constitutes the education of Nature, the use to which we are taught to put this development constitutes that given to us by men, and the acquirement of personal experience from surrounding objects constitutes that of things."

The growth of every part of the body to complete and harmonious maturity, while the senses become quick, alert and skillful, the development of the various intellectual powers — memory, reason, understanding, perseverance, logical argument — until they are keen and mature: according to Rousseau, all these inherent natural tendencies constitute the "education of nature." In other words, the "education of nature" means the inward growth of the body, mind and spirit, the development of the soul.

He gives the name "education of things" to all the familiarity with the substances and processes of the physical world which man gains from his environment and his experience in dealing with it.

The verbal, traditional education of the schools, which we receive by the deliberate effort of other men, and by means of which we learn practical wisdom in dealing with the outer world, by using the powers which the "education of nature" has given us, he designates "education by men." This is to say, he regards "education by men" as the link between the education of things and the education of nature.

It is of course a matter of no great importance that Rousseau divided education into so many parts. There is no necessary significance in his analysis; it is merely a question of convenience, of classifying things according to their different aspects. His three-fold division need not be taken as final. "Education by men" and "education by things" are both received from outside the man; only the "education of nature", one may say, is received from within. Why then should we not make two divisions only, "interior" and "exterior" education? The next step would be to say that since "exterior education" does not touch the springs of personality, and "interior education" does so, interior education alone can be considered the real, essential part of education.



What I have called "exterior education" is not got only from other men or from schools. There is a description in the Upanishads of how Satyakama Jabali was told by his guru to care for the cattle, and how he got his education while grazing them. Sometimes a bullock teaches him, sometimes a sparrow, sometimes a tree. As his knowledge grows his whole countenance begins to glow with life and energy. "My son," says his guru, "I see in your face the light of learning; whence came that learning?" And the boy replies: "अन्ये मनुष्येभ्यः—from other than human gurus." It is mere vanity to think that there is no education to be had except from men.

The truth is that man is being educated ceaselessly by everything in this infinite world. The stream is never blocked. There are "sermons in stones, books in the running brooks," and all created things are filled with the matter of learning. Trees, plants, flowers, rivers and mountains, the sky and the stars, each in its own fashion is giving its teaching to man. From the geometrical point to the geographical ocean, from the highest heavens to the secret depths of the earth, everything great and small is a *guru* to men. From the microscopes of learned scientists and from the plain sight of practical men, from the inspired insight of imaginative poets and from the wise vision of meditative philosophers, from things perceived and things unperceived, from all these things we men receive a never-ending education. This wide creation is an eternal, divine, wonderful and most holy book, placed open before us for our learning by the hand of God.

And yet, however deep be this Ganga of knowledge, man can take only so much of its water as his little vessel will hold. Therefore from this world that lies about us we can receive only that kind and amount of education whose seeds are contained within us. All of us learn many facts, read many books, hear many opinions, see many objects—how few of them remain in our minds!

It may be said, in short, that all that we have learned from the external world is forgotten, and in its place there remains only the mark of its influence. The facts, the details of learning, die away, their influence alone lives on. Because of this, as we said above, we can get from outside nothing that is not already within us. It is clear then that exterior education cannot stand alone and does not reach the essence, but is an external matter.

At this point a double difficulty raises its head. If we say that external education is illusory, we still need some external starting-point, some support or foundation on



which to weave the pattern of a living culture. If we say that external education is real, we have to face the fact that nothing remains of it but the influence of that fragment of it which harmonises with the inner development of the man. Either way a dilemma arises. We must, therefore, ask, what is the relationship between these two kinds of education?

This is not a new difficulty, nor is its resolution new. This sort of problem is raised in all the classical philosophies, and is resolved in the same way in all of them. The *Vedanta* asks: What is the connection between happiness and outward things? Here is the same dilemma. If you say that happiness is to be found in outward things, then it ought always to be found there, but this does not happen. When the mind is disturbed, it can find no happiness even in those things which usually give it pleasure. If, on the other hand, you say that happiness is not found in outward things, but is an attitude of mind, that is not borne out by experience. It is said that "if wishes were horses, beggars would ride," but it is the harsh truth that they do not ride. What then is the answer to the question?

Take another example from the *Nyaya Shastras*: What is the relationship between the clay and the pot? If you say that the clay and the pot are one, then go and draw water with your lump of clay! And if you say that the clay is one thing and the pot quite another, then give me back my clay and take your pot! What is the connection, then? A nice, polite, courtly way of saying that we do not know, of covering up our ignorance, is to call it an "indefinable" relationship. But even if the relationship is indefinable, if we judge that the clay is "real" and the pot "illusory", then in the parallel case we have to decide that interior education is complete in itself and the exterior is imperfect or illusory.

But as soon as we say this, another fundamental question is raised. Of the two aspects of education, then, "interior education," the development of the *atma*, which we say is the essence of the matter, goes on in the secret places of each man's heart. We can say nothing about it, still less can we make a syllabus for it, and even if we could, we could not put it into practice. But we have also decided that exterior education in general and formal education in particular, is incomplete and "unreal". It appears to be a case to fit the proverb: "No one will ever be given the horn of the hare". Are we to say that the whole educational movement is nothing but a display of stupidity?



The foregoing objection is not however so unanswerable or final as it seems. For when we say that exterior education is an incomplete thing, we do not mean that it is nothing at all. We mean that it *is* something, something proper and useful, but not complete. Education does not call anything new into being, but it is the means by which the sleeping essence is awakened. The uses of education are certainly not what people think them to be, but it does not follow that education is therefore of no use at all. Education cannot create, but it can remove obstacles.

Ruskin has made a similar analysis in the field of sculpture. The sculptor's work (he says) is not to create a statue from stone or clay, for the statue is already present, it is only hidden from view. The sculptor's work is to reveal it. In this way it becomes clear that even though education is an incomplete thing, it is a good and useful thing; and though its task may be confined to the removal of obstacles, it is not entirely unreal. With this in mind we spoke of education, above, as a *comparatively* unreal thing. It is an illusion to think that education in itself can develop the soul—in that sense it has very little reality.

We have however exaggerated the importance of education beyond all reason, and as a result our methods of education have become ridiculously unnatural, and very harmful. If a child appears to have a quick and retentive memory, he is pushed on excessively to learn. His father begins to wonder how much more can be rammed into his head, and the same methods are applied in school. On the other hand, if the child is slow he is deliberately neglected. The pupils who are recognized to be clever manage somehow until they reach college, but then very often they fall behind. If they do not lose ground in college, they fail to achieve anything worthwhile in after-life. This is because their immature minds have been loaded with too heavy a burden. When a horse is lively and runs well there is no need to whip it along. You can see that it is a good runner, so why not leave it alone? When you use the lash, what happens?—the horse shies and falls into the ditch, and brings down the rider with it. This kind of pressure is stupid and barbarous, and should be done away with altogether as a method of education.

The fact is that as soon as the pupil begins to feel: "Now I am learning something," you should understand that something is going wrong with the educational machinery. The principle has been recognized in the field of play. The best form of physical training, the best opportunity for the development of the body, is obtained by little children through their play. But the child himself never feels: "Now I



am training my body.” While he is playing the outside world does not exist for him. Children at play are absorbed in one undivided experience. They are not aware of comfort or discomfort, they feel neither hunger nor thirst, neither pain nor weariness. In a word, play is joy, not duty; it is pleasure, not physical training. This principle has to be applied to all kinds of learning. Instead of the artificial idea that education is a duty, we must foster the natural and inspiring idea that education is a joy. Is that what our children think today? So far are we from the feeling that education is a joy, that even the idea that education is a duty is hardly to be found nowadays. The current feeling among school-children today is the attitude of the slave—education is punishment. As soon as the restless energies of the child begin to develop, as soon as there is a glimmering of a tendency to independence, the family decide that it is time for him to be shut up in school. So that the meaning of school is—a place for shutting children up! The teachers who set their hands to this holy work are merely the warders of the city jails.

Whose fault is this? It is the fault of our idea of the nature of education, and of the system, or lack of system, that we have relied upon in consequence. Learning for the pupil must be an unconscious, natural process. All this education should be acquired in the same natural way as he learns his mother-tongue in babyhood. The little naked toddler doesn’t know the meaning of grammar. But he will never use the masculine form when he talks about his mother. So he knows the reality of grammar, even though he does not know the word. He may not know how to define grammatical terms, but he has grasped the essence of grammar.

Let us take care not to confuse ends with means. We use the means for the sake of the end, not the end for the means. In the last analysis, why do we teach Gautam’s *Nyaya-Sutra* or *Aristotle’s Logic*? Is it not so that thought may be ordered and deductions clear? When the lamp begins to go out even a child can make the deduction that “probably it has no oil in it.” The whole chain of reasoning is there in his mind. It is true that he cannot explain the five steps of the syllogism, but nevertheless the power of reasoning is there. The task of education is to provide occasions whereby this power may be continually nourished. All learning, all arts, all good qualities are latent in man, like seeds. Because we cannot see the seed, we have no right to say that it is not there.

To consider man as naturally evil is not only an insult to the whole human race, it is also a counsel of despair. If man is evil at the root, then there is no hope in



education. Since in logic it is impossible completely to eradicate the nature of anything, it follows that if the nature of man is radically evil, then all efforts to reform it will be vain, and one must let the animal tendencies have their way. In that case the true watchword of education must be: “Spare the rod and spoil the child.” And so the most thoughtful philosophers and educationists have accepted the principle that all the elements of wholeness are present as seed, as potential, in the human mind.

It has already been said that we should teach in such a way that it will never enter the children’s heads that they are being educated. If we are to achieve this it is needful that the teacher also should be free from the professional attitude—“Now I am teaching my pupils.” Unless the *guru* himself is a single-minded natural teacher, the pupils cannot learn naturally.

Whenever you catch yourself saying that “we are teaching by the Froebel, or Pestalozzi, or Montessori, method,” you may be quite sure that this is just empty verbiage, the meaningless copy of some method or other; it is a ghost, it has no life. Education is not like algebra; it is not a matter of applying the formula and getting the answer ready-made. “A well-spring within, overflowing naturally into the outer world”—that is education.

Even though this natural education may have its faults, it is workable. What must never be tolerated is the orderly doling out of ignorance by slaves who follow a fixed method. What are our *shastras*—our learned techniques—after all? Are they anything but systematized ignorance? Herbert Spencer, the educational philosopher, has commented that “education has no power to fashion an outstanding personality.” So much for our educational techniques. What value then can be attached to such techniques from a scientific point of view? These systems must be able to make the promise that was made to Arjuna: “By knowing this you will grow wise and your work will be fulfilled.” Any *shastra* that cannot give this undertaking is simply an organised effort to throw dust in the eyes of plain folk. Did Shakespeare study any theory of drama? Has any great poet or lover of poetry ever been made by learning by heart the rules of rhetoric? There is no great meaning or value in the words “system” and “method” in themselves. They are a delusion. Bhartrihari has this great and vital saying that “the real *shastras* are the life-histories of the best men.”

In this context that is the right interpretation.



May we then define this “undefinable” education as “that which, without method, builds itself up into a methodical and ordered whole, that which no *guru* can give and which nevertheless is given”? That is why those seers who were gifted with the deepest insight made it abundantly clear that they did not know how education is given. As is said in the *Kena Upanishad*, “He knows who says: we do not know.” Method, syllabus, time-table—these are all meaningless words. They are nothing but self-deception. Education is to be had only from living deeds. When some separate activity unconnected with the work of life, is given the name of education, this “education” has a poisonous and unhealthy influence on the mind, just as some foreign substance entering the body usually has evil consequences. Unless we are exercised in work we have no hunger for learning, and when learning is forced artificially upon a man who has no appetite for it, the digestive organs have no power to digest it. If wisdom were to be had by cramming books, the library cupboards would be wise indeed. But learning which is forcibly rammed in is not digested. “Mental dysentery” sets in and the intellectual powers are atrophied and die.

The principles which apply to the education of children apply also to adult education—that which shows men the way of the good life. In the sight of the great seers our human society is just a naked little toddler. It is said that a man who has no son cannot enter heaven; how then could Bhishma, the Great Teacher, be saved—for he remained a *brahmachari*, unmarried, till the end of his days? The answer to such riddles is that Bhishma was like a father to the whole community, so that all men were his sons. In the sight of the truly wise, then, folk-education is not different from children’s education. But today, like children’s education, it is made into a big bogey, and it is customary to say that the responsibility for it rests upon the educated.

As a matter of fact the responsibility for folk-education cannot be fastened upon any one individual. A man who should think that “folk-education depends on me” is like the grass-hopper who thought that he was holding up the sky. To say “I am the doer” is a sign of ignorance, not of wisdom. So long as that attitude, “I am the doer”, persists, there can be no true creativeness. Like all education, folk-education is “unreal”, a matter of removing obstacles. This is what Shri Sankaracharya had in mind in defining folk-education as, in essence, “the elimination of men’s tendencies to evil”.

The truth is this: the true teacher does not teach, yet one may educate oneself at his side; in just the same way the wise man does not create folk-culture, but it takes form naturally in his presence. The sun itself *gives* its light to no-one, yet all, in the



most natural and easy way, receive its light. It is this unattached action which the Gita calls “natural action”, and Manu gave to this same “natural action” the pleasing name of “action of the inward man”. The phrase “Education of the Inward Man” is based upon the same idea. The teachers who give this kind of education, who nourish the Inward Man, are the true *gurus* of society. They are the fathers of the community. The father by birth is not the true father, nor is the hireling *guru* the true *guru*. Those who have learned at the feet of a true *guru* alone deserve the honour of the classical description: “Possessing a Mother, a Father, a Teacher.” We are all like orphan children, after all; we are all ignorant. How many of us have been blessed with such a liberal education?



Chapter 2

Learning and Living

The queer teaching methods of today break up the unity of life into two fragments. A person spends the whole of his first fifteen or twenty years in getting an education, and the ordinary cares of life are kept at a distance; after that he throws away his education with his school-bag and the rest of his days are given entirely to living!

This system runs counter to Nature. Neither the child itself nor anyone else need give any thought to how a baby one cubit long is to become an adult of three and a half cubits. The body grows of itself, day by day, little by little, so that we hardly notice that it is growing. The child does not go to sleep at night two feet tall and wake in the morning two and a half feet tall! But in our present educational system a person has no responsibility at all in the affairs of life to the last day of a certain year; yet when the first day of the next year dawns he must be prepared to take full responsibility for his affairs. We seem to see nothing wrong in this, yet surely the jump from complete irresponsibility to complete responsibility is a regular Hanuman's Leap, and it is not surprising that bones should be broken in the attempt.

A young man of twenty, enthusiastically absorbed in his studies, builds all kinds of castles in the air: "I will serve my motherland as did Shivaji the Great. I will become a poet, a Valmiki. I will be a scientist like Newton". So, in countless ways, he dreams of the future. (It is true that only a very few young men get the chance to dream such dreams, but at present I am speaking of these lucky few.) What becomes of these dreams in later life? The poor fellow has to stoop to problems of housekeeping, of getting his daily bread. Up to now he has had no idea of what the responsibilities of life really mean; now they loom ahead like a mountain range. Shivaji the free outlaw of the jungles, Valmiki the sweet singer, Newton the great discoverer, must lay their dreams to rest and turn their attention to matters like getting a job, finding a wife, marrying off a daughter, and finally providing for a funeral. So much for the results of Hanuman's Leap.

I ask a matriculation student: "What are you going to do next?"—"What next? Oh, I shall go to College."—"You will go to College, of course, but afterwards? Have



you not thought about what you will do later?” — “Yes, I shall have to decide some time, but why bother about it now? We shall see later on.”

Three years go by, and we ask the same student the same question. “No,” he says, “I have not decided yet.” — “What do you mean? Have you not thought about it at all?” — “No, Sir, I haven’t. I have no idea what I shall do. But there is still a year and a half. We shall see later on.”

“We shall see later on”—the very phrase that he had used three years before. But his manner then was quite carefree. Now it is tinged with anxiety.

A year and a half later we meet the same student—now a married man—again. This time his face is troubled, his voice has lost its carefree ring. Sankaracharya’s famous question: “What next? What next? What next?” repeats itself insistently in his brain, and he can find no answer to it.

We put off the thought of death from day to day, but the day will come when we have to die. He is truly free who “dies before his death,” by facing the fact of death with open eyes. He who accepts the steady approach of death as part of experience will find death gentle. He who tries to escape from that experience, to tear it out of life, will find death sit like a nightmare on his shoulders. The blind man knows that there is a pillar in his path only when he strikes his head against it; the man who sees it ahead of him avoids the crash.

The responsibilities of life are not things to be feared; they are an essential part of our true happiness, for they keep us mindful of the natural laws of life which God has decreed, and help us to control our unlawful desires. And in so far as responsibility is full of joy, it is also full of the matter of education. It is certain that anything which is cut off from life-responsibilities thereby loses its power to teach. Many people have a fixed idea that if we awaken the minds of children to a sense of the responsibilities of living, we prematurely destroy their enjoyment of life. But surely, life would not be worth having at all if its realities could so destroy the joy of living?

The chief reason why most educationists hold so strongly to this wrong notion is that we have a mistaken conception of the meaning of life. We think of it in terms of conflict and struggle. But if this were true, if life were a terrible, weary struggle, we should neither introduce children to it nor continue to live it ourselves. If, on the other hand, life is worth living, our children must certainly be introduced to it, for without it



they will never get an education. If we could only learn from the hen in Aesop's Fable (who is held up to ridicule, but who really understood the true value of things) and cease to value pearls more highly than grains of millet, the conflicts of life would disappear and co-operation would take their place.

The Lord taught Arjuna the *Bhagavad Gita* on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. He did not first give him classes in the *Gita* and afterwards pack him off to the battle. Our teaching too must and can be given on the field of real life. Even that phrase "can be given" is not right; we ought to say rather that it is only on the field of life that it can be had at all. Arjuna was faced with a problem of practical conduct; the *Gita* was the answer to his problem, and he was able to absorb its teaching all right. That is real education. Set the children to work in the fields, and when a problem arises there give them whatever knowledge of cosmogony, or physics, or any other science, is needed to solve it. Set them to cook a meal, and as need arises teach them chemistry. In one word, let them live. The man who works in the practical world is continually learning something. Let little children have a chance to learn as he does. The only difference is that the children should have someone with them to guide them, as they need it; but that someone should not belong to a special category called "teacher", he should be a man living an ordinary life in the practical world. There will however be this difference between him and other productive workers, that the man who is to guide children should conduct his life intelligently and be capable of explaining the processes of life and work to the children as opportunity arises.

There is no need, then, for a separate profession of "teaching" nor for a creature called "a student", outside the ordinary run of humanity. When someone asks: "What are you doing?" the answer should not be: "I am learning," or "I am teaching." The answer should spring out of the practical business of living, and be given in terms of employment: "I am ploughing a field," or "I am weaving."

From this point of view Ram and Lakshman are our model students, and Visvamitra our model teacher. Visvamitra was busied with the sacrifices appropriate to his calling. He asked Dasarath to send Ram and Lakshman to protect them, and Dasarath sent the boys for that purpose. The boys themselves went with the knowledge that they were entrusted with responsible work, the protection of the sacrifices. It was a wonderful education for them, but if anyone had asked what they had done, they would not have said that they had been educated, they would have said that they had defended the sacrifice. Yet they got the education that they needed.



Education is a by-product of practical work. A man who follows any useful occupation is being educated by it, whether he knows it or not. Children ought to be educated in the same way. Adults learn the hard way, by their mistakes. Little children are not yet strong enough for that, so provision ought to be made for them to learn without too many mistakes in an atmosphere in which they may gradually grow to be self-reliant.

But this work ought not to be undertaken *merely* for the sake of the education it offers. Such an arrangement would encourage a kind of greed: Today I have learned this, tomorrow I shall learn that, and so on. We have to escape from that kind of illusion, and to regard a man who has so escaped as having received the very highest education. Suppose that my mother is ill; I shall learn a great deal by attending on her, but I ought not to attend on her merely out of greed for learning. I ought to regard this service of my mother as my sacred duty and privilege and I ought not to neglect it through any fear that the time spent in attending on her will be lost to some other business which I consider to be in a special sense “education.”

There are some educationists who would agree that useful work ought to have a place of primary importance in education, but they would admit it as a means of education only, and not as a means of livelihood. They take this position because they fear the evil associations of the phrase “filling the belly”, and to that extent they are right. But after all God has some purpose in giving man a belly. If the human race were to set itself, seriously and honestly, to the business of “filling the belly,” the greater part of the sorrow and sin of society would disappear. This is what Manu had in mind when he proclaimed that “he whose means of livelihood are pure is the truly pure man.” All learning is contained in learning to live “with hatred towards none.” It is man’s first duty to make his earthly pilgrimage in this spirit of goodwill, and it is only by fulfilling that duty that he can make any spiritual progress. Our sages have given the name *yagna* to the labour which benefits man in his bodily life. There is a famous verse by Vaman Pandit about the act of eating: “Know that this is not a mere filling of the belly, it is a sacrificial act.” So it is right that man should have the feeling that he is working for the sake of this earthly pilgrimage, but in his mind the phrase “earthly pilgrimage” should take on its highest meaning. It is not to be understood merely as the life-journey of his own three and a half cubits of flesh and blood; it is the earthly pilgrimage of all humanity. Man needs to hold on steadfastly to this equation: My



pilgrimage in the body is the service of humanity, *therefore* it is the worship of God. Each man should feel that his body ought to be fully used, to be used up, in this service of God.

Little children ought to feel this too, and to this end they must be allowed to share as fully as they can in the common life, and all their education must be built up around that as its chief centre, and given as it is needed.

If this is done, life will no longer consist of two broken fragments. The difficulties which arise from being thrust unprepared into responsible living will be avoided. There will be a constant, unconscious accumulation of knowledge, but men will not fall into the illusion of "education," and will be helped to attain that detachment of spirit in which a man labours, but does not lust after the fruits of his labour.



Chapter 3

The Secret of Depth

The quality of education is not to be measured by its length and breadth, but only by its depth. What counts in study is depth, not extent.

By extent of study I mean spending a great deal of time, hours together, over one's studies. By depth of study I mean spending a short time in complete concentration upon the subject. There is no refreshment to be had from ten or twelve hours in bed, if we are tossing and dreaming restlessly all the time; on the other hand a mere five or six hours of sleep, if it is deep, sound sleep, may refresh us completely. It is the same with study; concentration is the secret of study.

There is no knowledge without deep, concentrated study. Study that is merely extensive has a number of shortcomings. Strength is frittered away in pecking at too many subjects at the same time; nothing is properly grasped and fully mastered. Study ought to develop steadfastness of mind, reason, independence and power of thought. By power of thought I mean the opening of new buds of thought, new concepts, new enthusiasm, new zeal in the search for truth. These are all signs of a lively mind, and this liveliness of mind is suffocated by excessive quantities of study.

A line is defined in terms of two points. The road of life also is determined by two points; the first is, where we are; the second is, where we want to go. When these two points are known the direction of our lives is settled. We cannot mark out a road by wandering aimlessly, without first deciding our direction.

The secret of depth of study, then, is limited time, a definite subject, concentration of mind and a settled direction.



Chapter 4

The Tradition of Learning in India

There are two things which ought to be looked for from education.

The first is that education, which is given at the national expense, ought to be of use in practical affairs. A child ought to be so educated that he is competent to come forward and serve the world around him, and return ten-fold whatever he has received. Just as a seer of seed sown in a field gives a return of twenty-five seers, so the seeds of thought which are sown in the pupil's mind should give a ten-fold or twenty-fold return.

The second thing which we expect from education is that all the student's faculties should develop as a harmonious, integrated whole. The *rishis* and *munis* have described the many various powers of the mind: "The Lord of the world is infinite, infinite also is the Mind." When we begin to analyse, one by one, these tendencies and powers of the mind, we come to feel their rich variety. The Soul is Sat-Chit-Anand—Truth, Intelligence, Bliss. Under its influence the mind reflects the image of many qualities, and the infinite capacity of the Soul is revealed in the mind.

Wise men have taught us that the most important part of education is that by which we learn that we are other than our minds and bodies. I am not my body, but other than my body. The essential truth of myself is beautiful and pure, it is not stained by impurity. Faults occur by means of the body; my body becomes unclean, but my essential self does not become unclean. Education is the light of the soul, which is other than the body. A place where that light does not shine is not an educational institution, and there is no education there.

The highest of all powers is this power of self-knowledge. We ought to treat the mind like a kind of watch, which we can wear on the wrist and look at from time to time; if it goes wrong, we must be able to correct it. The real "I" is that which never goes wrong and never becomes unclean. I am the one to correct and cleanse this body, when it goes wrong and becomes soiled. It is only when this thought is firmly grasped that we can reach a right view of education.

In the old days, if a student sought out a *guru* merely for the sake of learning, he was called a *vidya-snatak*—one who is master only of learning. He was not



considered a complete master; for his education to be complete, he had also to be a *vrata-snatak*—to obtain the victory over himself. A *vrata- snatak* was one who had learnt the art of self-mastery and self-control.

When a student who has undergone this discipline and passed these tests enters upon life, he does so with manliness and full self-confidence. He need humble his head before none, but can go forward with good cheer. When he goes out into the world in this heroic spirit, "the earth herself bows down before him."

This does not mean that such a man is arrogant. He will certainly be of humble mind. A man who has gained some true knowledge understands how infinite knowledge is and what a small fragment of it he has mastered. The true scholar has both learning and humility in a measure which the man without learning can never know, for the latter has no conception of the range and extent of knowledge. The man who has looked upon the vast ocean of knowledge understands well that his own learning is only one drop of water from a boundless and endless sea, and that his whole life must be spent in the search for knowledge. No matter how much he may learn, the world will still be full of things he does not know. The more fully aware he is of this truth, the greater will be his humility.

In Sanskrit education is called *vinaya*, the name that is also given to the virtue of humility. For this reason, that humility is the gateway to all other virtues. It is the means by which the other powers of man are developed. The man who is modest, humble, lowly in mind, is able to grasp and hold fast to all virtue, all wisdom, all good things wherever they may be found. The great quality of humility is this power to hold fast to virtue, and therefore our ancestors centred our attention on humility. They taught that only those scholars who themselves remained humble could truly guide the people.

But the student must be not only humble minded but also strong of purpose, self-reliant, courageous and fearless. He must have both intelligence and steadfastness. A student ought to enter upon life like a conquering hero. The scriptures put these words into the mouth of a student who has completed his study of the *Vedas*, and is returning to the world: "Let the four quarters of the earth bow before me!" When a man has knowledge of this quality, it will enable him to serve the whole world.



Human beings are not so made that we can eat today and feel satisfied two days later. The enjoyment and the satisfaction come at the very moment of eating. It is the same with knowledge. When true knowledge comes our way, the face lights up with pleasure. As the students experience this happiness of the spirit, their appetite for knowledge goes on increasing. They never feel that they are wasting time while they are learning.

A man who has once tasted the real flavour of knowledge can never give it up. The advice of the *rishi* is that we should fulfil all our duties, and also at the same time study and teach. "Carry out your religious observances," he says, "and also study and teach. Speak the truth, and also study and teach. Undertake austerities, and also study and teach."—Serve the people, and also study and teach. Tend the (altar) fire, and also study and teach. Fulfil all the duties which fall to the lot of a householder, but along with each of them you are expected, and rightly, to study and to teach. For the delights of knowledge which a man tastes in his student days grow greater as the years pass.

Today, however, we find that the habit of study is lacking in our country. We live in an ancient land, and here from ancient times there has been an unbroken tradition of study. This tradition remained unbroken until yesterday. At a time when the rest of the world lay in the darkness of ignorance, learning had been established here. The inhabitants of this land used to rise two hours before sunrise. "In the morning they did not sleep, they studied." Today, there are very few who study. The root cause of this weakness is to be found in our educational system. When a student has been subjected to it for ten or fifteen years, his whole interest in knowledge withers away. His powers of initiative are weakened. You can see for yourselves that when children go to school their bright eyes grow dull, their strong bodies become weak, and the vigour of their minds is dimmed. The latent powers of the intellect get no chance to develop. Worst of all, the life of the spirit is deadened; the light of the knowledge of the Self—that we are other than our bodies—is denied to them, and they never learn to control their senses. What education then do they get?

It gives me no pleasure to say this; on the contrary it makes me very sad to think how learning once flourished in our country, and to what a state we have fallen today. What a beautiful description of India Rabindranath Tagore has written!

"O Motherland! in thee the whole world takes delight.

First from thy forest-dwellings rose the sacred songs;



First from thy dawning spread the light

Of noble thoughts and deeds, in epic verse told.”

With such memories of the glory of our motherland, it is a grief to me to think of what passes for education today.



Chapter 5

Commentary on Learning

It has just been said that Vinoba is a teacher. There is some truth in this, but it would be much better to call me a student. I am a student by nature; I feel no need of any external stimulus to make me study. I have spent the greater part of my life in practical work, but I find, nevertheless, that my intellect keeps its freshness.

I think that the best way to keep the mind fresh is to take regular physical exercise in the open air. As the sun-scorched earth is ready for the rain, so is the mind ever ready to grasp at knowledge. Heated by physical labour, the mind eagerly welcomes knowledge, and the knowledge it obtains bears fruit. It is not our business to fill our students' heads with information, but to arouse their thirst for knowledge, and to see that they develop the power to acquire it for themselves. Teacher and pupil both learn by their contact one with the other. Both are students.

Only life is education. "Calories" cannot be calculated properly on paper, but only as their effects are seen in the body. So, true education is that which is experienced, tasted and digested, so that it becomes one with the blood. What can be counted and recorded is not education. Education cannot be doled out; it cannot be weighed and measured.

I have no real, sound knowledge of the subjects in which I have had to take examinations, but I do know well things in which I have never been examined. My own experience, therefore, does not lead me to attach any value to examinations. Examinations are exactly like the purgatives that people take to cleanse the stomach—one takes an examination and all one's knowledge is cleared out! There is no reason why we should fall into this trap which the pedagogues have set for us.

In the Upanishads, the praises of ignorance are sung side by side with the praises of knowledge. Man needs not only knowledge but ignorance too. Knowledge alone, or ignorance alone, leads him into darkness. But the union of fitting knowledge with fitting ignorance is filled with the nectar of eternity. Look at it like this: the world is so filled with the matter of knowledge that men would go mad if they were to attempt to cram all of it into their heads. The ability to forget is just as necessary to us as the ability to remember. I am displeased when children are made to stand up and gabble



some thing or other that they have learned. I call it a gramophone, for it is a purely mechanical process, and there is no intelligence in it. If they were using their intelligence, they would leave something out, or add something on.



Chapter 6

Self-reliance and Freedom

Boys are taught various bits of information in school nowadays, but they are not taught how to acquire knowledge independently for themselves.

Many people would agree about the importance of self-reliance in education. Self-reliance, for me, has a very profound meaning. It is not merely that the child should be taught some handicraft, some manual skill by which he may support himself. There must of course be manual labour, everyone must learn how to use his hands. If the whole population were to take up some kind of handicraft, it would bring all sorts of benefits—class divisions would be overcome, production would rise, prosperity and health would improve. So that, at the very least, this measure of self-sufficiency must form part of educational programme. But self-sufficiency as I understand it involves much more than that.

It seems to me that education must be of such a quality that it will train students in intellectual self-reliance and make them independent thinkers. If this were to become the chief aim of learning, the whole process of learning would be transformed. The present school syllabus contains a multiplicity of languages and subjects, and the student feels that in every one of these he needs the teacher's help for years together. But a student should be so taught that he is capable of going forward and acquiring knowledge for himself. There is an infinite sum of knowledge in the world, and each one needs some finite portion of it for the conduct of his affairs. But it is a mistake to think that this life-knowledge can be had in any school. Life-knowledge can only be had from life. The task of the school is to awaken in its pupils the power to learn from life.

Most parents are anxious for their boys to complete the school course so that they can get a salaried job and lead an easy life. This however is a wrong way of looking at education. Learning has value in its own right. The purpose of learning is freedom—and freedom is another word for what we have called Self-reliance.

Self-reliance means freedom from dependence on others, or on any external support. A man who has true learning is truly free and independent. The first and least part of this self-sufficiency is that the body must be educated and made skilled in a



craft. A second, and a very important, part of it is the ability to acquire new knowledge for oneself. There is a third essential element in freedom, and this also is a part of education. Freedom implies not only independence of other people but also independence of one's own moods and impulses. The man who is a slave to his senses and cannot keep his impulses under control is neither free nor self-sufficient. Temperance, vows and service therefore have their place in education, for it is by such means that this third aspect of freedom can be learned.

Self-sufficiency, then, has three meanings. The first is that one should not depend upon others for one's daily bread. The second is that one should have developed the power to acquire knowledge for oneself. The third is that a man should be able to rule himself, to control his senses and his thoughts. Slavery of the body is wrong. The body falls into slavery for the sake of the belly; therefore a free man must know how to earn his living through handicraft. Slavery of the mind is wrong. If a man cannot think for himself and reach an independent judgment, his mind is enslaved; a free man must have acquired the power of independent thought. Slavery of the emotions and the senses is also wrong, and it is an essential part of education to overcome their tyranny.

Parents ought to keep these three principles in mind when thinking about their children's education. The parents' whole duty has not been done when the boys have got jobs and a marriage has been arranged. They will find their true satisfaction in seeing their children happy, skilled and respected by all their neighbours.



Chapter 7

Four principles of Education

I agreed with great pleasure to the suggestion that I should meet you here, because I am to this day both a student and teacher. I continue to study, and to study deeply, as I travel on my work of *Bhoo-dan* and *Gram-dan*. I am like a boy at the University who puts his whole heart into his learning. At the same time I am teaching, for this task of explaining myself to the public is a kind of teaching. In addition, I always have some plan on hand for teaching those who are my companions on my journey. I can claim then that I have plenty of practical experience. In fact, there is not one iota of mere theory in anything that I have written on the subject of education—it is all based on experience.

Out of this experience I have come to accept for myself, as the first rule of education, that the student should be made self-sufficient as quickly as possible.

Now it is certainly one aspect of self-sufficiency, and a fundamental one, that he should be able to earn his living by his own labour. Unless he can do that, he will be of no use to society, but merely a burden upon it. So that economic self-sufficiency is and must be one of the aims of education. However it is not the aspect of self-sufficiency which is upper-most in my mind just now.

It is the task of education to make the student self-sufficient in the matter of acquiring knowledge. He must be made capable of gaining knowledge both by his own experiments and by using the experience of others. It reflects no credit on the teacher—it is in fact a discredit—that the student should remain in tutelage for twelve or fifteen years. We have a saying in Sanskrit that “when a son has attained the age of sixteen he should be treated as a friend.” In the sixteenth year, or after the completion of fifteen years of age.

You remember how Visvamitra, in the *Ramayana*, came to Dasarath to ask him for the services of Ramchandra. “I want Ram and Lakshman to protect my sacrifices,” he said. Dasarath did not want to let Ram go; just notice the reason he found for saying No. What does he reply?—“My beloved Ram is not yet sixteen years old; how then can I send him with you?” Then Vasishta explained to him that his son would get from Visvamitra the very best kind of education, and that he was asking for him for the sake



of his education. I have no need to follow the story further. I simply want to illustrate the idea that a boy of sixteen should be capable of getting knowledge by his own efforts. By that time he should have learned how to use a dictionary, a grammar, an encyclopaedia, and other reference books, to read maps, diagrams, and guide-books; he should be able to read standard books in his own tongue, and understand them, and he should be able to learn new languages by his own efforts. He should be able to make his own experiments and so increase his knowledge of the world of Nature. The water beneath the soil has to be dug for; the springs of knowledge too must be dug for by penetrating the secrets of society and of the physical universe.

It is certainly possible to teach children a number of languages in school, but let us make sure that we give them such a mastery of one language that they get the understanding of linguistic principles by which they can learn other languages for themselves. Let us teach them how to teach themselves. The question “What shall we teach our students?” is raised in the Upanishads, and the answer given is that we should teach them “the Veda of Vedas.” We teach the Vedas, but omit the Bible; we teach the Bible, but omit the Quran; we teach the Quran, but omit the Dhammapada; we teach the Dhammapada, but omit science; we teach science, but omit political economy. Where are we to stop? No, we have to give them instead the Veda of Vedas, that is to say, the power to study the Vedas, and everything else, for themselves. We have to put into their hands the key to knowledge.

Friends, you all know very well that the things you set children to learn are bound to be forgotten, that they are not worth remembering in full. And because you know this, you allow them to pass if they get thirty-three per cent of the marks. If someone were to come and ask you for a job as cook, saying that he could manage to make thirty or forty good *chappatties* out of every hundred, but that the rest would be bad, would you decide to employ him? A boy who gets thirty-three per cent of the marks is sixty-seven per cent a failure, but we have to pass him because we know that he cannot remember the things we have taught him. It is of no use for him to remember them, and so we give him so much latitude, so much margin.

Now I want the boy’s knowledge to be one hundred per cent. He must feel quite sure that a thing is so. If he feels that “perhaps it is so,” “very possibly it is so,” that is not knowledge. The man who really knows can face the world with confidence, like a lion. In former times, when the day came for a student to leave his *guru’s* house and



go out into society, he was given a mantra. It was the token that his education was complete, and with it he entered the world. This is what it says:

"The four quarters of the world lie before me, and I am the Lord of creation. I am the maker, and to this clay I will give what form I please. For this is mindless matter, and I who have mind am able to give form to the mindless."

On the completion of his education a student ought to have that kind of confidence in his own powers. This is what matters, not a supply of miscellaneous information. The purpose of education is to train men to get the information which they need for themselves. This is my definition of education: education means the attainment of self-sufficiency in learning.

The second matter is a topic which I suggested for consideration in my message to the Basic Education Conference recently held at Turki in Bihar, in which some of you probably took part. At present Education and Defence—the protection of the people—are two separate departments of Government. But in a non-violent society, education is itself the means of defence, and the better our education, the less we should need to spend on police and on the army. Whenever we think of education, we think of it as a spending department, and we lament that in this poor country of ours there is very little money to spend on it. But the fact is that in this poor country of ours more than half the budget is swallowed up by the military.

In Gandhiji's time, when we made our claim for *swaraj*, we used to picture the benefits which were to spring from it. One of them was that, when *swaraj* was won, there would no longer be any need to spend more than sixty crores on the army. (Was it sixty crores?—I don't remember.) "After *swaraj*," we used to say, "we shall cut down the military budget by half. The English are a foreign Government, and do not trust the people, so they have to keep a large army. But when the country is free, we shall halve this expense." What has happened to that promise? All that planning of ours has gone for nothing. We do not make our own plans nowadays; Pakistan makes them for us. If Pakistan increases her military expenditure, then we do the same. We are not free to plan for ourselves, we have not yet won our independence in that field. America is in the same condition; she is spending a tremendous amount on her army, because she fears that Russia will get ahead of her. In other words, America's planning is being done by Russia, and Russia's planning by America. In the same way, Pakistan's planning is



being done by India. Pakistan says: "India has such a big army, what is going to happen to us?" In the world of today, no country is free to plan for itself.

True knowledge is a weapon before which all other weapons fail. Education ought to be able to claim that it can protect the country by the power of non-violence. An education which does not possess that power is not a queen, but a slave, and will never win her freedom.

Education has therefore a social and national goal, as well as an individual goal. I have already explained that the goal of education for the individual is the attainment of self-sufficiency in learning. The goal of education for the nation, for humanity, must be freedom from fear, not only for this country, but for the world-wide community of man. It is our duty to think out the ways and means of reaching this goal; this is the greatest task before all of us today. Consider for example the immense amount of litigation that goes on. Why should there be so many disputes? And when disputes do arise, why cannot people meet and settle their difference among themselves? The reason, so it seems to me, is the dearth of the right kind of education. The only right kind of education is that which strengthens the forces of love and peace.

People have got into the habit of thinking of Basic Education if it were one method or system of education among others, like the Montessori Method or the "Project Method." But it is not a matter of method or technique; Basic Education stands for a new outlook, a new approach. The fountainhead of all the world's conflicts is that knowledge has been separated from work. They have been separated in thought by a faulty psychology; they have been separated in life by a faulty sociology; they have been assigned different market values by a faulty economics.

The third principle of education, to my mind, is this: that work and knowledge must never be separated. The man who keeps them apart does not understand what knowledge is. No real knowledge at all is to be had without action; there is no such thing as knowledge divorced from action. There is only one exception to this rule, and that is the knowledge that "I am, I exist"; the knowledge of the Self *is* divorced from action. It is beyond action. But all other knowledge, except this knowledge of one's self-hood, is linked with action. There is no knowledge without action and no action without knowledge. The two are one. This is not a question of technique, but of fundamental psychological principle. People come to me and say: "Look here, Bhave. About this Basic Education of yours—if the children have to work for two or three



hours every day, how are they going to learn anything?" It seems to me an extraordinary question. What we should really be asking is how they are ever going to learn anything if they spend three or four hours a day poring over books. It is amazing to think what three or four hours of reading really means. In three hours a boy might read sixty or seventy, perhaps eighty, pages of a book—drink in, as it were, all that ocean of learning—but does he really *learn* anything? The muscles of his eyes no doubt get some exercise. We never seem to have any doubt that by reading he is obtaining knowledge, and that reading is in fact the direct road to knowledge. It is nothing of the sort; on the contrary, book-learning is like a curtain that shuts us off from the world of real things. We do not learn what a mango is by reading about it, but by eating one. In his exposition of this point, Sankaracharya took *gur* as his example. Talking, reading, pictures, may all be of some help, but the simple, direct way to a knowledge of *gur* is to put it into one's mouth. The man who crushes the sugar-cane, extracts the juice, strains it, makes the *gur*, and finally eats it, has a real knowledge of *gur*. Does the time he gives to this work prevent him from learning?

There is a book called "The A. B. C. of Bee-keeping," in which every possible piece of information about bee-keeping is to be found. Having read it, I thought: "Now we can do something; let us get hold of some bees." But I did not get them without many days of running hither and thither, and when I had got them, it took two full months more to win their confidence. Everything was written in the book, and the book was certainly of some help, but the main high road to knowledge is direct action. Reading and study are supplementary to action, they are the accessory tools. It is like saying "That man has no spectacles, how can he see?" The eyes, not the spectacles, are the organ of sight; the spectacles are merely accessories, but if the eyes are weak the spectacles can certainly assist them. Eyes are primary, spectacles are secondary. Books, like spectacles, are secondary; they are not the most important instrument of knowledge.

This fear, that the children will learn nothing if the time spent on books is reduced, is not well-founded. It is based on a misunderstanding of psychological laws. The truth is that work and knowledge go together.

I said just now that the separation of learning from labour results also in social injustice. Some people are given nothing but learning to do, and others nothing but hard labour, and as a result society is split in two. Those who earn their bread by manual labour form one social class, and those who do only intellectual work form



another, and the resulting cleavage is a grave social injustice. I mentioned also the economic injustice. Manual labourers are paid twelve annas or one rupee a day, intellectual workers are paid twenty-five or thirty rupees. A very great injustice has been done by rating the value of manual and intellectual work so differently. This three-fold wrong—wrong mental attitudes, social cleavages, discrimination in the rewards of labour—has to be done away with; and it is this, this abolition of injustice, that must be the goal of our education. That is my third point, and it is absolutely fundamental.

Even if these differences are done away with, however, that will not in itself bring about a happy society. This brings me to a fourth matter of basic educational principle. What, in the last analysis, is the right human way of living? In my view the answer is this: that the more closely we can live in harmony with Nature, the greater our welfare and happiness will be; the more we are cut off from Nature, the less contented we shall be. I have said elsewhere that Sarvodaya economics is based on two great principles. One is that the smallest possible percentage of our population should be employed in agriculture, and the largest possible percentage in other productive kinds of work. The second principle is that the life of the whole population should be closely in touch with agriculture. If a single person is cut off from the life of the fields, his life will lack completeness, and to that extent it will not be wholly satisfying. Everyone needs to be in touch with the land, to be rooted in the soil. Human lives are like trees, which cannot live if they are cut off from the soil which nourishes them. Therefore, everyone must have the opportunity to tend the soil, but at the same time the business of agriculture must be done so efficiently that the smallest possible number of people are tied entirely to the land. These are the two principles; they may seem to be mutually contradictory, but they are both parts of Sarvodaya. The production of food is only one part of the life of man, and no more time or labour must be spent on it than is necessary. Real human well-being will be reached only when the greater part of life can be given to all the other interests that make up the world of man. At the same time it is a basic need of humanity to be in touch with the earth, and any nation or civilisation which is cut off from agriculture slowly but surely loses its vigour and degenerates.

True education, then, is bound up with Nature; how can any such education be carried on in our large cities? It is a great misfortune for the cities to be cut off from agriculture, for human life could suffer no greater loss. When I had been in jail I was in



many ways very happy; everyone got the impression that I was thoroughly enjoying myself. One day the jailor said to me: "You seem to be very content; is there nothing that you miss?" "Yes, Sir," I said, "there is one thing." "What can it be, I wonder?" he asked, no doubt saying to himself that this Bhave seems to have not a care in the world. "Why not use your own wits and try to find out?" I said. "I will give you a week to do it." He thought it over for a week, poor fellow, and then he came back to me and said, "I don't know what it is that you miss." "It is this," I told him. "I am very well content with everything else, but I have this great grief, that my eyes can never see the blessed sight of sunrise and sunset."

How much joy, and how much blessing, there is in being able to go out in the open air, among the natural objects of creation! City-dwellers cannot know this joy, so what do they do, poor things?—they get a flower-pot and put paper flowers in it, and hang pictures of sunrise and sunset on the walls. So artificial has their life become, that at night they cannot see the stars. When a German philosopher was asked what are the greatest blessings of life, he replied: "The starry heavens above and the moral law within." How can our cities be blessed with the sight of the starry heavens, in the midst of all their artificial lighting? What is left, I sometimes wonder, for these people to burn? They have burned up even the darkness, the darkness of night, which was given to man for peace, and rest, and quiet thought. Wherever one turns there are lights, lights, lights—what greater vandalism could there be?

There is no true joy for the man whose life is cut off from the heavens above and the world of Nature around. This means that the task before education is to change the whole system of values and way of life that is current in our cities. How this is to be done is not a question for you and me alone, but for the whole of humanity.

When people ask me what kind of education should be planned for the towns, I feel very sorry for them. It is like asking how we should teach the blind. In planning for the blind one has to remember with pity that one great instrument of knowledge is lacking to them. It is the same with the crippled, the homeless, the mentally feeble; one must make some plan for them, out of sheer pity, but no matter what we do their great disability will remain. City children also suffer from a heavy disability, in that they have so little contact with Nature, and the plans we make for them must take account of that fact, and by means of education bring them into touch with Nature so far as we can.



In the Veda, the God Indra is called Purandarah—he who breaks down and destroys the cities. The millions who inhabit the cities push and jostle together there for money, like a cloud of insects buzzing round a heap of dung to feed in the grain it contains. Because there is no room to live, one storey is piled upon another. Krushchev commented in Calcutta the other day that such high buildings would be a danger in this atomic age. What a state of affairs. The more our education can be linked with a simple, natural life, the better it will be. That must be our aim, and this artificial way of life must be done away with.

I have one more thing to say, which follows if we understand rightly the meaning of “a natural life.” The progress of science has brought the whole world face to face with a new problem. Large numbers of the children that were born to previous generations died before they were three years old, and this greatly relieved the pressure on the resources of humanity. Now, thanks to science, many children do not die in infancy; our knowledge of health has increased so that great majority of them grow up to maturity. In consequence the world has a population problem, and a very serious one. I suggest that the best solution of this problem is to be found in intimate contact with Nature. When a man lives this natural life he gets so much satisfaction from it, so much real joy, that he has no need for other and artificial pleasures. I am saying this from my own experience. The reading of sacred books, and the company of saintly men, is certainly a great help towards a life of *brahmacharya* (self-control); but to live a natural life in the open air, and to work bare-bodied in the sunlight, is an even greater help.

No joy is to be compared with this joy of the free life. There is a word in Sanskrit for this boundless joy, a word which you all know, the word *sukha*. Everyone desires to have this *sukha*, this well-being and contentment. In Sanskrit the primary meaning of *sukha* is “the wide and boundless sky.” *Kha* is the root, meaning sky; happiness is to be found beneath the open sky. It is hard to find it where life is artificial and the sky is cramped. In Bombay a room with one window is rented for fifty rupees, but if there are two windows the rent is a hundred rupees. Two windows mean more fresh air, and it is obvious that fresh air is something that is very greatly prized. Go out then into the world of nature and be one with the creation; you will find happiness under the sky, and true bliss. A simple life of harmony with Nature is essential to the true well-being of humanity; it is the task of education to lead the way, and to show us how to regain our happiness.



Chapter 8

Fundamentals

In planning for national popular education we must beware lest we give all our attention to the branches and ignore the root. We talk about "Lok-Shikshan," because we like high-sounding names; but in fact, as we all know, there is very little behind this name except a literacy drive.

Literacy drives always remind me of an incident in my childhood. Like all Brahmin boys, I was taught the Vedic *sandhya*, and within a week I had learnt it by heart. My mother was very proud of this and used to tell people about it. One day I said to her: "Mother, you tell everyone how I learned the *sandhya*; but do you know what?—something else wonderful!" "What is that?" she asked. "Why," I said, "Vinya *did* manage to learn the *sandhya* in a week, but in much less time than that he has managed to forget it!"...As Wordsworth said:

Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers.

If we do not wish literacy to prove harmful we must concentrate our attention upon the meaning, and the best and cheapest way of doing this is to listen, and then to act on what we hear.

Our forefathers knew that the loftiest thoughts of humanity should be heard and proclaimed continually. The first three stages on the nine-fold road of *bhakti* are *shravan*, *kirtan*, *smaran*, and we can travel them without spending a pice on kerosene oil. But alas, we are not only poor in material goods— our imaginations too have become poverty-stricken.

The whole educational philosophy of India, the fruit of thousands of years of experience, can be summed up in the words *shruti*, *smriti* and *kriti*. It is not a new idea in this country that every citizen ought to be educated. In the Upanishads King Aswapati sings the praises of his kingdom in these words: "There are no thieves in my domains, no misers, no drunkards. No one is ignorant, no one is unemployed. So far from there being women of ill fame, there is not even any man of evil repute in the land."

We will not discuss thieves and misers; we all know what a brisk trade they do today. As for drunkenness, the English used to tell us that if we wanted education we



must not put a stop to drink. We ourselves are saying the same thing in our own way, though not so bluntly. It seems that if money stops, everything stops: it goes without saying that literacy stops too. But where is the sense of preaching literacy and not stopping drunkenness? I would not mind much if my country were to remain illiterate, but I want to see it freed from intemperance without delay.

When Aswapati claimed that no one in his kingdom was ignorant, what did he mean? He meant, surely, that every citizen well understood that theft, miserliness, drunkenness, laziness and evil conduct are forbidden. What has this knowledge to do with literacy? It often seems that literate people are experts in evil habits! Do we want the whole nation to join them?

Of course I do not mean that all these evils are the *result* of literacy; I merely suggest that we should not attach excessive importance to literacy as such. Let us think straight about the real purpose and programme of adult education, and give whatever literacy we desire to the children. Along with that, we should lay the greatest possible stress on the children's basic education.



Chapter 9

Words and Realities

If a man's house is full of medicine bottles, we infer that the man is probably an invalid. But if his house is full of books, we conclude that he is intelligent. Surely that is not right? The first rule of health is to take medicine only when it is absolutely necessary. By the same token, the first rule of intelligence ought to be to avoid, so far as possible, burying one's eyes in books. We consider the medicine bottles to be the sign of a sick body; we ought to consider the books whether secular or religious, as the sign of a sick mind!

The wise men of past ages, the fragrance of whose lives still fills the world, took no pains to make life literate, but did much to make it meaningful. We do not need to look far in our modern educated society for illustrations of the truth that a literate life may be meaningless. History on the other hand is full of examples of how meaningful an unlettered life may be. Indeed, when we compare the lettered with the un-lettered, the a-lettered as we might say, it often seems that this letter a-, the sign of deprivation, is really the sign of honour. Does not the Lord say in the Gita: "Among the letters of the alphabet, I am A"?

Books, after all, contain only letters, and it is vain to hope to make life meaningful merely by collecting books. "Whose stomach is filled by talking of curry and talking of rice?" This is a vital point. "The well in the book drowns none, the boat in the book saves none," says the poet. The dictionary says that "steed" means "horse." and the children think that they can have knowledge of the "steed" in the dictionary. But that is not so. The "steed" is not to be found in the dictionary, it is standing in the stable. It cannot be got into a dictionary. What the dictionary tells us is merely that the word "steed" and the word "horse" have the same meaning. What that meaning is, you will find in the stable. The dictionary gives only synonyms. The meaning is not in the book, it is in the world of God's creation. Until we understand this, we shall never taste true knowledge.

* * * * *

A certain man was always taking medicines. But he went on growing worse, for the disease and the drugs flourished together. In the end he did as some one advised



and began to work in the fields, and in a few days he was quite cured, and felt strong and healthy. As a result of this experience he began to advise others to do the same. If he saw anyone with a medicine bottle in his hand he would say to him very earnestly: "Bottles will do no good; get hold of a spade and you will soon feel fine." But the answer he got was: "You have had your fill of medicine yourself; why should you stop us from taking it?" That is how the world goes. Men do not want to learn from the experience of others, they want their own. They want to make their own mistakes. I say to a man, out of my own experience, "You will get no benefit from books; please do not fall into that trap." But the man replies, "What business have you to tell me that? You have read all the books yourself."—"It's because I have read them that I am telling you to keep clear."—"No," he says, "I must see for myself."—"Very well, see for yourself. The freedom to make your own mistakes is your birthright."...We never learn from the experience of history, and that is why history repeats itself. If we had paid history the attention it deserves, we might have got on, and left history behind; but as we have not valued it, its value has been lost on us.



Chapter 10

Perfect from perfect

There is a verse in the Scriptures: *Purnat purnam udachyate*. From the perfect comes the perfect, that is the law of natural development. A question may well be raised here, for if something is perfect to begin with, and also perfect later, how is there any 'development'? ...If the verse said: "From the imperfect comes the perfect", it would be understandable to talk of development; but to say that "from the perfect comes the perfect" seems quite meaningless.

Yes, such language undoubtedly does seem meaningless, but there is profound meaning hidden within it. Perfect from perfect, that is, from that which is small, but perfect, arises that which is great, and also perfect. A new-born baby is a perfect whole, and so is a young man of twenty. The former is an example of the 'small perfect', the latter of the 'large perfect.' It is not that the baby has one eye and half a nose and the full-grown youth two eyes and a complete nose. They both have a whole nose, and one eye on each side of it. Both are complete, perfect. The difference is merely that one is a small whole and the other is a large whole.

A two-inch straight line is a complete thing, and so is a four-inch straight line. The first is smaller, the second larger. A circle of two inches diameter is a complete circle, and a circle of four inches diameter is also a complete circle. The first is smaller, the second larger. I write on the black-board a 'zero' the size of a gooseberry, and seen through the micro-scope it looks as large as a pumpkin. What did the microscope do? How did it 'develop' it? Did it make an imperfect zero into a perfect one, or a small zero into a large one? Is it not clear that the microscope turned a perfect zero of the smallness of a gooseberry into a perfect zero of the largeness of a pumpkin? Now the real truth is that education cannot do much more than this. A good definition of education would be that it turns a little zero into a big zero!

But joking apart, if we grasp the essence of this verse, we shall see that "From the perfect comes the perfect" is a new watchword of natural development. At five o'clock in the morning I see the tree in front of me as a dim shape. I can see the whole of it, but not clearly. By half-past five the outline has become clearer. As before, I see the whole of it, but in greater detail. After sunrise, I can still see the whole tree, but



now I see it with complete clarity. I do not see a quarter of a tree at five o'clock, half a tree at half-past five, and the whole tree only after sunrise. I see the whole each time, first a dim whole, then a rather clearer whole, and lastly a perfectly clear whole. The sunlight has 'developed' my sight of the tree from dim to rather clear, from rather clear to very clear, but always it was the 'development' of the whole tree. This is natural development, from a small whole to a large whole, from a dim whole to a clear whole.

Let us look at another example which will clarify the meaning of both phrases—"perfect from perfect" and also "perfect from imperfect." Let us suppose that we are standing on the sea-shore. There is no vessel of any sort in sight, but a little later a ship begins to come into view. That is to say, only the topmost portions of it come into view. As the minutes pass the middle portion becomes visible, and finally the whole ship. We now see the ship in its entirety, but owing to the distance we still do not see it clearly. As it draws nearer, its outlines gradually become clearer. From the moment of its first appearance up to the time when we saw it whole, our vision of the ship grew "from imperfect, to perfect" and afterwards "from perfect to perfect."

A teacher takes up with his pupils the geography of India. First he shows the children a map of the whole country, then he tells them about the various States, and then about the rivers of each State. After that he points out the places in each State which are of importance from a historical, religious or commercial point of view. In this way he proceeds to more and more elaborate detail. This teacher is developing the children's knowledge "from perfect to perfect."

Another teacher is also teaching the geography of India. First he makes the pupils familiar, in detail, with the features of one district, then of a second district, and so step by step with those of the State. At that point the pupils have a very elaborate knowledge of the features of one State, but none whatever of the other States. The teacher then goes on, in the same way, to deal in detail with the features of the other States. In this manner the pupils acquire at last a knowledge of the whole of India. So far as the geography of India is concerned, this teacher can be said to have developed the children's knowledge "from imperfect to perfect."

"From perfect towards perfect" is the law of the growth of the soul. It is this that has to be applied in any kind of spiritual development.

There is a book on "Clay Modelling" which expressly forbids the method of modelling "from imperfect to perfect." The author writes from his own experience. It



is quite wrong, he says, to set to work with the feeling that it does not matter how we shape the clay in the beginning, we shall be able to get the form we want in the end. On the contrary, the work must be so planned that at any stage, from beginning to end, the onlooker may be able to see what it is that is being made. This is the secret of true sculpture. There seem to be plenty of practitioners who do not want to display their work until it is finished. "Let us make it anyhow to begin with, and afterwards put it right," they appear to think. Such a head-strong approach can never result in true art. For art is an immortal part of the soul, and the birth of art can take place only when the law of spiritual development, "from perfect to perfect," is observed.

The forming of a nation is a very great work of art indeed. The undertaking can only be successful if we hold fast to our watchword, *Purnat purnam*, from perfect to perfect.



PART II

BASIC IDEAS OF NAI TALIM



Chapter 11

The function of Nai Talim

Gandhiji used to say that the *charkha* was the central Sun of the world of constructive work, and that the other items in the programme were the planets. I used to wonder where Nai Talim fitted into this picture, for I was not prepared to call it a mere planet. If we keep Bapu's metaphor, Nai Talim must be thought of as the force of gravity, which keeps the planets revolving round the sun and keeps the sun itself circling on its course. *Nai Talim* is the power which binds all our varied activities into one integral whole. In the language of the Puranas it is the *Sesha-Nag*, the power on which rests the whole created universe. What words have we, asked our ancient thinkers, to name that which underlies creation, seeing that words themselves are a part of creation? Therefore they called this fundamental substance *sesha*—that which remains over, the remainder. To say that the *Sesha-Nag* has a thousand mouths is a way of symbolising the truth that the power which binds the whole material world together by mutual attraction works in a thousand directions. *Nai Talim* is our *Sesha-Nag*: therefore if each worker, in addition to becoming skilled in his own craft, pursues it in the spirit of *Nai Talim*, his work will bear fruit and its influence will permeate all his surroundings.

I do not mean that every worker should or could become a teacher—teaching demands special qualifications. But everyone ought to know what the goal of Nai Talim is. It is simply this, that, on the one hand, we must miss no opportunity for learning that our own lives offer; and that, on the other hand, we should not entangle ourselves in knowledge that is not relevant to our own lives. These are the limits of what *Nai Talim* requires of us, and what it forbids.

If we observe these natural limitations, and recognise what we ought to do and what we ought to leave aside, then the craft we follow, whatever it may be, will bring fullness and wholeness into our lives and work. If we fail to observe these limitations, we either get into a rut and are tied down to one place, or we run aimlessly about in all directions. We should neither stick fast nor run wild—we should be travelling steadily in a chosen direction. *Nai Talim*, by which each of our activities is linked with every other, and all of them are linked with our lives, can help us to achieve this purposeful peace and harmony.



Chapter 12

Compulsory Free Education

Bapu used to say that *Nai Talim* was his last and best gift to this country. It was not Bapu's habit to use exaggerated speech; I can remember no other man who weighed his words with such care. We must therefore understand everything he said in the full meaning he gave it. Bapu had the insight of genius; he knew, not from cold logic but from his own intuitive understanding, what was needed. He foresaw what India would need most of all after she had obtained her political freedom. The change of government, in his opinion, must be marked not only by a change of flag, but by a new beginning in education.

Why did Bapu use the phrase *Nai Talim*, *new* education? Why put in the adjective *new*? The fundamental truths of education and knowledge are not "new": they are without beginning, they are timeless. But there are times when thought becomes clouded, and with the new age there must be a new revelation, so that a new thing is created.

People wonder how it is possible to make education compulsory and free. I often say, jokingly, that nothing remains to be done in that respect. God has made all the arrangements already, arrangements which are the very foundation of our humanity, without which the race of men could never have been born. Where would the world be if God had waited for a Government to be formed, and afterwards relied upon the Government to arrange for free, compulsory education? But God put into man's mind the powers of intellect, and put hunger into his stomach, and universal sympathy into his heart. Man was thus equipped with three tools of knowledge, a sympathetic heart, a questioning intellect and a hungry stomach. In order to appease his hunger he has to use to the full his gifts of co-operation and intelligence. As soon as he sets to work, he begins to acquire knowledge of many kinds, but if he had not received from God the divine gift of hunger neither the Government nor anyone else would be able to educate him. That is what I call compulsory education. Without it our hunger would not be appeased, our sympathies would not be enlarged, our intellectual powers would not be sharpened.

Children are born of mothers, and it is from their mothers that they learn the mother-tongue; it does not cost the Government a pice. That is what I mean by free



education; God has provided many other opportunities for such free education. I have often remarked that if anyone imagines himself to be a "giver of education," it is a proof that his own education is incomplete.

An interesting light is cast on the Indian attitude to education by the fact that in all the fourteen languages recognized in the Constitution of India there is no verb "to teach," but only a verb "to learn." We have artificially constructed a causative form, as *sikhana* from *sikhna*, but there is no root word in our languages corresponding to English "teach."* We can learn, we can help others to learn, but we cannot "teach." The use of the two distinct words, "teach" and "learn," suggests that these two processes may be thought of as independent of one another. But that is merely the professional vanity of the "teacher," and we shall not understand the nature of education unless we rid ourselves of that vanity. Our first task is to realise that an "uneducated" human being is nowhere to be found.

But today, all too often, an ordinary "matric-pass" boy treats a first-class carpenter as if he were an ignorant boor. He goes into his house and says: "We have some work for thee; what are thy rates?"—using "thou" as to an inferior; he does not say: "What would you charge, Sir?" The carpenter may be a man of maturity and experience, a wise and skilled workman, who is of real service to his country. But simply because he cannot read and write, the "educated" boy treats him as an inferior.

The gift of education is no matter for pride, in fact an essential condition for being able to receive it is that we should grow in humility. In our ancient books *vidya* (education) is equated with *vinaya* (humility); *vinaya*, in Sanskrit, is a synonym for education, and a student who had completed his studies was called *vinit*—perfected in humility. This humility is the fruit of true education. The teacher must be ready at all times to serve his students in humility; the students must learn humbly from the teacher. Teacher and student must each regard the other as a fellow worker; in former times they united in the ancient prayer of the schools; तेजस्विनावधीतमस्तु—may the study of both of us be filled with vigour. The word नौ in this is the dual number—that is, the teacher does not consider himself to be "teaching," but to be studying. That the student is studying goes without saying. The prayer asserts that both live together and both study together. They both understand that the teacher finds his own true good in helping the student, and the student in helping the teacher.



Wherever two people live together in this kind of comradeship, giving and receiving mutual help, there real education is in progress. The place of books in *Nai Talim* is therefore secondary. This idea troubles many people, who think that if the place assigned to books is reduced the students will be deprived of the most valuable tools of knowledge. Books do most certainly have a place as tools of knowledge, but it is a very minor place. The major need is for teacher and student to become work-partners, and this can happen only when the distinction between the teacher “teaching” and the student “learning” can be overcome.

The second feature of *Nai Talim* is that the distinction, opposition, or conflict between knowledge and work disappears. I have used these three words deliberately because various philosophical parties are being formed on the issue of whether work and knowledge are merely different or whether they are actively opposed.

The principle of *Nai Talim* is that knowledge and work are both forms of the same thing and that it is therefore impossible to distinguish between a knowledge-process and a work-process. Educational activities are those which from one point of view appear to be “learning”, while from another angle they appear to be “labour”. There is no real educational activity when the knowledge-process alone is isolated, neither is there any education in the labour-process alone. A really educational activity is one where we cannot tell which of the two predominates. Moreover, this integration must be natural and unforced. In some schools they spin *taklis* and at the same time sing *takli* songs, but there is no *natural* unity between work and knowledge in that. *Nai Talim* is based on the faith that knowledge comes through work, that work is inspired by knowledge, and that life is made fruitful by the experience of work and knowledge as one.

We believe that it is possible for us to learn all day long, work all day long and enjoy ourselves all day long. That is not three days but one, not 72 hours but 24. There is no joy apart from knowledge and work. The watchword of our education is *Sat-Chit-Anand*. *Sat* is work, without which life cannot go on; *chit* is knowledge, without which life lacks freedom; and without *anand* life loses its flavour. True education binds *sat*, *chit*, *anand*, into one whole; you may call it new education or old, as you please.

One more point. In matters of knowledge there can be no orders given. There may be a place for orders in other fields of life, but if a thing is round, I cannot order you to think of it as triangular. Orders are no good. What is round is known to be round.



Nai Talim does not “discipline” students, it gives them complete freedom. Whether or not a society free from Governments is ever built in the larger world, such a society must be found in the world of students. If there is one thing of supreme importance for students, it is this freedom. The greatest teacher we ever had gave this teaching to his students—“यानि अस्माकं सुचरितानि तानि त्वयोपास्यनि नो इतराणि”—“Whatever good work I do, take it fully; whatever is not good you will not follow.”

In such conditions we may certainly expect the students to imbibe the spirit of self-government. There should however be no artificiality. Our present social framework *is* artificial, it is based on class-consciousness, and boys educated in Nai Talim ought to be rebels against its values. Gandhiji declared that he would oppose existing society, oppose it with humility, but oppose it with conviction. Such humility is the antithesis of slavish submission; it is a strong humility that is able to stand up against the wrong values of society as it is.

* Vinoba here raises an interesting point. The verbs "learn" and "teach" are both derived from ancient Anglo-Saxon forms, and both have been in common use for more than a thousand years. But the present distinction between learning and teaching is quite modern. The word "learn" has been used century after century in *both* meanings, and seventy years ago it was still considered correct to write, e.g., “the carpenter *learned* me to use a saw.” English village children still use this old habit of speech, although nowadays they are told that it is “wrong.” The word “teach” is connected with Sanskrit दिश् and its earliest use in English is in its root meaning, to “show.” Little by little the modern meaning prevailed, and in this meaning it has displaced the word “learn.”



Chapter 13

Nai Talim: A seed Thought, Not a System

It is about fourteen years now since our country was given the great idea of Nai Talim. In one sense it is not new at all, since no truth of experience is new. Truth is eternal, and the seeds of this idea have existed for many centuries. But when some aspect of truth is lighted up for our own times, it seems to us that we have got hold of a new idea, and for us it *is* new. Its newness lies in this, that we draw inspiration from it. This idea of Nai Talim has been working steadily among us for many years; it has been tried and tested; its reality, its strength, and its abiding truth have been established beyond doubt. The time has come for this Nai Talim to stand up and summon the nation like a trumpet call.

It puzzles and saddens me that three years should have gone by since we gained our independence, yet we have not found the courage to take a decision about this. What clearer proof could there be of our failure to understand the essentials, than that the very system of education which was in use before independence as a means to keep people in subjection, should be allowed to continue after independence has been won? If you still feel that our new education is as yet in the experimental stage—it is still cooking, it is not ready to be eaten, and we will eat it only when it is properly cooked—if that is your idea, then I must ask whether we are to eat bricks and stones in the meanwhile. Are such things fit to eat, or fit to be thrown away? Where would have been the harm if you had thrown them away at once, and then said to us: “We have not yet considered what the new pattern of education should be. It will take us a few months to think this out, and for that time we will stop all schooling. As it is urgently necessary to increase production, all the children will go out and work.” But we do not feel so keenly about our national education as we do about our national flag; that is what I mean by our failure to understand the essentials.

We have named this education “basic education,” but we do not understand the meaning of the word “basic”. We imagine that it means merely the first stage of children’s education. It means far more than that. It means that this is the foundation, the base, upon which the whole of our education, from beginning to end, has to be built, whether you call it primary, or middle, or higher. It will not do to have one kind of education for the villages and another kind for the towns. It will not do to have one



kind of education for the first four years of school life, and afterwards some other kind that is quite unrelated to it. It will not do to regard this as an experiment to be tried out on refugees while the rest of the country has something else. We have a right to use the word “basic” only if we are agreed that the whole education of the country should be built up on the foundation of Nai Talim. Many even of those who are engaged in educational experiment, when asked what plans they have made for the towns, reply that this education is not intended for the towns, but for the villages. Nothing, in my view, could be a greater mistake. This education is for all, and in it there is no distinction between town and village.

If we are content that the atmosphere, the mental attitudes, which now prevail in our towns should continue, India will have no peace. The town must interest itself in the service of the villages on whose support it stands, and must educate its children with this end in view. It will not do to bring up village children to serve their country while town children are brought up to loot their country! Such a thing cannot happen in this country because the nation has awakened, and a wide-awake nation will never allow differences of that kind to arise. This then is the meaning of Basic Education.

I wish now to utter a word of warning about some of the dangers which confront us. Many people nowadays think of Basic Education as a new kind of system, method or technique of teaching, on a par with the various other teaching "methods" which have had their vogue in the past. This is a mistaken view. I am very much afraid of systems, especially in educational work; a system can make an end of all education. What a student receives from a Nai Talim centre such as Sevagram is not a system to be practised but a compass to show him the direction. He is given a suggestion which he may keep in mind and think over, but he must make his own independent judgments and try out his own independent experiments in his own place. Nai Talim is not a system, it is a far-reaching educational idea, it is a seed-thought, like the *Brahma-vichar* which was formerly so widespread in India and in which so many different systems of thought—*advait*, *dvait*, *visisht-advait* and so on—were all rooted.

I was once talking with a friend and explaining to him that it is a fault in the western system of education that it lays so little stress on learning great lines by heart. I said that children ought to learn plenty of well-chosen couplets, and I cited my own case as an example. I said that I had got much benefit from it, and that it had stood me in good stead at a number of critical periods of my life. It is good that the exalted experiences which are recorded in our literature should be stored in our minds. Our



traditions in this matter differ from those of the west. The point of view of western scholars is analytical; they break up the world into fragments and divide it into various "branches" for study; but we look upon the world as one, and study it as an integral whole. In this our approach differs from theirs, and for this reason there is in our tradition a place for the learning of great passages of literature. Other traditions give the foremost place to the intellect. The importance of the intellect is recognized by all, but one must not ignore the feelings and emotions. The heart of man needs nourishment no less than the mind, and it is right and necessary to provide it by storing the memory with thoughts of truth.

The friend to whom I was speaking agreed with me, but he at once had a question to ask. "The thing appeals to me very much," he said, "but how can it be correlated with craft?" I said, "I too will ask you a question. Your children spend every night asleep in bed—what has this sleeping got to do with craft, I would like to know?" "It has this to do with it," he replied, "that after they have slept they are fresh and ready for work, so that they come to the craft with the necessary eagerness". "Very well," I said, "look at it like this. Man has a soul, and it is only when the soul of man is strong that the nation can be strong. Strength is not merely of the body; a body without a soul is not a body but a corpse, and can be correlated with nothing but the burning-ghat. It is only when the body is informed by a soul that it has the strength for action. In my opinion, the learning of great passages of literature is a necessary aid to the maturing of the soul."

I have described this incident because so many people are trying to turn Nai Talim into a system; and if this idea gets imprisoned in a system, it will be killed. If that should happen there will be no room for initiative, and people will spend their time contriving how this piece of knowledge can be correlated with that activity. We must steer clear of that kind of thing. Nai Talim is a philosophy of living, it is an attitude to life that we have to bring to all our work.

People talk of the growth of population in India, and there is no doubt that this is a serious problem and one that demands attention. But for my part I do not so much fear the growth of population as the growth of an unmanly population. If our people are manly, hard-working and skilful, I feel confident that this earth will be able to bear their weight. But because we lack the spirit of self-discipline, an unmanly and spiritless population is increasing in numbers. The books that are being written, the cinemas and so on, are tending completely to unman the spirit of India. In these conditions,



education must take up the task of training boys from childhood in self-control, manliness and temperance. "Control of hands, control of feet, control of speech," said the Lord Buddha. By all means let us strive for dexterity of hand, but let us also strive for the power of control. The power to use the sense must be matched by the power to control the senses. Skill without self-control can lead a man to disaster; it cannot profit humanity. Strength by itself is vain; skill by itself is vain; they have value only when they are used for human welfare. Not enough attention is being given to this aspect of education. When people discuss Basic Education, they simply recite this slogan of "education through craft" as if that one phrase described it completely. That is an entirely false idea.

Our plan for education is a plan for discipline; its main-spring, that is to say, is not self-indulgence but self-control. Our chief aim should be that our children should learn from their earliest years to keep their senses, minds and intellects under control. Their speech must be imbued with the spirit of truthfulness; we must train them to express their thoughts clearly, and to choose words for their fitness, not for fashion. I would like to invite your attention to this difference between fitness and fashion.

I have one thing more to say. If we are to carry out this task of creating a spirit of discipline and self-control, basic education must be entrusted, so far as is possible, to women, and women must be trained for this work.....We ought to be keeping in touch with all organisations and institutions for women in India, and inducing them to come forward for this service. The education of little children should be entirely in the hands of women. As the Upanishad has it, "*matruvan, pitruvan, acharyavan*"—education is to be received first from the mother, then from the father, and lastly from the teacher. That is the true order of education.



Chapter 14

Brahma-Vidya and Craft

Our boys ought to be educated as Shri Krishna was educated, by working. Shri Krishna grazed cattle, milked them, cleaned the cowshed, worked hard, hewed firewood for his Guru's house; later, as Arjuna's charioteer, he not only drove his horses but also cared for them. At the time of the Rajasuya sacrifice he asked King Yudhishtira for work. Yudhishtira replied that he had no work to give him, but Shri Krishna persisted, saying that he did not want to be idle. Yudhishtira thereupon asked him to choose some work for himself. Shri Krishna chose to gather up the used leaf-plates from which people had eaten, and smear the place with cowdung. "That is the kind of work I know," he said. "I have been doing it from childhood and I am a master of it—an M.A.!" Sukhdev in the *Bhagavat* and Vyasa in the *Mahabharata* have both described the scene. Later, when the opportunity arose, Shri Krishna also taught Arjuna the Brahma-vidya.

Our boys ought to be so brought up that on the one hand they become familiar with Brahma-vidya and on the other hand can make themselves useful in sweeping, cleaning floors or work in the fields. Through our current education they get neither Brahma-vidya nor a craft. The proof that they do not get Brahma-vidya is to be seen in the fact that nearly all of us are bent on material pleasures and are slaves to the senses. The "educated" man leads a life of comfort, pleasure and luxury. His education has included no handicraft, so his hands also are unskilled. His intellect runs to waste through lack of self-knowledge, and his hands through lack of craft; of his ten fingers he can use only three—for writing. If we make *this* kind of education universal, what is the nation to eat?

Education, then, must be revolutionised, and must include these two things, Brahma-vidya and craft. Brahma-vidya will give self-knowledge, and body, mind and senses will be brought under control. The individual greed for possession, which cries "my house," "my field," will be overcome by the growth of a universal love and caring. A person who has absorbed Brahma-vidya will not say "mine, mine," but will regard his house, his land, his wealth as being for *all*. It is the falsely educated who look upon these things as "mine, mine."



In our plan of education every boy will work with his hands and become self-reliant. Every boy will be a first-rate cook, and they will all work at agriculture. Now a days there is such widespread laziness that all our crafts are in danger of extinction. We need *good* craftsmen—*good* carpenters, weavers, engineers, smiths, leather-workers. We need merchants who will carry on their trade to serve the people, not to cheat them. We need a nation which will not regard any occupation as “high” or “low,” and in which no one will consider it beneath his dignity to do any kind of useful work.



Chapter 15

Bread Labour and the New Society

Many kinds of work are being done in the world today, all of them useful to the society of which we are a part. There are lawyers, merchants, professors, ministers of state, farmers and many others, and the man who does any of these jobs well is a good servant of society. There is no need to find any fault with this division of labour as society is constituted today, but Nai Talim does not work with the present social order in mind. Those who share in the work of Nai Talim are working, thinking and serving for the sake of the society that is to be. Otherwise we would be content to call our purpose by that best of names, *good* education. The fact that we call it *new* education is no guarantee that it is good. It is possible for a new thing to be bad, just as much as an old one. We do not call it *Nai*, new, because what is new is necessarily good, or because there is some special virtue in newness. We call it Nai Talim because we want to build upon it a new society.

Our picture of the new society includes one very important principle, and if we do not accept this principle it is not reasonable that we should be so enthusiastic about Nai Talim. This principle is that everyone ought to do manual labour for his food, and that it is not an ideal arrangement that bodily food should be earned by intellectual work. It is certainly a possible arrangement, but nevertheless it is not the best way. The body ought to be fed by the work of the body, and this is the meaning of the phrase “bread labour.” In the *Bhagavad Gita* it is called a *yagna*, a sacrifice; and in the Bible it is referred to as “earning one’s bread by the sweat of one’s brow.”

This is a fundamental principle of Nai Talim, and those who do not fully accept it do not fully accept Nai Talim either. People ask me again and again why I am so keen on bodily labour. I am not discussing that now, I only wish to draw your attention to the fact that Nai Talim does not mean merely learning through some activity. Many other educational philosophers agree that knowledge is best gained through practical work. Arithmetic which is merely abstract goes in at one ear and out at the other, but when it is taught through concrete practice the children grasp it easily. This is a commonly recognised truth of ordinary teaching, it is not Nai Talim.

We can live rightly only when we earn our livelihood by bodily labour. If we do not do this, we are a burden for other people to carry on their backs, and our lives



cannot be free of violence. This is the idea that is the foundation of Nai Talim. Many educationists would admit bodily labour in the form of “physical exercises.” Others agree that “work projects” are a good means of acquiring knowledge. But these types of work are not bread labour. Rightly or wrongly, Nai Talim believes in and is based upon the principle of bread labour.

This is the principle upon which I have myself conducted my life for the last thirty years. I have usually worked for eight hours daily, sometimes for longer. My days for the last thirty years have been spent drawing water, grinding grain, scavenging, spinning, weaving, carding, carpentering and so on. What I want to emphasize is that thanks to this work my intellectual powers have not been diminished, but greatly strengthened. I am not claiming that those whose lives are spent in unrelieved and unremitting toil will thereby have their minds sharpened. All excess is a hindrance to development. But I do say from my own experience that the mind is most fully developed by a life which includes a good amount of purposeful, intelligent labour. My memory in my childhood was considered "good"—that is, it was better than the average. Today, at the age of 62, it is better than ever it was in my childhood. I do not forget anything that is of value. If in my reading I come across a thought which I judge to be worth remembering, it remains in my mind in the words in which it was written. There may be more factors than one at work in the development of this faculty, but one of them is certainly the place that bodily labour has had in my life. Nai Talim is founded not only on the principle of knowledge through work but also on the great principle of bodily labour for one's livelihood.

If I were in charge of the training of teachers for Nai Talim, I would give them one lecture only, in which I would say what I have said to you now, and that would suffice for the whole year. After that I would say to them, "Now get busy with some work", and every evening I would discuss with them whatever difficulties they met in the course of their day's labour. The education they have had up to now, for B. A. and M. A., has consisted of nothing but lectures; if they get nothing but lectures from us also, they will never get a real education. I would challenge them to send home to their families the stipend they get from the Government, and see whether they can earn their bread for a month by their own labour. "How much cloth are you weaving in a day?" I would ask them. "Ten or twelve yards?" If they reply that they have no practical knowledge of weaving, but that they have studied the principles of it, I should ask them why they eat daily, seeing that they have studied the principles of nutrition. Our



education must not be mere word-knowledge, it must be potent for action, and bread labour must be at its very basis.



Chapter 16

The threefold vision of Nai Talim

When a new idea comes to a man, he does his best to put it into practice, even though his practice may fall short of his principles. The various moulds which are shaped by different people to hold the idea have no special importance. It is the idea that is the big thing.

In Nai Talim there are certain fundamental ideas.

The philosophy of Nai Talim does not accept the unequal values assigned by our present society to physical and mental work. It takes the position that every kind of service rendered by a man, whether it is physical or mental, is ethical in its nature; the salary which is given to him is economic in its nature. The value of an ethical act cannot be calculated in economic terms. There is no meaning in asking how many hours there are in a mile; a mile must be measured in yards, not in hours. The two things are different in nature, and one cannot be converted into the other.

A man was drowning in a river, and another man jumped in and saved him. The job took ten minutes, and it was physical, not mental labour. Are we then to pay him an anna as wages for ten minutes' work? If you were to offer him a hundred rupees he would not accept it—he would say that it is not a question of money at all. His action was ethical in its nature and any piece of work whatever, physical or mental, which is useful to society, is also ethical in its nature and has no relationship to economic values. It is the individual's hunger that is related to economic values. A man who feels two rupees' worth of hunger has a right to two rupees' worth of food, and it is the duty of society to give him that two rupees. It has nothing to do with whether he is a carpenter or a farmer or a teacher.

Our Government has given its approval to Nai Talim, and yet it retains class distinctions in its own educational system. I feel very sorry to see this, but it is society, rather than Government, which is to blame. An education which accepts these class distinctions has made a compromise with its environment, in just the same way as so many religious people do. Christians go to Church on Sunday and are taught that "if a man strikes thee on one cheek, turn to him the other also." But on Monday they get busy making atom and hydrogen bombs, because they have made a compromise. The



standards which are good for individual life have, they think, no relevance in the world of public life. Mussalmans use the greeting “*Salaam*,” (peace) and on their flag are the moon and star, symbols of peace—unlike the sun, that symbol of Shiva, the Terrible. They worship God as Most Merciful, Most Compassionate. And yet, over certain matters, they are ready to cut men’s throats. Hindus also compromise with evil in the same way. But Nai Talim must not compromise, for its task is to change the whole pattern of society. People who desire compromise are apt to adopt the language of revolution and give it the meaning that suits themselves. The word socialism has been misused—by Hitler for example—in this way, and there is some danger that the word Sarvodaya may suffer a similar fate. Those who really understand the idea of Nai Talim must insist on its independence and preserve it from compromise. The economic aspect of Nai Talim is that the class distinction between physical and mental work should be broken down.

The spiritual principle of Nai Talim is that knowledge and work are not two things but one. It is a mistake to say that knowledge is higher than work or work than knowledge. Nai Talim is education based on the unity of knowledge and work. In such an education, no one feels that he is being forced to work. The work is done, the knowledge is gained, the good clean open air is enjoyed. Our modern labourers are shut up eight hours a day in factories where they get neither open air nor joy. Their work is divorced from knowledge, and cinemas etc., have to “supply” them with pleasure, for their work is divorced from joy. But Nai Talim does not consist of an hour’s work followed by an hour’s pleasure. Nai Talim is *sat-chit-anand*; work, knowledge and joy are one. Knowledge is gained in the most natural way, for whatever we do becomes a channel of learning. We serve the sick, and at the same time we carry out experiments: service and study go hand in hand. What should we think of a doctor who wanted to carry out research, but not to serve the sick? And just as you cannot separate the search for truth from work, so you cannot separate work from joy. If they are kept apart joy is impure and work is dry. When I was a school boy we had a holiday for the King’s birthday and also a holiday when he died. We boys enjoyed holidays, so we became pucca *Vedantins*—we understood that birth and death are both illusions, but the holiday was real! We did not trouble our heads about why birth and death should both be treated alike; it was enough that there was a holiday. Children want holidays because school is usually a kind of prison. But in Nai Talim they should enjoy themselves not on one day a week only but on all seven. Nai Talim is



being practised when work, knowledge and pleasure—*sat-chit-anand*—are experienced not as three things but as one.

The social principle of Nai Talim is that all human lives are equally to be respected. All the various social and class divisions are therefore forms of falsehood. Once this is admitted, our present political and other divisions will be done away with. Social cleavages cannot exist where the principle of Nai Talim is at work. The basis of Bhoodan is the contention that the land is for all, and that no individual ought to exercise rights of ownership in it. If this idea is extended to the international field it means that no one nation can regard its land as the property of that nation alone. The whole of the land of the world is for the whole of humanity. In Nai Talim there are no social distinctions between man and man, but as the pattern of Indian social life today is based upon a multitude of distinctions, Nai Talim will and must create a great upheaval. Children of all kinds will eat together, play together and learn together. The good elements in every religious tradition will be retained and the bad elements abandoned. Some people misunderstand the phrase सर्व धर्म समन्वय, and imagine that it means that every element in any religion must be accepted as good. They also think that a “secular attitude” means that nothing whatever must be said about religion. But the business of Nai Talim is to oppose all the wrong that is done in the name of religion. It would therefore appear to be the duty of the traditionally orthodox to oppose Nai Talim very strongly. If they do not oppose it, it must mean either that they do not understand Nai Talim, or that the Nai Talim of today is not really Nai Talim at all. Those who want to keep the *status quo* ought to be opponents of Nai Talim.



Chapter 17

The social purpose of Nai Talim

Nai Talim is the name given to a particular kind of education. The word Nai—new—may suggest that we want to replace some of the bad characteristics of the ‘old’ education by ‘new’, good characteristics. In reality it means much more than this. When we speak of the “old” education in this context we do not mean the really ancient tradition, but the type of education which was introduced after the coming of the English. This education has many faults, but I will not now enter upon an exposition of its major and minor shortcomings; I will merely observe that it is in fact no education at all, because it was not framed with any social order in view. A system of instruction which lacks this social purpose may be of some use for certain special ends, but it does not deserve the name of education.

At the time when the English came to India and established their new regime, there was no social order, in the true sense of the word, in existence. It was in process of disintegration in every village, and was breaking up, or had already broken up, into separate fragments. No village society as such could develop so long as the cleavages between touchable and untouchable existed. An integrated society cannot be formed so long as the castes remain apart. Nor can it be formed so long as men accept ideas of “high” and “low”. We can see the outline of this integrated society only in the *gramdan* movement and in general *gramdan* is most readily given in those villages where there is only one caste, or two or three castes, or several castes of similar outlook.

For the basic idea of *gramdan* is that the whole village is to be regarded as one family. I do not see how people can accept this, if the idea of a family made up of members of several different castes appears to them to be irreligious. I am not thinking now of those who argue that while the whole village may be looked upon as a joint family, yet it is often expedient for a joint family to be divided up. We can deal with that argument by explaining to them that real prosperity comes from unity, and that divisions motivated by self-interest are therefore a mistake. But when people regard the whole idea of a village joint family as basically irreligious, it is necessary to convince them that their caste barriers are wrong before we can go on to the economic aspect of *gramdan*. *Gramdan* is only possible where a village social order has begun to grow.



A mere aggregation of people divided into different castes is not a true society. Co-existence is not the same as community, and where there is no community there can be no education in the full social meaning of the word. There may be some school or other giving instruction in grammar—that is a different matter. But a truly living education, the growth of a folk-culture embracing all the various concerns of life, can only take place within a harmoniously integrated society.

This kind of society has been completely lacking in India during the last two or three hundred years. So that any attempt at true education is bound to be “new”; it is a completely new start. One of the objectives of Nai Talim is to bring about this integration in the village where it begins; it aims at building up this kind of society. Our villages today are riven by every possible kind of cleavage—divisions between rich and poor, master and labourer, Brahmin and non-Brahmin, Harijan and non-Harijan. It is the intention of Nai Talim to do away with all these innumerable sections and cross-sections, distinctions and cleavages. Let it make enemies, as it inevitably must, in the process! It surprises me to hear everyone speaking in favour of it, and I suspect that they do not all understand what Nai Talim means.

Children will be taught that people's salaries should not be determined by their "qualifications." The wages, or salary, should be determined by the individual's needs in food and other essentials. As these needs do not differ very much from one person to another, there should not be any great difference in the amount of their wages. The boys will then inquire what the salary of the Headmaster is, and what are the salaries of the other teachers. And we shall have to answer. So that, in our schools, all salaries ought to be about equal. Then the boys will ask whether it is right to have the "grades" that exist in Government service, and we shall say "No, it is not right." "Why does it go on, then?" "It goes on because at present we are helpless to change it." No matter how we may explain it, however, the boys will certainly feel that those who accept inequalities have no moral authority over them. It is one thing to endure inequality, it is another matter to regard it as part of the social structure. How can the boys be anything but rebels, anything but a threat to a Government based on inequality? And yet the Government wants this type of education! This only makes sense if the Government wants to correct the existing evils and starts this kind of education in order to do so. But those who do not accept such communistic ideas ought to oppose Nai Talim tooth and nail.



We shall also teach the children that it is wrong to eat without having done some kind of manual labour or agricultural work. How is it possible for those who consider it irreligious to work with their hands to accept this idea? If such castes exist, they are bound to oppose our education. The children will learn that all should own land and have the right to work on it. But in the villages there are landlords and landless, a social order which, according to Nai Talim, is all wrong. We have to realise that if our existing society agrees to Nai Talim, it is consenting with open eyes to its own extinction.

In the eyes of the student the guru is the supreme authority, and the guru says that the inequalities of village society are wrong. “Very well,” the students will respond. “Why should not you and we together try to put an end to them? Why should you waste time teaching us arithmetic and so forth? First let us put an end to the arithmetic of inequality, then we will attend to other things.”

This means that Nai Talim teachers must consider it a part of their work to do away with inequalities in the village. In every country in the world it is the teachers who have led revolutions. Here too it is an integral part of the work of Nai Talim to change, to revolutionise, the present condition of the villages and establish economic and social equality. We have a four-fold programme including village industries, the equitable distribution of land, the destruction of caste and sectarian barriers and the education for life which is called Nai Talim. These are not four separate items but one integrated programme. The four aspects may be distinguished for the sake of clear thinking and explanation, but they cannot be separated in practice.

Kaka Saheb Kalelkar has been saying that Vinoba’s mission is to destroy Government organisation and that Nai Talim is his tool. He expressed the matter in a novel way, but there is a good deal of truth in what he said. “तदुत्थाय तमेव खादिति” as the Lord Buddha said, the worm devours the wood in which it was born. What arises from a thing devours that thing. So that if the present Government organisation gives birth to Nai Talim, it will itself be destroyed by Nai Talim. It is no light matter to destroy the one who gives you birth, but that is where the welfare of society lies. If our rulers understand this, and have given their consent with this understanding, it is indeed a matter for rejoicing. Not the Government only, but the Congress also, has passed a resolution in favour of Nai Talim, which springs from the plan to change the whole social order. It appears that they have said to us deliberately, “We give you birth in order that you may destroy us.” If we keep these things in mind they will change our



whole outlook. Nai Talim does and consist merely in trying to give knowledge through active work. We call it *new* education because it aims at establishing a completely *new* society. After the new society has been established, Nai Talim will continue to be open to new experience and will undergo reform. As it is reformed and improved, it will deserve to be called “good” education. Its quality will steadily be improved, and new experiment will always be going on. But I want to repeat that this type of education is not to be achieved merely by introducing some reforms into the old education. This is *new* education for a *new* social order, and there is in it infinite room for improvement.

Nai Talim schools must undertake a thorough study and discussion of the ideas of Bhoo-dan, Sampatti-dan, and so on, and of the principles of Sarvodaya, communism, and other social and economic philosophies. We must build up our little community of children and teachers in the way in which we want to see the village community built. The school society must be a model of the future village society. Let us suppose there are five to ten good teachers, with ten to twenty other members of their families. There are fifty, sixty, eighty children—altogether a hundred people or so. We give them tools to work with, land to grow crops, whatever books they need and other equipment, and we say to them: “Earn your living and carry on your education at the same time.” If they say that they must earn their livelihood and so cannot teach, they do not know even the ABC of Nai Talim.

All this no doubt seems difficult. It seems difficult because we all come from a class to which ideas like these are new. But what a small class it really is! Society as a whole is a society of workers, and in the end our teachers must come from this working society. We shall need to give them a little more polish of learning and culture, but we shall not have a good educational system until we can train such workers as teachers. Until then the teaching will have to be done by us who have received the old education, but desire the new, and we shall achieve only a *kuccha* kind of Nai Talim. When people ask us to show them a model of Nai Talim, we shall have to say that we are not fitted to give real Nai Talim. By the grace of God we can imagine what it must be, but we are not qualified to do the building. The students whom we train will be better qualified than we are...will be, in practice, more skilled workmen, bear a more excellent character. One result of our present learning is that we see with other men’s eyes, not our own; and on the strength of the meagre knowledge we acquire we are called “Vidvan”! But knowledge means direct action, direct experience. That kind of learning we do not possess. We have no real experience. And therefore our learning



does not give us vigour, does not give us strength. This is the point of view from which we should approach Nai Talim, and make our plans for it in an integrated way.



PART III

PRINCIPLES OF A NAI TALIM SYLLABUS



Chapter 18

Education must never grow old

The education of children is an auspicious kind of work. The education which is being given in Sevagram is called Nai Talim—new education—but I would like to call it *Nitya Nai Talim*—ever-new education. I mean that education ought to be like the water in a river—what is here today is not what was here yesterday, and what is here today will not be here tomorrow. The river goes on flowing, but its water is never the same. In the same way education should go on changing continually, with the experience of every passing day.

People are always making fixed moulds for education; but education that is set in a mould is spoiled. I have made up my mind that I will never in my life offer such a mould to anyone. Every day brings us ever-new experience, and we must have the strength to adapt our lives to ever-new conditions.

The situation of every village is different, and plans for education must take account of those differences. Education will take one form in a village on a river bank, another in a village on a hill, another in a village near a forest. It must vary with the circumstances. The same fixed mould, the same set of text-books, will not be equally suitable everywhere. When there is just one text-book for the whole State no attention can be paid to these local features and variations; in consequence the children's interest is not awakened, and the special needs of the individual village are not met.

The teaching of children ought to be suited to the occasion. If a boy is lazy, he should be taught verses calculated to rouse him to effort. If he is easily frightened, he should learn lines which will help him to overcome his fear. In this way children should be given teaching as the natural opportunity arises for it, not in a vacuum. Perhaps there is a boy who spins rather slowly but makes good yarn which does not break. Another is a fast spinner, but his yarn breaks again and again. This would be a good opportunity to tell them the fable of the hare and the tortoise, and so help them to learn the virtue of perseverance.

Some people seem to think that Basic Schools do not teach reading and writing at all! In my school I would begin from the very beginning by teaching my students verses from the Upanishads, starting with *satyam vada, dharmam chara* ("Speak the



truth, practise what is right"). I am told that in Sanskrit text-books there are lessons about chairs and tables and stories about the bazaar. This is all meaningless. From the very first day the children ought to be told the stories of the Upanishads and taught to recite the very finest verses. Some people say that it is wrong to make children learn by heart. But when he was five years old Ruskin had learned the whole Bible by heart, and his whole life was shaped under its influence. In our modern schools the children learn nothing by heart except stories about crows and sparrows!

The people who think that it is easy to teach by means of books are mistaken. As an example take the teaching of arithmetic. Children do not understand that two and three make five. Why should they? Two is two and three is three, they are different, they don't mix. But it is very easy for them to understand that two mangoes and three mangoes together make five mangoes. Yet people say that it is very difficult to teach through practical work! The fact is that it is extremely difficult to teach by the methods in vogue today. They hang, as it were, a curtain between man and nature, and then explain that "steed" means a horse. But can the children understand, if they have never seen a horse? Such teaching does not help the children to understand the *thing*, it merely gives them a synonym. When men look only at the word, and not at the reality, their "knowledge" is a delusion.

Book-learning seems to you an easy method because you have been following it for eighteen or twenty years and have become experts in it. But it is not really easy. Nai Talim does not banish books, but puts them to their proper use.

We do need books for our schools, but our books must be varied, and in choosing them the individual characteristics of each village must be kept in mind. Our books ought to preserve the distinctive flavour of each separate village. A history book for a school in Sevagram ought to contain the history of the institutions there; it should explain how the village grew up in that spot, and it should include the memories of the old people of the village. In that way it can become a living history. Geography too, for Sevagram village, will start from Sevagram. Wherever we happen to live is the centre of the world for us, simply because we do live there and the world lies all around us. That is the basis upon which our teaching of geography should be built.

This then is my idea. We shall be meeting constantly with new experiences and making new experiments. As these new experiences come to us, we shall be obliged



to tear down whatever we have built on the former experience, and build anew. There will be a continuous process of building up and breaking down.

If I were to be asked to summarise in the briefest way the guiding principle of child education, I should say that it is that those who teach should become children, and those who learn should become adult. If the teacher does not become a child, he is not teaching, and if the child does not grow up, he is not learning. We have to be guided by this principle.

All the work that we do with our children must be linked with our daily life, and we must explain to them the why and wherefore of everything that we do. If someone falls ill, we want to know the cause; we treat the illness as a means of knowledge. The man recovers from his illness, another dies, a baby is born, and all these events, rightly understood, are the tools of our learning. When a man looks upon the world in this way, and sees the four quarters overflowing with knowledge, where is he to find ignorance? Knowledge can be gained from cooking, from cutting vegetables, and from every kind of kitchen work. We must know the proper way to sit to cut vegetables, and how to arrange the work. When we cook, we must learn how to build a fireplace so that fuel is economised and there is no smoke. When we sit down to a meal we must learn what to eat and how often to eat.

Everything we do in life is filled with the material of knowledge; for example, we pray every day, and the prayer must be in the children's mother-tongue. We must not act as though the Quran has some special merit when it is read in Arabic which disappears if it is read in Marathi. It is the same with Vedic mantras and other prayers. Children can only understand the prayer if it is in their mother-tongue, and there is no value in mere repetition of forms of prayer whose meaning is not understood.



Chapter 19

A triple Educational Programme

There are no rules and regulations about what items of knowledge should be included in a Nai Talim syllabus, and what should not be included. All kinds of knowledge may come in, but on one condition—a condition that challenges us. We eat today to satisfy to-day's hunger; we do not eat for ten days ahead; similarly, the child should be given the knowledge that is needed to satisfy the demands of his life today. This is the principle which should regulate the acquiring of knowledge; otherwise it becomes a form of greed. Either the child refuses to carry the burden of this superfluous knowledge and simply flings it away, or, if he is compelled to carry it, it presses so heavily upon his intellectual powers that the development of his personality is thereby stunted.

If we reckon our syllabus by subjects—geography, history, arithmetic, geometry, and so forth—there will be no end to it, and no value. Instead, let us think in terms of the development of speech and of reason, the development of the body, the mind and the senses.

In ancient times our thinkers distinguished five elements. The modern discovery of basic elements has not rendered these five invalid. So long as we possess five senses, our understanding of the world will be five-fold in nature. The elements of creation will remain five. The upshot is that we should not think in terms of subjects or books, but of children. Our task is to nourish them, their reason, their intelligence and so on.

Children eat and drink, and they fall ill. It is clear that what they need is a knowledge of the science of eating and drinking, of sickness and of health.

When our children work in the dairy, and drink the milk, they have both the desire and the need to learn all about it. They must learn to speak really well. No one can doubt the need of practical arithmetic. People who do not know how to conduct themselves in society are to be counted among beasts rather than men. So we cannot omit the teaching of ethical and religious duty. As for history, your children in Sevagram ought certainly to know something about Kishore-lalbhai Mashruwala. They do not need to know anything about Caesar. They do need to know the meaning and



the history of the institutions which embody some aspect of Sarvodaya—in Wardha District, the leather factory at Gopuri or the way that leprosy patients are cared for at Dattapur. This does not mean that Nai Talim will never include any knowledge of other times and places; that also may come in, but as and when it is needed, when it is relevant to the situation.

We speak of *Nai Talim*, “new” education, but there is nothing new about it. Those who have reached the highest spiritual development regarded both knowledge and ignorance as precious and made room for both, and thus came to the vision of the Self. This is the standpoint of Nai Talim.

There is no need to go on teaching from the cradle to the grave. Give the knowledge that is needed today; see that your student becomes capable of learning for himself whatever he may need in the future; call into play his own latent inner powers. That is our three-fold programme. We may call its three aspects (1) direct knowledge, (2) power to gain knowledge and (3) Self-knowledge. This whole approach is entirely new. How can it fit in with the lifeless methods of today?



Chapter 20

Taking our Bearings

For very little children it is not enough to have only one subject. At the same time it is useless to load them with too many. In truth, there is only one goal for them, the unfolding of life. This has three aspects: speech, body and mind.

1. For speech training, let good *bhajans* and poems be recited sweetly and with clear pronunciation. Let them have a general understanding of the meaning. Let there be practice of clear, accurate, truthful speech.

2. For the body, let there be craft work in the open air, and a varied programme of work throughout the day. Also play, wholesome food, a regular daily and seasonal time-table, and the knowledge and practice of nature-cure.

3. For the mind, how to conduct oneself with others, how to make oneself useful to all, how to control the senses; knowledge of the truth that we are other than our bodies. Necessary familiarity with the social and natural environment.

This is, in brief, an outline of education. Education and life for the children should be intimately linked together.

The three most important skills to be mastered are: a really good knowledge of some one language, the power to calculate accurately for the practical needs of work, and expertness in some one craft.

Learning through craft means that knowledge and craft should go hand in hand. People are apt to get confused about how this can be done, but there is really no need to worry. Do not let us be involved in a debate about how Gnaneswari can be linked up with weaving. There is no need for mountains of books. But when a book has gripped the whole of our society, to ask what connection it has with craft is rather like asking what connection the mother has with the child. Knowledge must never be allowed to be vague, incomplete half-knowledge. And knowledge which is united to practice cannot remain incomplete.



Chapter 21

Education means Character-Building

It is often said that the old methods of teaching give first place to knowledge, and that our Nai Talim gives first place to work. But this is a mistaken analysis. It is wrong to say that the old methods are knowledge-centred; it is also wrong to say that Nai Talim is work-centred. Some people say that the old methods were book-centred and that Nai Talim is craft-centred. This too is an incomplete description. Our aim is not to develop the individual's technical skill, nor is it to turn out educated workmen. What we are aiming at is the full development of human potentiality. The pupil and the teacher who share in this educational programme must both become fully developed persons. If they get "mere knowledge" or "mere manual skill," or even both, their education will be one-sided. For manual skill and knowledge are only two out of very many aspects of human capacity, and what we look for from education is the development of the whole.

We say that the history, arithmetic, geography and so on, that is taught in schools, ought to be overhauled, and integrated with a craft. There is no doubt that arithmetic etc. have their uses in life; it is also clear that a craft is necessary. But these alone are not enough. The main end of education is the development of character; the craft, and everything else, must be planned to that end.

It is a mistake to plan a school time-table on the basis of subject-divisions. Without craft it is not possible either to develop character or to test it. A craft is therefore essential, and the self-reliance which is acquired through it is itself a part of character. Without the ability to present thought accurately, truth itself cannot be properly preserved. Language training is therefore to be regarded as a part of the training of character. But from the educational point of view these things have no independent value in themselves.

It is said that we teach children to spin, and by means of this we give them knowledge. But that is a very small part of our task. We have to see whether this activity has brought about any inward growth in the personality of the children. Have they been cured of their laziness or not? Have they gained any sense of craftsmanship? Have they become more fearless? Have they grown more truthful, more self-controlled, more ready to serve, or not? We must care for all these matters.



Examination time seems to me to provide a most disgusting picture of the old education system. When we take an examination, a supervisor has to be appointed to watch us, to see that no student steals from another by copying. It is to me a very saddening spectacle. For if it is possible to suspect us of being capable of stealing, then, as students, we have already failed. What is there left to examine?

Unless we give our full attention to these things from the very beginning, it is possible that Nai Talim will fall into the same error as the old system, and fail to lay the proper emphasis on character-development. Let us not confine ourselves to asking how many hanks have been spun; what we have to find out is whether or not the children are showing any strength of character.



Chapter 22

Teaching Methods

The clay and the pot—are they one thing or two? If you answer "two" then give me my clay and take away your pot! If you say they are one and the same, well, there lies a heap of clay, go and draw water with it. This relationship between clay and pot is called *samavaya* (integration); I have given the name *samavaya*—method of integration—to the Wardha system of education, because in it work and learning are as intimately united as are the clay and the pot.

Let all the children's education be built upon some basic craft; the craft will give warmth to the learning, and the learning will throw light on the craft. That is what is meant by an integral method.

Industrial education is something different; in it only the craft is taught. That is the heap of clay. Book education is something different; only the learning comes into it. That is the picture of a pot! You can look at it, but it is not meant for holding water.

The current systems of education are directed towards one, and only one, of the many faculties of humanity—the intellect. Even so, they are more apt to destroy it than to develop it. I call them "merely-methods," since their goal is merely to do away with the intellect, or in the language of their adherents, merely to provide learning. These systems have many faults, but from the point of view of educational principle their greatest fault is that the learning provided has no connection with the environment, and has to be forcibly rammed in. The consequence is that it is not remembered, and so far from being suited to the needs of life it makes for greater uselessness.

There is another system which I call the "appendix-method." The place given to craft in it is rather like the place of an appendix in a book. Craft is included, certainly, but only as a kind of tail, and it is looked upon as a pleasant hobby or pastime, with a decorative value. It is used for display, or to lighten the labour of learning.

Thirdly there is the "balanced-method;" there is an attempt to give equal importance to craft and to learning, and equal amounts of time are allotted to each. But clay and water do not make a pot; it is only when the potter brings his skill into play that the pot is formed. A boy who is taught by this "balanced-method" feels no



satisfaction. It seems to him that he is being made to waste in craft the time that he might have given to learning, and he works at the craft only unwillingly and under compulsion. Since in this method the craft is not looked upon as part and parcel of education, it can only be regarded as a means of livelihood, and its educational value is small. So that even when a boy works at it, he finds little interest in the work. In addition, there is no connection between the two parts of the time-table. In class we may find “Sakuntala” and the geography of Africa, whereas what is needed in the carpentry shop is some knowledge of the geography of timber. Neither side of the programme is of any help to the other.

Besides these three, educational science knows of another, the “Project” method. In this method the principle of integrated education, “learning through doing,” has been accepted. But work is given only a secondary place. Something has to be learned, and so a suitable project is taken up in order to teach it. This leads to artificiality.

The integrated method takes as the medium of education some many-sided craft which is intimately related to life. This craft is not merely a tool of education, it is an indivisible part of it. Through the craft, three objectives are to be reached: (1) the all-round development of the children’s innate faculties; (2) the teaching of the various kinds of knowledge that are useful in life and (3) the acquirement of a skill by which the children can earn their living. A small but important test of the fulfilment of these aims is that the products of the craft should meet part of the cost of the children’s schooling.

This integrated method differs from all current methods and is as it were the final fruit of our experience up to the present.

It was said above that the basic craft must be chosen for its broad and many-sided nature. In India today, in my opinion, spinning will be the craft best suited to 80% of our schools. I say this with children of seven years of age in mind.



Chapter 23

Some common misconceptions of Nai Talim

It is clear that the expectations which have been aroused by Nai Talim are not being fulfilled, and therefore both teachers and students are feeling dissatisfied. The so-called "basic biased" schools are like the avatar Narasimha—neither wholly man nor wholly beast. It is important that we should conduct some genuine Nai Talim schools, but first we must be clear in our minds what Nai Talim means.

Many people think that if the children are given some handicraft, made to do a bit of spinning, we have got Nai Talim. Others seem to think that Nai Talim means paying scant attention to knowledge; others again that we achieve Nai Talim by linking knowledge with work, but that it does not matter how the link is made—naturally or not. These three conceptions of Nai Talim are all mistaken.

Nai Talim cannot be achieved merely by giving the pupils a bit of craft work to do. It is true that the children should acquire such skill in craft that they will take to it as naturally as fish to water. They ought to feel confident that they can earn their daily bread by four hours' work at their craft. It is not enough to give them a mere smattering of spinning and weaving. Some teachers ask what need they have to become skilled in a craft, seeing that they are teachers. But when a mother has taught her little children how to eat, she does not say; "Now they have acquired the art of eating, so what further need have they of food?" The matter is not ended when they have learned how to eat—human beings must have food every day. Just as daily food is a permanent need of man, so is four hours' daily labour a permanent part of the life of Nai Talim teachers and pupils. They must be so skilled in their crafts that village carpenters and farmers will come to learn from them. They must be fully competent to keep their tools in repair. They must be masters of agriculture. Village industries are in decay; through Nai Talim they must be restored to vigour.

Books are not of primary importance in Nai Talim, so people expect knowledge to be deficient, or perhaps they imagine that whatever knowledge is necessary will be picked up naturally. But this is a mistaken notion. Nai Talim must provide complete knowledge of all that is basic in life. There is no need to memorise great chunks of history or meaningless lists of kings—that would be to put a useless burden on the children's minds. But they must know the fundamental ideas by which man lives and



grows. Some knowledge of philosophy, religion and ethics is essential. The children must also know something of the distinguishing features of our own and other societies. They must know the basic concepts of science. They must be thoroughly familiar with the laws of health, nutrition, hygiene, cookery, etc. Nai Talim must demand thoroughness in these fields of knowledge, and also a thorough mastery of language: the ability to express one's ideas in the proper way. Handwriting must be beautiful; the children must have a knowledge of literature. Thus, in Nai Talim, knowledge must never be imperfect; but also, it must never be irrelevant.

The heads of our university students are loaded with a lot of vain and useless information, and they are told that 33% constituted a pass—in other words, that they are at liberty to forget 67%. But if it is real knowledge, 100% ought to be remembered. Who is going to employ a cook who can make only 30% of his *chappattis* properly? There must be no uncertainty about knowledge. We either know a thing or we don't; knowledge is complete, or it is nothing. A man cannot be 80% alive and 20% dead; if he is alive, he is all alive; if he is dead, he is all dead. There is no place in knowledge for perhaps; it must be complete and certain, with no doubts in it. The university professors allow for 67% to be forgotten because they know that what is being taught is useless. There is no place in Nai Talim for that kind of indulgence. Whatever is taught will be worth remembering in full, and the students will remember it, because the knowledge is useful in life. Real knowledge is not forgotten by humanity; what is forgotten is not real knowledge. In Nai Talim we teach the things that will not be forgotten, and the fruit of Nai Talim must be men of learning and wisdom.

Now let us take the question of linking knowledge with work. We have adopted the word *samavaya*—correlation. Like the clay and the pot. The two are so merged that no one can separate them, yet neither can they be called identical. The word *samavaya* describes this kind of relationship, in which the elements are neither separable nor identical. In our method of teaching knowledge and craft possess this kind of relationship, so that it is impossible to say whether knowledge is being given or work is being done. We make no distinction between work and knowledge. If learning is in progress, there is a work-process going on too; if work is in progress, a learning-process is going on too. Work and knowledge are so closely intertwined that the problem of linking them does not exist, and the question of bringing in knowledge from the outside does not arise. Knowledge is developed through the craft itself, and the craft developed through knowledge. The business of stitching a fragment of



knowledge on to a fragment of work is not Nai Talim. In Nai Talim knowledge and work are an organic whole.



Chapter 24

A Workshop School

We have given the central place in Nai Talim to some useful craft, which we are trying to make the medium of education. I have seen many attempts to do this, but I admit I am not much satisfied with any of them. One must not blame the workers, for the idea is after all quite new, and each does as well as he can. When a man of outstanding ability takes up the task, useful work is done and results obtained. That is how any new idea makes progress.

I am not now discussing the education of little children. I am thinking of a new way to educate grown-up boys. I would not talk in terms of “giving them an education,” but of giving them daily wages. I would offer work to the unemployed, and pay them wages from the very first day. But I would take one hour from their working day to talk over with them the circumstances of their lives and environment. I would watch over the progress they made in their work, and look after their health. It would be said that I had opened a workshop, but perhaps I should be able in this way to make a better demonstration of Nai Talim than what is being done now.

I am not merely theorising. In Paunar I had boys of fourteen to eighteen years of age; who worked eight hours a day for wages. There was a kind of spinning workshop. I used to go and spend an hour or two with them. First of all I considered how to increase their earnings. The boys were spinning with the right hand. I gave them three month’s practice with the left hand and then had them work with either hand alternately.

Their hanks of yarn were not of the same count; some were coarse and some finer. The assessors would take the count of the coarsest yarn for the purpose of calculating wages on the whole amount. I taught the boys to reckon up how much they were losing in this way. They were not counting the 640 rounds of the hank accurately, and were losing 40 or 50 rounds in every hank. I taught them to count correctly. They were not steady workers; they were in the habit of gossiping together while spinning. I made them see by a practical experiment how much their work was losing in efficiency by this. I suggested that they should work in silence for a time; the output increased, so did the wages.



After this I began to give them seven hours for work and an hour for discussion. Then I started swimming, games, walks, classes in the *Gita* and talks about the meaning of festivals and holidays. In this way they both increased their earnings and also got some education.

At that time they were just boys; now they have become responsible citizens. They spin yarn for their own clothes. They work in a responsible way in the village *panchayat*. They take part in the community enterprises of Paunar. They are planning a village-cleaning programme. All this has come about because of that workshop. The workshop did not run for long, because I had to go to jail, and then it was closed. If it had continued, it would have been a successful piece of Nai Talim, though in name it was a workshop.

It seems to me that not much genuine work is being done in the schools where craft is introduced. They link up a little work with a little knowledge, but it is a kind of game, it is not serious. Is not the workshop very much better than that? Working for wages is a serious matter. The workman knows that if he does not learn his work there will be no profit. But the atmosphere of the schools seems to be one of make-believe. Where the bigger boys are concerned it would be better to have a workshop and give Nai Talim there. The only condition is that the organiser of the workshop must be a first-class teacher, a teacher to the marrow. He will work in natural conditions and give his workshop an educational form.



Chapter 25

The Educational Principles of a Basic Craft

The purpose of correlated or integrated methods of teaching is to give knowledge through a handicraft. The children ought to get their physical development in the same way as far as possible. The bodily exercise which can be had by a steady, fairly prolonged concentration on a craft which is properly handled is certainly of no less value from a physiological point of view than ten minutes of violent "physical jerks."

But this means that the teacher should be alert. Unless the right kind of attention is given to it, even a craft which has great potentialities for physical development may be rendered useless or harmful. Take for example the "carpenter's back" mentioned in the *Rig-Veda*; the backs of many of our carpenters are bent like a bow, even when they are still young, and in all these thousands of years we have not been able to cure the trouble. Carpentry is a valuable bodily exercise, but the habit of bending over the work all day long prevents us from realising its value. A great deal of the carpenter's work could be done standing up, but we have paid no attention to this aspect of it.

After working in a sitting position for a time, one should stand up to work. The sitting posture itself should be changed from time to time. Skills should be practised with both hands alternately. The children may work for a time in the class-room, and then go out to work in the field or garden, in the open air. Work which demands close focusing of the eyes should alternate with work which focusses them at a distance. There may be singing for a time, and then complete silence for a time. In short, we should make use of whatever variety can be introduced without spoiling the work. For example the children may sit for 30 minutes spinning on the takli, and then stand up for 6 or 10 minutes to wind the yarn. The same principle applies in general to all crafts; we must ensure that they aid, and do not impede, physical development. The teacher must pay special attention to the children's posture, and see that correct postures are used both for each process of the crafts and for all other activities.

Just as it is part of the craft teacher's work to let little children change posture frequently, so it is also part of his work to develop in them by practice the ability to maintain one posture for a considerable time while working. The period should be



gradually increased. The smallest children, when spinning on the takli, may usually be allowed to change hands, or change posture, every fifteen minutes; but on one day in the week they should be trained to spin with the same hand, or maintain the same posture, for thirty or forty minutes.

Our faith in work will be vain without this power of steady application. The capacity to apply oneself to a task, the ability to work steadily and well, seems to be almost entirely lacking among educated people today. We have to remedy this shortcoming. The final test is to be able to work steadily eight hours a day for several weeks on end, and we must train our students, step by step, up to that standard. When a river gushes out of its mountain source it leaps and plays, but as it nears the sea it grows quiet. In the same way training in a craft should begin with all the variety which has been suggested for the early stages of takli teaching, but as time goes on the power of steady application should be acquired.

It is of special importance that as little raw material as possible should be wasted; even the “waste” material should be put to some use. We are the poorest nation in the world, yet we are as thriftless as we are poor, and quite careless of wastage. We are careless, for example, in throwing away an invaluable fertiliser like human excreta, and so spreading disease. We are equally wasteful in disposing of dead animals. We eat limes, and throw away their valuable rind, and one might give innumerable other instances of our wastefulness. We have to tackle this problem thoroughly and from every side. When cotton is ginned, do not throw away the seed; collect the lint from the underside of the carding mat and use it to make coarse yarn, etc.; use the yarn which is broken by beginners on the charkha to make pincushions and other things.

Some people ask how it is possible for little children to make beautiful and useful things, but if they are being rightly taught this difficulty should never arise. Experience shows that children are capable of spinning clean, first-class yarn. They have a natural impulse to imitate, and they will readily imitate beauty. A child will never feel content to see a whole *laddu* on his father’s plate and only a fragment on his own—he wants a *whole* laddu, even if it is a little one! It is not nearly so difficult for children to grasp the idea of beauty as it is for them to grasp the utilitarian idea of usefulness. But we teachers will have to cure ourselves of the bad habit of allowing 10% for beauty and allotting 90% to some ugly piece of work because it has other qualities. A thing without beauty has no educational value whatever.



Children understand much more readily than adults that slivers ought to be all of the same length. Adults ask, what does it matter if some are a bit longer or shorter. If we have to be careful to make them all the same length, they argue, the work will take longer and nothing will be gained. But there must be no place in the education of little children for this slackness and inaccuracy. Let there be less work done, but let it be beautiful. Nothing is lost if the effort to do well lessens the output of work. [If the output is lessened by laziness, of course, that is quite a different matter.]

If the children do not acquire the habit of working together the teachers have accomplished nothing. The spirit of community is very weak in our society; except in times of great emergency we pay no attention whatever to what is going on outside the four walls of our homes. One of the most important functions of craft work is to arouse this spirit of co-operation. If one boy cannot card, another boy should be ready and eager to help him, and to do even better carding for his class-mate than he does for himself. Every child ought to pick up his own waste, but if one or two fail to do so, the others should pick it up for them. Every child ought to know how to make the belt for the *charkha* and should make his own; but if belts are needed for the whole class or for other students, they should be made willingly and carefully.

Children ought to be taught to find satisfaction not merely when their own speed of work has increased but also when the average speed of the whole class increases. There should be not only individual records, but class records also, and the children must be encouraged to take an interest in them. Normally, each child's yarn should be taken separately for weaving in order to make a full test of its quality; but occasionally a length of cloth should be woven from the yarn of the class as a whole, and shown in some school exhibition where the children can feel a pride in saying: "This is made from *our* class yarn." They will then realise that the merits and defects of this cloth are the merits and defects of them all, and community spirit will be strengthened.

A teacher ought never to scold a child for his failures by making him feel isolated—"What! You can't spin yet? You are not trying! All the other children are getting on, aren't you ashamed?" Instead he should say: "How is your class going to make any progress when you don't try to spin? If the class is to do well, everyone must try his very best." These, and many other such devices, can be used to awaken in the children the feeling of community.



When we come to the integration of knowledge with the processes, tools or other aspects of the craft, we should keep within the natural boundaries of the work but we should not let ourselves be imprisoned by them. One may sit on solid ground on a mountain-top and look out upon the world in all direction; in the same way we should keep our feet firmly on the craft and from this vantage ground make a wide survey of the universe. In this way a man's knowledge is firmly grounded in his craft, but is not limited to it.

Suppose we need to explain to the children that a takli or charkha should be spun "clockwise." The explanation can be given by getting them to revolve the wheel and drawing their attention to the direction of the revolution. But besides this they should be made to think of many other examples of things that turn clockwise or anti-clockwise. Here are a few:

(Clockwise):

1. Which way do the hands of a clock turn?
2. Which way does the pulley turn when a bucket goes down the well? Which way does a "Persian wheel" turn?
3. Which way does a screw turn when going in?
4. Which way should you turn a key to close the lock?
5. Which way do you move the *arati* (light-offering)?
6. Which way do people make the circuit of a temple =?
7. Which way does the rod roll when you press out the cotton seed on the plank?
8. Which way do you turn the handle of the hand-gin?
9. Which way does an oil-press turn?
10. Which way do you move your hands in shaping a *laddu*?

(Anti-clockwise):

1. Which way does the pulley turn when the bucket is drawn up the well?
2. Which way do you turn a screw to take it out?
3. Which way do you turn the key to open a lock?



4. Which way do you turn the mill to grind flour?

5. Which way does the *Sapta-Rishi* ("Great Bear") go round the Pole Star?—etc., etc.

All these things have to be demonstrated in actual practice, and not a moment of the time spent on them will be lost. Teaching of this kind has both a scientific purpose and a poetical purpose. That is to say, it throws light upon some aspect of the craft both in order to extend and deepen knowledge and also in order to awaken the experience of joy in the wonderful universe around us.

There are people who can spin well, but who are unable to describe in words the process of spinning. From one point of view it may be said that their understanding of the process itself is incomplete. They are certainly not deficient in the power of speech; the position is rather that their minds have not fully grasped the many fine and subtle movements which make up the work of their hands. In other words they are able to do the work but not to analyse it. Most of our craftsmen and artisans belong to this class. If you ask them to teach you some process, they will say: "Just watch me..... do it like this"—and you have to get whatever you can from these two words, "like this."

This state of affairs needs to be changed. Speech springs from the union of hand and head, and we cannot consider anyone to have a full mastery of his craft unless he can not only carry out the work but also give an exposition of the process in speech. By "speech" here I mean "exact and clear speech." Many people would say, for example, that a pencil which is standing on its end is "straight" and one which is slanted at another angle is "crooked." In fact the pencil is "straight" in both positions. Only recently, in a book published by one of our education departments, teachers are told that "in teaching addition to the children of such-and-such a class, numbers should not exceed 50." What should have been said is that "the numbers chosen for teaching addition should be such that their sum is not more than 50." When words are put together anyhow so that some kind of vague meaning emerges, they do not deserve to be called speech.

This whole subject is part of the teaching of the mother-tongue and special attention ought to be paid to it in language classes. However, it is also, in my opinion, an integral part of complete craft training, and even were a school to teach nothing but craft, it should not be left out.



The development of the student's powers of logic and reasoning should also form an essential part of craft training. These powers include:

1. Analysis—dividing a subject or object into its component parts and distinguishing various aspects.
2. Synthesis—the opposite of analysis, putting together the various parts of a subject or object.
3. Classification and organisation of material in suitable groups.
4. Comparison between various subjects or objects of thought and their qualities.
5. Appreciation of the relationship of cause and effect.
6. Recognition of the scope of sense-knowledge and also of sense-illusions.
7. Power of judgment, the weighing of uncertainties, reaching conclusions.

Examples of the exercise of all these powers would take up a great deal of space. The gist of the matter is that the mind's powers of inquiry and research must find scope for development through the craft. The full potentiality and living spirit of a craft will never be realised by the kind of rule-of-thumb teaching which merely says: Do this, don't do that. Unless one knows *why* one should do this and not do that, one must simply follow instructions with one's eyes shut; such methods will never make for any real progress.

It is not necessary that the reason for the do's and don't's should always be explained on the spot. Reasons may be given beforehand, or afterwards, or at the time, as is convenient; I merely want to stress that they must be given. The methods of teaching ought to be such that the students will themselves raise questions and bring them to the teacher, but when necessary the teacher also should raise the questions, and discuss them with the students. We ought to ask questions even about things that are usually taken for granted—*e. g.*, why is not the wheel of the charkha square? Ordinarily, if anyone were to ask such a question, people would call him a fool; but I should call him a very intelligent man. We ourselves ought to raise questions like this and get the students to argue out the answer in a reasoned manner. Work is one thing, but faith in work, reverence and love for work, is quite another. The major portion of mankind is engaged in bodily labour, but probably they work only because



they must, and many people would escape from hard work if they had the chance. Some people have succeeded in escaping—in other words they have put the burden upon other men's shoulders and have got themselves regarded with respect. This is the root of imperialism, capitalism, wars, and the social cleavage between "high" and "low." The only real remedy is to bring students to feel that it is a sin against themselves and against society to accept food for the body without also labouring with the body.

The present atmosphere of society is such that no sooner is a child sent to school to study than he begins to object to picking up cowdung, although he is very happy to drink the milk. What ought to happen is that when children are educated by our methods they will enjoy picking up the cowdung, but will feel reluctant to drink milk unless others can get it too.

This means that the teacher ought to share this bodily labour along with his students. The work that is done in school should belong to the school, but in addition the pupils should see their teacher and his family working willingly and hard in their spare time and holidays, like other labourers of the village. Teacher and pupils will of course take part as need arises in village cleaning and other public service, but besides this the teacher should habitually work with the pupils in sweeping and cleaning the school, plastering the courtyard with cowdung, etc. Such so-called "low" kinds of work must not be put upon the children; the teacher must first do them himself and then get the children to take part. Without this the children will not learn to honour and enjoy manual labour.

The charkha means manual labour, and manual labour means *ahimsa*.



Chapter 26

The choice of a Basic Craft

A question which is being asked today is whether poultry or fishery can be introduced as a basic craft in schools. This is the kind of problem that would arise in no other country in the world except India—not by any evil fate, but because of the history of our culture.

People who believe in non-violence regard this question in two different ways. Both parties are non-violent, but they reach different conclusions. I will give an instance. Kaka-saheb believes in non-violence as fully as I do; it is as unthinkable for him to eat flesh as it is for me. He has written an article about fisheries, in which he says: "Fishing is an occupation of great educational value and one which may well be followed as a basic craft." I agree that it satisfies our criteria of what a basic craft should be, and that it may be made the basis of general knowledge in the same way as other crafts. Some people may say that while at present fishing is carried out by cruel methods, it would be possible to do it in a scientific way so that the living creatures suffer as little as possible. What harm would there be in teaching it to children under such conditions?

When I think of this occupation, fishing, I find myself unable to think of using it as a means of education for children. I should have to teach them first how to make a hook, and then how to bait it with some kind of flesh, so that the fish will be attracted to eat it—in fact, I have to show them how to deceive the fish. We say to the fish, "See, here is something to eat," and when the poor things come to eat, and take the hook, we lay hands on them and carry them off. There is a lot of untruth in this, as well as violence. I cannot do it, and I cannot think of using it for education. How am I to make the children understand that this kind of trickery and deceit is included in the truth of humanity?—or are we to make a distinction between truth towards men and truth towards other creatures? I can imagine myself under some circumstances accepting violence, but it is impossible for me to accept untruth. Someone may perhaps suggest a way of fishing in which the fish are not tricked and do not suffer. But even then I could not agree that it is right to include this kind of thing in children's education. The feelings of these creatures are very clearly to be seen. I give them something to eat, and the fish at once come up to me eagerly to eat it; I scare them, and they rush away.



They understand, in fact, both my goodwill and my anger. I do not see how I can teach children to kill creatures into whose feelings I can enter like this.

So much for fishing. I am not opposed to poultry-keeping in the same way. The objections which I have to fishing do not apply to poultry-keeping. Other considerations of a different nature come in with regard to poultry, which I will not enter into now.

Someone asked me what is meant by integrated education. I said that it meant the mingling of knowledge and work. He replied, "Well, if that is all, we can send our students to work in an atom-bomb factory; they will work, they will be educated through their work, work and education will be integrated. Would you agree to it?" "Certainly not," I replied. "There may be a mingling of work and knowledge in an atom-bomb factory, but I will not send my boys there, because the principles of Sarvodaya are contravened. That kind of work will not do for Nai Talim." "Let us say, then," he said, "that the meaning of *samavaya* is that the divorce between work and knowledge should be healed, and that both the purpose and the instruments should be pure." I was very happy to hear this, I agreed entirely. In our integrated study we must be careful to see that both the means and the ends are clean.

Some people ask what production we can expect from the small, simple tools which we use. I tell them, "First see what the state of India is, see how poor we are, and then ask your question. All that we do is for the poor. There is such poverty that the villagers cannot send their boys to school. If they stay at home they can lighten the family burden a little, at school they will earn nothing. So we have to find some way of enabling them both to work at home and to attend school."

Let us keep this aim clearly before us, that our schools should serve the poor. If we do that, all the questions of whether we should teach five hours or six, have one session or two, will solve themselves. If a system will help the poor, that system must be adopted in a Nai Talim school; it is only when schools are run on that principle that education can become really widespread.



PART IV

Aspects of the Syllabus



Chapter 27

Religious Teaching for Children

A letter from Apte Guruji raises the following problem: "People ask again and again about the religious instruction of little children in school. Many have no idea how to go about it. Certainly all are agreed that the children ought to get by heart the words of the Saints. But some clarification is needed with regard to the form to be taken by religious teaching in primary and middle schools."

There is no doubt that religious teaching is a subject of great interest and importance. But the word "Dharma" has unfortunately acquired a very narrow, communal meaning, and for this reason many thoughtful people are opposed to any teaching of *dharma* in schools at all. My own point of view is that true religious teaching is not a matter of literature. The essence of religion is a sound character, faith in God and the conviction that the soul is other than the body. This essential religion can only be learned from the company of good men. My only plan for religious teaching, therefore, is to choose good men as teachers.

To learn by heart the words of the Saints is certainly a most profitable exercise, but I should not call it religious teaching; I would rather call it the teaching of the purest literature. In making the selection of pieces to be learned, a wide alertness and sensitiveness of spirit is needed.

As a foundation for reverence towards all religious traditions, one may certainly teach the lives of their saints and tell children about their rules of life, their festivals and other disciplines for purifying the mind. But this should be regarded as history or social studies rather than religious teaching.

There is a belief current in all religions, that merit can be obtained directly from certain ceremonial forms and outward actions, without paying any attention whatever to purity of heart. This superstition has to be destroyed. The children must get into the habit of testing everything by the challenge of experience. If that attitude were firmly established I should consider their religious education to be complete.



Chapter 28

Truthfulness

The ethical values of our society have to be changed. What we need is an unshakeable conviction that if there is one vice more despicable than the rest, it is untruth. All other vices may be regarded as shortcomings or moral sicknesses. The traditions of India name as major sins "the theft of gold," "drunkenness," and "killing a Brahmin." But untruth is a greater sin than any of these. Our present standards of value encourage men to conceal their faults. Now if a man eats too much, and upsets his stomach, and dies in consequence, we do not blame but pity him. Failures in ethical behaviour should similarly be pitied, not blamed. If society were to adopt that attitude, the impulse to conceal one's faults would begin to disappear. We have therefore to nurture the belief that the most deadly sin of all is untruth.

We must do our very utmost in our schools to lay the foundation of a steady truthfulness. This means that we must always trust our boys, and accept a boy's word as true, no matter what it is. A man who loves truth in his own heart always trusts other people.

I still remember an incident which happened thirty years ago, when I was in Benares. I went to a shop to buy a lock. As I make a habit of asking the price of things even when I do not buy, I knew what the correct price was. The shop-keeper said that the price was ten annas, but I knew that it was really three annas. I said to him quietly: "I know quite well that this lock should cost three annas, but as you say that the price is ten annas, I will give you what you ask." I paid the ten annas and took the lock. I used to pass this shop every day on my daily walk; one day two or three weeks later the shopman saw me passing; there happened to be no customer about, so he called me. What made him do it I do not know, but he said: "The price of that lock was three annas, as you said. Please take your seven annas back again." I had not expected anything of the kind, and tears came to my eyes. It seemed to me that God had taught me a lesson in truthfulness. Of course, it is possible that God may not always arrange matters like this! He may put his devotees to a severer test. We must stick to our faith in truth, even though it may seem to have no influence at all upon men's hearts.



Chapter 29

Aspects of Character-Development

1. Nor to be afraid without cause; when fear overcomes one, to take the Name of God. Fear cannot stand before the Name of God.

2. To correct one's faults daily. To try not to repeat yesterday's faults today, nor today's faults tomorrow.

3. To understand ideas properly, and to remember that an ideal that is not put into practice will be lost.

4. To help others in need to the utmost of one's power, never forgetting how much help we have received from others.

5. Not to put oneself forward; to restrain oneself.

6. Not to eat before doing some productive work.

7. To study regularly for a time every day.

8. To offer some manual service to one's gurus.

9. To sit straight, speak straight, and think straight.

10. Not to be involved in any fighting, or cause anyone sorrow.

11. To be truthful always in conduct and in speech.

12. Never to be mastered by anger; it is a sign of weakness.

13. Not to look always for one's own advantage, remembering that the world was not made for our pleasure, but we for its service.

14. Never to stir up confusion, noise and strife.

15. Not to look for others' faults, but to hold fast to their good qualities.

16. To sorrow for the sorrows of others, and strive to remove them.

17. Not to give way to gluttony or greed, but be satisfied with little.

18. Not to be proud, but to mix freely with all and be courteous in speech.

19. To be ashamed to do any evil deed; to be temperate always.



20. To keep one's hands, feet, eyes, from needless straying.
21. Not to submit to a display of physical force, but
22. To forgive the weak their faults.
23. To endure physical pain without complaint.
24. To be pure in thought.
25. To envy none; to pull no one down in order to raise oneself.
26. Not to consider oneself great; this is the true greatness.

I have given above a simple, straightforward, elementary interpretation of the goals of the divine treasure of the Gita, in a way suited for young children. It is expounded in full in *Gnaneshwari*.



Chapter 30

Two notes on Language Teaching

(i) *The Mother-tongue*: The knowledge which we need is of two kinds: (1) the power to judge the nature and value of the things around us, that is, science and (2) knowledge of the Self, or spiritual knowledge. As a means to these ends, it is necessary to have a certain measure of skill in language. Language is a kind of postman. If I write nothing at all in my letter, the postman will deliver the blank paper. Language is not knowledge, but the vehicle of knowledge; only scientific and spiritual knowledge is truly knowledge, and it is this that we must concentrate upon. That is the kind of examination I would set in school. I would not go to the trouble of setting a language paper; I would evaluate the children's command of language by getting them to talk.

(ii) *Sanskrit*: We ought to think out the reasons why we should teach Sanskrit at all. "If you want to preach the Vedanta," said Vivekananda, "teach people Sanskrit, and your purpose will be accomplished." In his opinion, then, Sanskrit meant Vedanta.

The Gita, the Upanishads, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, these and their like are the living literature of Sanskrit. Plays, novels and so on are also to be found in it, but these are not its distinguishing feature; there is plenty of such literature in modern languages, and there would be no special reason for learning Sanskrit if that were all it had to offer. The real urge to learn Sanskrit comes because it can satisfy a spiritual need; without that, only specialists in philology would learn it.



Chapter 31

Self-Knowledge and Science

People have an impression that self-knowledge and science are opposed to each other. They associate science with materialism. This is a mistake. Science is a thing which can greatly expand the knowledge of the Self. There is no danger to be feared from the advance of science, it will bring us great benefit. Science has increased the power of compassion. The sick are served much better than they were in former times. Science has power to expand and strengthen self-knowledge; it will not destroy it.

In ancient days our spiritual teachers strove repeatedly to eliminate the possessive spirit of "me and mine," but did not succeed. Now there is a chance of success, for this "me and mine," this narrow parochial outlook, will not be able to stand up against science.

We must recognise the conditions of our own times. In former days no one knew anything of events fifty miles away. Now the whole world is our neighbour. In consequence, the habits of the old life, the isolation in which families once lived, will no longer serve our need. Neither isolated nations, nor isolated families, can survive in modern conditions.

We desire to establish our society on the basis of true self-knowledge. Science will rid us of the faults of our ethical and religious traditions, the knowledge of the self will heal our divisions, and the social structure of Sarvodaya will eliminate the possessive spirit of "me and mine". We need all these three things, Science, Self-knowledge and Sarvodaya. Science must greatly expand, all must be trained in self-knowledge and we must all unite to plan for the welfare of all. So far as I have been able to understand, this is the essence of all religions. I believe that religion will be revealed in greater truth and splendour by the progress of science.



Chapter 32

The Teaching of Science

If any subject can be singled out as more important for us than others, it seems to me that it is science. India is undoubtedly an agricultural country, but its salvation will not be found in agriculture alone. European countries are commonly considered to be industrialised, but in France, which is reckoned as an industrial country, there is three and a half acres of land per head of population, whereas in India with its agricultural economy, there is only one and a quarter acres per head. This is a very serious state of affairs. There is practically no other kind of work done in India, except what is connected with agriculture. If our condition is to be changed, all our people, beginning with our students and teachers, must acquire skill in one or other craft, and to do this they must learn science.

The kitchen must be looked upon as our laboratory. The person who works there ought to know how many calories, and how much protein and fat, are obtainable from various kinds of food. He ought to be able to work out the kind of diet needed at various ages and for various kinds of work.

In the morning everyone goes to answer the calls of nature. But in schools there must be a special study of the science of sanitation. In what ways can the excreta be used? What is the effect of the sun's rays upon it? What harm is there in leaving it uncovered, and what diseases does it spread? If it is converted into fertiliser and used on the fields, how much does the production increase? And so on. We have to see that our students get a scientific knowledge of all these matters from the practice of sanitation. This morning scavenging ought to be a regular part of life and from it we can learn the science of health, and that if the body accumulates wastes, it loses its vigour.

Some boy falls ill. Why did he fall ill? Did the disease visit him for nothing, or did he have to spend some money to persuade it to come? In any case you must treat it like a guest, and find out why it came, how it came and so on. Now that it has come, you must learn as much as you can from it. It is part of your education. It must never be said of us, as it certainly can be of others, that this disease came and went, with all its possibilities of knowledge, but that we remained a perfect blank and learnt nothing from it.



In this school you are spinning yarn, and making it into *khadi*, and that is a good thing. But if you cannot answer questions about the scientific principles of *khadi*, what is the difference between a school and a production centre or factory? As a matter of fact I would like to see this kind of scientific knowledge given in factories also.

Students, like other people, have to eat, but there ought to be a big difference in the way they eat. For students, food ought to be a source of knowledge. When a student grinds and sifts flour, he will make a note of how much bran is extracted. Let us suppose that there are eight tolas of bran in a seer—that is, ten per cent. That is a great deal. Next day he goes to his neighbour and weight the bran which is extracted there, and finds that it is only two and a half tolas. This experience must make him ask questions—what do we lose when we extract eight tolas of bran? If we were to eat it, would it do us any harm? He must get a full, correct answer to these questions. In this way, as is said in the Gita, every kind of work will be an instrument of knowledge.

There will certainly be some expenses involved in doing every piece of work in an experimental spirit and as an instrument of knowledge, but there will be at least an equivalent increase in production. The school's *charkhas* will have to be kept in tiptop condition; it won't do to let them be kept anyhow. The quantity of work turned out in a school may not be so great, but the quality must be very high. The children will weigh the cotton as they take it, and will also weigh the seed which they extract. Why is it that there is a difference in the weight of seed taken from *rozhia* and from *varum*? This is the kind of question that ought to be asked and answered. The cotton seeds are much the same size and shape as peas: why then is there such a difference in their weight? The children can be shown that cotton seed is light because it contains oil. The next question will be what other seeds of this kind are to be found.

For all this work a pair of scales will be needed. They should not be bought in the bazaar, but made in the school. If every piece of work is tackled in this way, the teaching of science will have begun. What fun science will be if it is taught on such a plan! It will be impossible to forget it!



Chapter 33

Tables without tears, or, all about an acre

During arithmetic lessons in school, children are taught their tables. When I was a child these tables were rammed down my throat also, by dint of repetition and the teacher's cane, but a great many of them were not really assimilated. One reason for my failure to digest them was to be found in those two instruments of instruction; the other reason was that some of the tables were absolutely useless. If tables are really of use in life, they will certainly give pleasure to those who are interested in living. They must also be taught in a pleasurable way. I will give an example which may serve as a guide.

The main basis of life is the land, and land is measured in acres. Children need therefore to know the tables of land measurement and how an acre is made up. Let us consider how to teach them.

The first step is to tell them that this word "acre" is English in origin, but has now become an Indian word because of its common use among us. It is a unit of land area. In India there is about one acre of land to every person, so we may say that one acre is the land of one man. By linking the sound of the word "acre" with the sound of the word "ake" (Hindi: एक—one) we can get the children to remember the word easily.

The multiplication table says that one acre equals 4840 square yards. But how is such an unwieldy number to be remembered? It is made up of two factors, 121×40 . 121 square yards are called a "*kattha*" and 40 *katthas* make one acre. But we will leave aside yards and talk about feet, and we will divide the *kattha* also into smaller parts. Out of a plot of 121 square yards— 11×11 yards—we can make nine smaller squares each 11×11 feet. Nine of these little plots will make a *kattha* and 9×40 or 360 of them will make an acre.

There are roughly 360 days in the year. If we decide to dig 121 square feet every day it will take a year to dig an acre. We will forget for the time being that during the rains we shall not be able to dig at all. So, if we are to dig this amount daily, how much time must we give? The answer will depend upon the skill of the digger, the nature of the soil, the season, and the efficiency of the tools, but we find from experience that the work will take from 40 to 80 minutes, or, on an average one hour. For convenience



we may give the name *ghanta* (hour) to the area of land that can be dug in an hour it is not difficult to remember that a *ghanta* means 11×11 or 121 square feet. We will make ourselves a measuring rod 11 feet long and mark out with it a square plot of ground so that the children can actually see a *ghanta*. 360 such *ghantas* make an acre—the table is very simple and easy.

At this stage we should point out to the children that a *ghanta* does not mean a square of 11 feet by 11 feet, but 121 square feet of land, which may be of many various shapes. We only took the square plot for convenience in demonstration. When we divide up land among the children for agriculture, we should measure it in *ghantas*. Some may have one *ghanta*, some two. The children will then be able to calculate from their own actual harvests what the production per acre is.

So far we have been building up the multiplication table from amounts less than one acre. A square plot with sides, one furlong in length contains 48,400 square yards, that is, 10 acres. This is a common unit of land measurement. The Government of Madhya Pradesh has given a rebate on land-tax of two annas in the rupee to persons who hold less than this. The teachers should tell the children this, and then go on to impress on them that the standard size of a holding should be ten acres. It was said above that in India there is about one acre of land for every person, that is there is five acres of land for every family, reckoning the average family as five persons. 75% of our population today are agriculturists, whereas forty years ago the proportion was 70%. Owing to the decay of our crafts and industries, the pressure of population on the land has increased from 70% to 75% in the space of forty years. We can consider conditions satisfactory only when not more than 50% of our people are dependent on agriculture. If that were the case today, the average holding of a peasant family would be ten acres. We usually calculate one pair of bullocks for 20 acres of land, but if a part of the land is used for vegetable and fruit gardens, ten acres is not too little for one pair. Taking everything into account, ten acres may be regarded as the standard holding. We may call it an *agar* and teach the children that 10 acres = 1 *agar*.

If this *agar* is square, it is one furlong long and one furlong broad. Here is the basic significance of the furlong. How many *agars* are there in a square mile? — 64. Ten acres make one *agar* and 64 *agars* make one square mile, therefore 640 acres make one square mile. 640 is a number with which children who spin are already familiar, so this table will present no difficulty. An acre is 360 *ghantas* or 1/640th part of a square mile — it can be fixed from either end of the scale.



We have just alluded to the fact that the number of acres in a square mile, 640, is the same as the number of rounds in a hank of yarn. But this coincidence does not mean that the table of acres should be “correlated” with the spinning craft. There is true correlation only when the need for the table of land measurements arises in the course of practical work. A comparison used to facilitate learning is simply a part of ordinary teaching technique. It is not inconsistent with correlation, but in itself it is not correlation.

121 square feet	= 1 ghanta
9 <i>ghantas</i>	= 1 <i>kattha or gunta</i>
40 katthas or	
360 ghantas	= 1 acre
10 acres	= 1 <i>agar</i>
64 agars or	
640 acres	= 1 square mile.



Chapter 34

The approach to Social Studies

When I visit schools, I am usually dissatisfied with the way in which craft is being used as a medium of instruction. This is not the fault of the teachers, for the whole method is new.

In one class a teacher was telling a story; when he finished it he linked it on with the *takli* and began to teach a *takli* song. That seems to me artificial. A song about a *takli* is not the same thing as teaching *through* the *takli*. Teaching arithmetic through spinning does *not* mean giving the children fifteen or twenty slivers and making them add and subtract them. That only results in spoiling the slivers and one can do the work better with stones. We have to use the opportunities for teaching arithmetic that arise in actual craft work. Every kind of craft is brim-full of arithmetic.

Another teacher has recorded, subject by subject, what he has taught through the craft. But that by itself is not enough. The record should also show what topic was taken up in what connection, and how the opportunity arose. It is not sufficient to say that such and such topics were taken up in social studies; how did these topics come to be raised? Nothing should be taught in a vacuum, unrelated to the immediate situation. We must always make sure that what we teach is relevant to the occasion.

It seems to be regarded as compulsory that all social studies should be taught only through craft. But this rigidity of outlook is a fault. Craft is like a key, it unlocks the door into life.

Let us suppose that it is a wet day. The first thing I would ask the children when they arrive at school is whether they have been to the latrine, cleaned their teeth and so on. Why ask that on this particular day? Because when it rains children find it difficult to go out to the latrine.

If I want to teach children about doors and windows I will ask them what windows are for. They will say that they let in light and air. Then I will ask: "Then wouldn't it do to have windows in the roof?—they would also let in light and air." The children will say, "No, we want to see the outside world also." Then I will say, "All right, suppose we make windows for that. But you cannot go in and out by them. Would you



be satisfied?" "No," they will answer, "we must have a way to get in and out. We need a door also."

Then, when they have seen clearly why we need windows and doors, I will say: "Now tell me, what windows and doors have you got in your own bodies?" Eyes, ears, mouth, nose, etc., are called "doors" in Sanskrit. The *Gita* says: सर्वद्वाराणि संयम्य—control all the doorways, set a watch on all the windows and doors. नवद्वारे पुरे देही—this soul dwells in a city of nine gates. Men must have got the idea of a window from their own eyes. But human eyes are very small, cow's eyes are large. So men began to make windows like cow's eyes. The word for window in Sanskrit is गवाक्ष, which means cow's eye.*

I will then ask the children to draw a window, an eye—there comes in practice in drawing. After that I will tell them about the various kinds of windows that people have made—there is history. Can these old windows be seen anywhere in the world today?—I will take them to Lapland and in that connection tell them about the life of the people there. In short, one should tell children about the way of life of different countries, in connection with some such natural interest.

China like India is an ancient country with a wealth of population and intensively cultivated; why is China so productive? What do they do to maintain the fertility of the soil? In this connection I will tell the children about manures. We have to learn from China in particular how to make use of human excreta. This is very widely used in China and thanks to it the soil maintains its productivity even though it has been farmed for so many years.

An American has written a book called "Farmers of Forty Centuries,"** describing the agriculture of China. In it he says: "How thriftless we Americans are! We possess fifteen or twenty acres of land a head, and we have farmed it for only four centuries at most. Yet we use all kinds of chemical fertilizers to make it productive, and these ruin the soil, while we allow a valuable manure like human excreta to go to waste." Teachers ought to read that book.

If it rains very heavily the children should be given a holiday to enjoy themselves playing in the rain. The teacher too should take off his clothes and play with them, and tell them that rain is the blessing of God. We in India get a holiday when it rains, but in England they get a holiday when the sun shines. Why?—because there the sky is



usually dull and overcast, so when the sun comes out there is a holiday. In this way, while they are playing and enjoying themselves, I can give them some idea of the climate of England.

Social studies include history, geography, civics. To teach history and geography means to introduce the children to distant times and places. Time and place are so closely related that in all languages time-words are freely used as place-words. “I will answer your question after a little while”—here, “after” is a time-indicator. “They followed *after* him”—here “after” is a place-indicator.

When we say that we should teach history and geography we mean that we should acquaint the children with the people of ancient times and far countries. If we tell them about people in our own land in old times it is “history”; if about people of our own time in distant lands it is “geography”.

There is one party among educationists who say that little children should be told about old times and far countries. Another party says that we should begin with our own day and take the children back step by step into history. These two opinions seem mutually contradictory, but they are not really so. One says, teach the very old; the other says, teach the very new. But no one says that we should begin in the middle. That is perfectly correct. The process of comparison is a most important aid to understanding, and for purposes of comparison we need either what is very near, or what is distant. Gandhiji’s *ahimsa*, for example may be compared either with socialism, or, for purposes of contrast, with imperialism.

But, this kind of extensive knowledge should never be given apart from a natural context of interest. It will not do for the teacher simply to get up and talk about Lapland; let the natural opportunity arise. It is the teacher’s task to seize the natural opportunity to widen the children’s knowledge and it is not at all difficult to create such opportunities.

* English “window” is literally “wind’s eye”—Translator.

** By F. H. King: Rodale Books Inc. U. S. A.



Chapter 35

History is dangerous!

Freedom of thought there must be, and along with it there must be a science of thought. Thought does not spring from the senses or the feelings—from nose or eyes or ears; thought is of the reason. So when we control our senses and our feelings and attend to our reason, we find out how to think, we enter upon the science of thought. It is a science that should be studied by every citizen and student.

One of the greatest faults of our education, however, and one of the greatest dangers to right thought, is what is going on today in the name of history. The falsehoods of history are much more serious than those of fairy-tales; the story-teller does at least begin by avowing that his story is imaginary—there is that much of truth in his pages. The historian, on the other hand, is apt to claim for his fabrications the sole title to truth!

Do any of you imagine that what is taught in the name of history is the truth? There have been two world wars in this century; one version of their "history" is written in Germany, quite other versions in Russia, America and England. I was amused to read in the newspapers recently that Russian history is to be corrected and rewritten—what was glorious in Stalin's time has now apparently become false! In Stalin's time, Mahatma Gandhi was described as a counter-revolutionary; now probably he may become a great man. Perhaps we should thank God that they never went so far as to claim that he never existed! But "history" is dictated by the whims of those in power; they use the events of the past as tools to distort men's minds. And this is the "history" that is taught to children! The makers of history are dead and gone, but the children's brains are burdened with their deeds. What use is there in knowing what happened when, and gabbling lists of dead kings? Countless kings have come and gone in the world, thick as the leaves on a tree. What will it profit us to study their history? The fact is that in the name of history the thinking of whole peoples is being forced into particular moulds, and as a result the nation is riddled with prejudice and is losing its vigour and manliness.

When the Bhoodan movement began, people would ask hopelessly: "What can be done by begging like this? The work will never be finished! Has anything of this sort ever happened in history?" I answer: "No, neither has Vinoba ever happened in



history! Vinoba is a new birth, so he is making new history.” Are you to make new history, or merely to read old history? It is none of the business of humanity to smother the creative spirit under the passive study of old history, and infer that ‘there is nothing new under the sun.’ Why should people say that what has never yet happened can therefore never happen? Did Shri Krishna refrain from playing the flute because Shri Ramachandra did not play it? Why should we be born at all, if we are only to do what has been done already? God gives us birth in order that we may achieve something in our own strength. We must not allow our intellects to be crushed under the weight of ancient history. We have seen how one-sided the presentation of history can be, and that one cannot be certain how much truth it contains. But even supposing it were true, that is still no reason for burdening our minds with it. We have been born to make new experiments and to test new truths. Our students and our people in general must be freed from this load of history.

Take a topical question—is Bellary in Karnatak or in Andhra?* What has history to say? The Andhras examine history and say that Bellary is in Andhra. The Karnatakas examine history and say that it is in Karnatak. But geography says that Bellary is where it always has been! History can prove nothing. Some of the Karnatakas are saying that their State is bounded by Godavari and Kaveri and that they will only be satisfied if some bits of Tamil Nad, Andhra and Maharashtra are included in it. Some of the Maharashtrians will reply that their State is bounded by Narmada and Tungabhadra and that bits of Gujarat, Karnatak and the Hindi districts must be included in it! Every State seems to be trying to push back its boundaries into the territory of other States—as if a farmer were to stretch out his hand into other men’s fields! It is ridiculous and yet it is a kind of devil-possession—and “history” is responsible for it. Everyone has his vanity fed by reading the old histories that were written to glorify his own country or party. Pakistan and India, through their newspapers, each accuses the other of violence and unprovoked attacks. Where is the authority that can judge between them? Until the greed and vainglory of history is destroyed, there can be no progress, no good faith.

There has been some talk of a union between Andhra and Karnatak. First unite your hearts a little, and then if you wish to unite into one large State, you may do so. But take such a simple matter as the coalition of the Telugu and Kannada scripts. There are a few small differences between them, but if each were to be changed a little, they could become one. A committee could easily decide it, but each side would have to



give up something. But the vainglory of history will intervene and nothing will be done. The Telugus will say that the “talaktu” must slope upwards, and the Kannadigas will say that it doesn’t look nice like that, it should lie flat. They will look in old books to see how high it is. This is the result of referring everything to history.

If we really want to make progress, we must select the essential in history and leave out the rest. I am not saying that history is completely useless. The *Mahabharata* is a magnificent piece of historical writing, embodying Vyasa’s understanding of the various facets of human nature. This sort of history is useful. But society will never make progress if its past history haunts it like an evil spirit. It is true that it is an inspiring experience to read of the glorious deeds of old; but the men of old days did evil as well as good, and why should we load our memories with all their doings? We should take the good, and leave the evil. This power of discrimination will be weakened if we allow ourselves to get stuck in ancient history.

Students have to learn to “read between the lines” of history and leave aside the printed word—to read the blank spaces between. Unwritten history is more significant than that which is written. When a mother takes care of her children, loves them and feeds them well, nobody sends a wire to the newspapers. But if someone’s blood is spilt, a wire is sent at once, and the event is written in history. The mother’s love, which is a major fact, never appears in history; the bloodshed, which is a minor incident, does so appear. Man never writes the history of his own humanity, but only of his denials of his humanity. So that knowledge of man's true nature is not to be had from history. What is recorded is only what is opposed to human nature, and out of these records is constructed a history which appears to consist of nothing but violence..... In fine, the current types of "history" have a bad influence; they tend to narrow our sympathies and destroy the vigour of our manhood.

* This talk was given at Anantapur, Andhra, in April 1956



Chapter 36

The materials of drawing

Drawing is a part of the syllabus of a basic craft, and an important part, for its relationship with the craft is intimate. But when I was handed a list of drawing requisites, it gave me a rude shock. Who is going to buy paint boxes, brushes, drawing-paper and such expensive material for every pupil? If the students are expected to buy them, it is impossible for poor children in the village; if the Government is to buy them it makes the scheme very expensive. What is to be done? I had to say plainly that no one should buy these things, neither the Government nor the students. How then is the teaching of drawing to be organised?

The art of drawing has two distinct aspects; one aims at beauty, the other at technical usefulness. To speak in very elevated language, one belongs to *bhaktiyog*, the path of devotion, the other to *karmayog*, the path of work. As I see it, these two aspects must be weighed and given their due place. We must never forget that in life and in education, *karmayog*, the path of work, has the first place. *Bhakti*, loving devotion, is the grace which makes beautiful the path of work. *Jnana*, knowledge, is the light which illuminates it. This line of thought holds good for basic crafts in general, and for drawing also.

The kind of drawing which is practically useful in spinning, weaving, carpentry and other crafts, and for skills like writing, is technical drawing. This includes the preparation of various charts and graphs, drawing plans and maps to a given scale, making a sketch of some new type of spindle-holder which one has seen (either from the model or from memory), or putting on to paper one's new ideas for the improvement of tools. In this way what are commonly called "freehand drawing" "geometrical drawing," "object drawing," and drawing from memory and from imagination, are all covered.

For this kind of practical work-centred drawing no special equipment is needed. A great deal can be done with ordinary slates and pencils. As little paper as possible should be used, and there is practically no need at all for what is called drawing paper." There should be no place for the dirty practice of using an eraser—the drawing should be completely scrapped. The children ought to acquire skill of hand and confidence by using their slates, and only use paper when it is really necessary. Ruled paper can be



used for graphs, and drawing paper for pictures. But there is no need to buy ruled paper; let the children do the ruling themselves that is also an aspect of the art of drawing. Looked at from this point of view everything falls into place—craft, art, knowledge, joy and self-reliance—and there is no need to get entangled in problems of equipment.

But even if we do give the first place to drawing as a useful technique, there is still a need for drawing as a homage to beauty. We need it to give grace to the craft and a certain amount of equipment is necessary—what can be done about it? The real purpose of this essay is to answer that question, but some allied matters have been dealt with first.

Rang-panchami is celebrated in Paunar as elsewhere. The boys who worked in our workshop used to do as everyone else in the village did they bought colour in the bazaar and spoiled one another's clothes. Afterwards the clothes had to be washed with soap (also bought in the bazaar) and even then the colour would not come out. The other villagers did not bother to wash their clothes, for they had not got the sense of cleanliness which the workshop boys had acquired. I said to the boys: "I have no objection to your spending time playing *holi*. But what good does it do you to spend your money on colour and soap? and you did not really enjoy yourselves properly either. Suppose instead that in the evening, after work was over, you had gone along the river bank for a mile or two and seen the *palash* trees (the "flame of the forest") in full bloom. You could have made your colour from those flowers, and it would have been much softer and lovelier than this artificial colour, and much easier to wash off, too. Which do you think is really more fun, my way or yours?" They all said that they liked my way better.

This incident of *Rang-panchami* holds the answer to our question about materials for the creation of beauty. Nature is all around us, waiting for the children to come to her. The purpose of drawing in its aspect of beauty is to bring them close to Nature and so into the experience of joy, a pure joy. The Creator would be a poor, unskilful artist indeed, if this created Nature which surrounds our children, and offers them so abundantly the subject-matter for their art, could not give them also the tools they need for it! Is it not His plan that so soon as the child feels hunger, the mother's breasts should be filled with milk? The finest brushes, the loveliest colours, are supplied by the trees and plants around us, and these same trees are rich in subjects



to draw. Nature is indeed the Kamadhenu, the wish-fulfiller. She gives us milk, and she gives us also the bowl from which to drink it. All we need to do is to ask.

It is fitting that we keep in mind the two-fold aim: joy and the purifying of joy. Joy is known only to the living; more, it is of the essence of the soul. The important matter is to purify this joy and keep it clean and holy.

I spent my childhood in Konkan, in a village among the hills. I remember how every year, as the season came round, we prepared to kindle the Diwali lamps. We used to go into the forest and collect the soft round fruits of *Koranti*, cut them in halves and scrape out the soft pulp. What beautiful little lamp-saucers they made! We put a little sand into each and arranged the wicks in them, and then filled them with our pure swadeshi Konkan coco-nut oil. Ordinary cotton does not grow in Konkan, so we used tree-cotton for the wicks. Having got our lamps ready, we arranged them in patterns, squares and triangles and circles. That was our Diwali.

Diwali is the first clear, moonless night after the four months of the rainy season are ended. The Goddess of Night is revealed in the full wealth of her divinity. The empire of the moon is gone, and in its place the free stars, great and small, shine together in all their constellations in a splendid harmony of beauty. If we too had lighted our minds along with our lamps, the commonwealth of the moonless night would have had a still greater splendour. But in those days that idea had not occurred to us, so our festival was incomplete to that extent.

The teacher will probably say: “The method is quite all right, of course, for bringing purity of pleasure into life, but to make our own brushes and colours from flowers and leaves will mean a lot of work. How are we to get time for the knowledge side of education?” This objection arises because the nature of correlated or integrated teaching is not understood. It is as though someone should ask: “If we grow so much food, how are we to satisfy our hunger?” The question is so simple that it hardly needs an answer, and yet it is also so complex that it can only be answered by actually running a school.

The syllabus in basic craft has two objectives—mastery of craft and purity of pleasure. I wished to speak of both, and both have been dealt with in this discussion of tools and equipment.



Chapter 37

The place of Art in Education

Someone asks: “What is the purpose of music and art in education?” I reply: “God is revealed in the world through Name and Form; all else in the Godhead is unembodied. Let His Name be sung in music, and His Form be glorified in art.”

Art has a place in our school syllabus from the very first class, for without it we cannot realise our ideal of the education to be given through craft. But there is a difference between the *technique* of art and the *vision*, or spirit, of art. A man who has seen the true vision of art will not tolerate any ugly habit in his ordinary daily life. That is what children have to be taught. It is not enough that they should acquire a certain dexterity of hand; their whole outlook must be coloured by the vision of beauty. There is an art in sitting, in a good upright posture, in standing erect and orderly in line, in sitting in straight lines for meals, and so on. There is a right and a wrong way to cut open a lime; it should be cut exactly in half, so that seeds and juice may be extracted easily. When one is eating an orange, the rind should be peeled off so as to form two bowls into which the pips and other scraps can be put as one eats. A papaya may also be cut lengthwise to form two bowls. The skin of a banana should not be stripped off all at once, but little by little as one eats, otherwise the hand is soiled by holding the fruit. Many more such examples might be given. The beauty of orderly living is a part of the appreciation of beauty in art.

There seems to be a fashion just now of wearing black caps. But the people of India have already plenty of black about them—dark skins, hair and eyes as black as jet! Beauty demands some contrast of colouring. Besides, different colours are associated with certain qualities or tendencies. Pure white is the symbol of purity, holiness; rose-red is the sign of love. The rosy dawn glows with the love of God; the divine spirit of dawn comes to awaken her children like some watchful and loving mother. No poet or artist can do his work without the vision of the dawn.

And what of the vision of the night sky? How can any art ignore that? How brilliantly Jupiter and Venus shine in the darkness! and how the contemplation of them purifies the mind! The very name Shukra (Venus) is cognate with Shuchi (purity). Compared with these, how trivial seem the pearls for which men dive into the depths of the ocean. In describing the perfections of the kingdom of Ram, Tulsidas writes that



in those days the ocean itself cast its pearls upon the shore. I should like him to have added another stanza describing how the children gathered the pearls from the seashore to play with, and then when their play was ended threw them back into the sea. That would have shown pearls at their true value. Today we measure the value of these lovely gifts of the ocean in money. But to equate beauty with money is sheer stupidity.

This vision of Nature is essential for art. It is decreed in the Laws of Manu that when one wakes in the morning one should wash one's face and eyes before looking on the stars. How can impure eyes behold the pure beauty of the stars?

It was surely the sight of the stars which inspired men to invent the art of *rangoli*. In rangoli one first makes a pattern of dots and then joins them together to create the desired form. This art was surely suggested by the stars of heaven. Our imaginations discover shapes and forms among the stars too. And without doubt the purpose of Diwali is to reproduce on earth the artistry of heaven! Diwali is the first moonless night after the skies have grown clear, as Kojagari or Sharat Purnima is the first full moon. The purpose of these two festivals is to direct man's attention to the sky. Why should we not arrange our twinkling Diwali lamps in the lovely shapes of the star-groups, great and small?

Pictorial art must be able to reveal the common and the distinctive features of any object. The difference between primary and secondary qualities is included in this matter of the common and the distinctive. If an artist selects and draws only a few distinctive features of a man's face we can recognize the man from those alone, just as an elephant can be recognized from the trunk alone. This may be called the art of "discriminating delineation." Discrimination is the art of selecting the distinctive feature. A bullock is discriminated thus: विषाण कुकुभ्याम्—an animal with horns and hump. If you search through the whole world of living creatures you will find no other species which has both horns and a hump.

Another aspect of art education is drawing from memory. We should be able to draw from memory later on anything interesting that we see—for example a machine, a building, or something we have discovered.

There are certain optical illusions which have to be brought out in the drawing class. When drawing a railway line it will not do to draw two long parallel straight lines. We must draw them as they appear, nearer and nearer together in the distance until



they seem to touch. When two stars are just rising the distance between them appears greater than when they are overhead. The sun looks very large as it rises, and then appears to shrink, but looks big again at sunset. All these wonderful and interesting sights of the world ought to find a place in our drawing classes.

The children must learn to appreciate different types of beauty. Suppose we visit a garden; the trees are all planted in orderly lines, their interlacing branches making a roof above us. We take pleasure in the sight. Now let us suppose we go into the forest. There the trees are all of different shapes and sizes, tall and short, big and small together. We take pleasure in those untended trees and their wild loveliness. How does it happen that the beauty of the ordered garden and the beauty of the uncontrolled forest alike are pleasing to us? Why do we enjoy both? It is because the garden reveals God in His orderliness and the forest reveals Him in His purity. These two qualities must be seen in the artist's creations also.

In Europe the Goddess of Justice is depicted as a blindfold woman holding the scales in her hand. Someone may ask why Justice should be blind? Why a woman, not a man? When the beam of the scale is level where is the need for justice? Her blindness symbolises impartiality, for a blind man makes no distinctions between small and great. Her womanhood symbolises compassion, the natural quality of woman, that should mingle with justice. The even balance shows that in justice there must be thoughtfulness. The image symbolises the impartiality, compassion and steadfastness of true justice.

Dattatreya has three faces. It is customary to show them as more or less alike. But the central face should be *sattvik*, that is, perfectly open and clear, beautiful and pure. The second should be full of *tamas*, indifferent. The third should be filled with energy, vigour and splendour, the qualities of *rajas*. Only if these distinctions are clearly made will the true image of Dattatreya emerge and the symbolism of the three *gunas* be revealed. The imagery of Hinduism is a storehouse of symbolic art.

Whenever some ceremonial function is to take place, an earthenware pot is filled with water and placed by the entrance as a sign of welcome. It is called *purna-kumbh*. What does it really mean? It is the symbol of a heart filled with affectionate welcome. The pot may be made of either earthenware or gold, but of no other material. The wealthy man's golden pot must symbolise the wealth of the welcome which he gives. This is the symbolism of the *purna-kumbh*.



Tulsidas, describing the meeting of Ram and Bharat, tells how Ram stood up to welcome Bharat unarmed, without his bow or any other weapon—कहुँ पट कहुँ निषंग धनु तीरा. Ram's affectionate longing to meet Bharat is revealed in the scene.

We encounter in life objects which are symmetrical and those which are irregular. It is a branch of art to depict these correctly. The centre of symmetry must be clearly seen and kept in mind. A *lapeta* (yarn-winder) is symmetrical about its long axis; a square is symmetrical in four directions, a circle is symmetrical every way, that is, it can be divided into two equal parts in any direction. Children must be able to depict symmetrical forms in their drawing... And just as we teach them to draw with the right hand so we should also teach them to draw with the left.



Chapter 38

The Charkha in Education

Many people are glad that schools should be teaching the *charkha*, because they are agreed about the national importance of spinning. The spinning that is done in schools, however, must be well planned and efficient. It is not enough to fix a time for it and then sit and spin in any kind of fashion. For spinning to be of real use, it must be properly organised, otherwise the children will get nothing from it, and the work will become distasteful. Charkhas in schools must be tools of education, and the following are the main points which should be included in the educational syllabus.

1. Knowledge of the processes of ginning, carding, slivering and spinning, all four of which must be regarded as part of the craft of spinning. In all of them the aim must be first-class quality and the highest possible speed.

2. Knowledge of some of the special arts of spinning, e. g., the spinning of very fine yarn, spinning (on *takli*) with either hand, carding so that all fibres are parallel, spinning without making slivers etc.

3. *Accessory skills*.—Enough skill in carpentry, metal work etc., to repair the hand-gin, the carding-bow, the charkha and spindles.

4. *Knowledge of mechanics*.—Sufficient for full understanding of the principles of the gin, the carding-bow and the charkha. The meaning of friction, and how to reduce it. The relationship between the wheel and the spindle. Reasons for slipping of the spindle, etc.

5. *The economics of the charkha*.—Investigation of the usefulness of spinning from the point of view of village reconstruction, the division of property, unemployment, the boycott of foreign cloth, India's place in the cotton world, self-sufficiency, swaraj, etc.

6. *The history of spinning*.—How the art of spinning arose and developed, why it had almost disappeared in India.

7. *Ethical and religious aspects*.—The attitude of the Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Christian and other religions to spinning. The love of country. A life of harmlessness



and simplicity. Respect for the poor and for the dignity of labour. Removal of untouchability. Reverence for womanhood.

The above are some of the aspects of spinning and they should be thoroughly taught. Spinning has natural links with agriculture on the one hand and with weaving on the other. So some knowledge of agriculture (the cultivation of cotton) and of elementary weaving ought to be included in the spinning syllabus.



Chapter 39

The Education of Young Children: Sense-Training

Questioner: The methods of education which we have seen in operation today at Sevagram are all right for villages. What modifications would you suggest for city children?

Vinoba: What changes do you think are necessary? What is the difference between city and village? The sun and moon shine upon them both; fathers and mothers are pretty much the same in both. The one uses oil-lamps and the other electricity—what else is there?

Q: In cities there is a machine civilisation.

V: What difference does that make? One child sits in a bus, and the other in a bullock cart. One learns about petrol and engines, the other about flour-mills and bullocks. The important thing, after all, is that the children's minds should be developed through understanding of their actual environments. It is not as though all villages were alike. Children in the Wardha district grow up among *Juar* fields; whereas in the Konkan they are surrounded by rice fields. We have to approach the differences between town and village from this point of view.

Q: Village children can be self-sufficient, but not city ones.

V: Why not? In a town tea-shop, for example, a boy can learn through his work in the kitchen. Our principle is, is it not, that the environment of the child is the medium of education? This principle applies equally to villages and to cities. In villages people may use wood as fuel, and in towns they may use coal, but what difference is there from the educational point of view?

Q: How should we begin, in the towns, with very small children?

V: I see no special difficulty in that. Even in towns there is water, air and light. The children's senses are the same as elsewhere. Children everywhere like climbing about; in one place they climb mountains, in the other they climb a many-storeyed building. Isn't that all?

Q: But how can we regard both as having the same foundation?



V: If you teach both what is really useful, village and city have the same foundations, they are both at one. Children in both places need equally to be taught to earn their food and satisfy their hunger. Of course, if the type of education they receive results in the village people working faithfully and well, and the townspeople doing slovenly and careless work, I should agree that the two methods are different.

Q: But you tell village people to do hand-spinning, and that is something that townsfolk don't understand at all.

V: What can I say to them? The villagers need clothes to wear, so I tell them to spin.

Q: We need clothes too, don't we?

V: In that case you must spin too!

* * * * *

Q: The Sevagram programme for sense-training is rather different from ours. We consider ours to be the more scientific. Correct development depends upon the proper provision of suitable equipment. But here this scientific equipment is excluded because it is foreign.

V: But is it essential to use foreign equipment for the education of young children?

Q: It is not the equipment itself that is foreign, but the idea.

V: Must we have national property rights even in ideas? But when material for sense-training is easily available in the natural environment of the children, we must take care that we are not led astray by the word "scientific" into supposing that some other artificial material is needed. If there is a river near at hand, cannot the child's senses be trained by teaching him to swim? Is not the natural environment of the village conducive to the development of the senses? Can we not count the collecting of cowdung and *ber* fruits as sense-development exercises? Is not work of this kind useful for education?

Q: We are not against it. But we believe that children will be better equipped for life if certain special equipment is used.



V: I will ask you one question. If you were to be sent to a village without any equipment at all, would you be able to do your work or not?

Q: Yes, I could do it.

V: Then I have nothing more to say. But there is no need to be in a hurry, to feel that we must provide every possible kind of knowledge without a day's delay. We ought to teach children something because at that moment they need to learn it, not because we want to teach it. Children need light for their eyes, taste for their tongues, sound for their ears, and we have to teach them accordingly.

Q: But scientific equipment is intended to teach fine discrimination.

V: Certainly, but we must be careful not to introduce artificiality in the name of science. No one could claim that a harmonium assists in the fine discrimination of sound, yet harmoniums are in use. How can someone who never drinks milk without sugar get to know the real taste of milk? We need to eat things in their natural form if we are to savour their real taste. If you think the matter out on these lines it will not be difficult to find the way.

The senses of animals are developed without any assistance from Montessori methods. The tiger's sense-organs are more highly developed than those of other animals, and it has an extremely keen sense of smell. It seems that the more difficult and dangerous is the environment, the more highly developed are the organs of sense. This matter of sense-training is not really so important; in a natural life the senses develop of themselves. A matter of much greater importance for education is the training of the senses in purity of taste. This purity of taste is not strengthened by the artificial refinements of life; on the contrary, it degenerates. This degeneration of taste is in progress in towns and villages alike. Food is flavoured with spices in both alike, and many other examples might be given.

Q: But did not God create the spices too?

V: God made cowdung, but no one eats that! And no child has any natural liking for chillies, but he does naturally like sweet fruit.

The development of the sensory powers and of a discriminating standard of taste are not different things, they are two aspects of the same thing.



PART V

TEACHER AND STUDENT



Chapter 40

Guru and Disciple: A Creative Relationship

The *guru* is a God for his disciple, and the disciple is a God for his guru. The knowledge which the disciples get from their guru will be full and complete, the service which they render to their guru will also be full and complete. The guru will find the nurture and teaching of the students a wholly satisfying task for its own sake—it should not appear to him to be a means to any other end. In the same way, the students must serve the guru wholeheartedly, not from any ulterior motive. For the students the service of the guru, for the guru the service of the students—this must be the one all-sufficient purpose, the single goal; and both guru and students should experience this service as their common service of God.

There are some activities which are of special value in creating this relationship. It is extremely valuable that teacher and students should work together in some kind of productive labour—growing food, making cloth, cleaning—and that they should live together as a family. As they join together for study and teaching they should feel that this also is being undertaken as a service to society. If this is the pattern of labour and study in our *gurukuls*, there will be no problem of suitable books; the necessary books will be made on the spot as the fruit of these two kinds of common experience.

The best commentaries we possess in this country have been founded on this kind of practical teaching experience. Sankaracharya has written an incomparable commentary on the Brahmasutras which is held in high esteem and is possibly the most profound philosophical work that we possess. But the writing is so pleasing and simple that it might have been written for the general public. It is so simple that I have used it for teaching Sanskrit to children, and they found as much pleasure in it as though it has been their mother-tongue. This simple attractiveness is the result of the fact that the book is the fruit of Sankaracharya's experience in reading the Brahmasutras with his students. While he was teaching he must have commented in full on each sutra and then put into his book a synopsis of his teaching. So that the very style of the commentary leads one to feel that one is listening to a talk or discussion. It does not seem that we are reading what some writer has written but rather that we are attending a discourse given by a guru.



When teaching, study and work are undertaken as an integrated whole, and as a service to society, books will come out of this experience. I myself have written a little book on spinning, based on my practical experience. The book grew out of my teaching of students and my practice of the craft. *Gita-pravachan* is composed of talks given directly to some of my fellow-prisoners in jail. I should never have written the book at all, had it not been for the desire and the opportunity to be of service which arose naturally then. On another occasion, while in jail, I was asked to give some talks on the स्थितप्रज्ञ लक्षण* which we recite daily in evening prayer, so as to help my companions to understand its essence. I explained the *slokas* to a few brothers and out of that came the book *sthita-prajna Darshan*. The book on *Swarajya-Shastra* was also written in jail in the same way; a brother asked me some questions and the book grew out of my answers to them.

So that whenever a teacher and student teach, study and work together for the service of society, the fruits of their experience are not confined to their own place, but are available for the whole world to profit from. The books which grow out of that experience form a school of thought, and the tradition of studying them is maintained.

What we expect from centres of Nai Talim is that ideas shall be thoroughly studied and canvassed and also tried out in practice. The teacher and the students will together plan, discuss and conduct experiments to test out their theories, and as a result of their work the world will be enriched with knowledge united with experience. Where a vigorous churning of ideas is integrated with practical experimental work, there we have *Nai Talim*. Where there is merely the discussion of ideas without a practical basis, we have the old type of education which is so common everywhere. Where there is practical work and experience, but no thinking or discussion, we have the bodily labour which is being carried on by innumerable peasants. The *Nai Talim* teacher and student must unite in their own persons the peasant with the philosopher.

In this connection we may take Shri Krishna as our example, for he did not merely repeat the philosophy of his predecessors, he developed it. Before his time the path of knowledge, the path of action, and the path of devotion were already known. The path of meditation was also known and the Samkhyas were following their own methods for the development of the personality. Shri Krishna blended these various traditions into an integral whole and gave the world something new; and because he did so, because he reached a new level of thought, he is one of the world teachers. He



followed the path of labour; but his labour was creative, it was not a mere repetition of the work of the peasants and craftsmen who went before him.

He so increased our reverence for the cow that his name to this day is linked with the care of cattle. The poet Eknath has proudly declared that the one thing lacking in the *avatar* of Shri Ramachandra was made good in the *avatar* of Shri Krishna. The care of cattle was not included in the works of Ramachandra; it fell to Shri Krishna to develop this branch of the duties of society.

Shri Krishna then was responsible for new growth in philosophy, in social consciousness and in craftsmanship. He gave humanity a new philosophy and a new type of work. This does not mean that his philosophy was a complete novelty, that it was not based on the old foundations. He took the ancient elements and blended them into something new. Ghee, gur, and wheat are separate entities, but when they are blended, the *laddu* that results is something different, a new creation. Shri Krishna took the ghee and gur and wheat of the various fundamental types of thought that existed before him, and made something new, a philosophical *laddu*. It was the same in the field of cattle-husbandry. It is not true that before him no one knew anything at all about the care of cattle. An elementary knowledge existed, but Shri Krishna gave the service of the cow a special status, and raised it to the plane of a religious observance. This is his new contribution to Indian social life. Shri Krishna is therefore an example of an individual who brought a spiritual outlook to bear on his whole social duty and in whose life the currents of knowledge and labour were united.

The basic teacher must keep this ideal before him. As a craftsman he must be no less skilled than any ordinary farmer, weaver or carpenter; in fact he ought to be more skilled. He must be able to give them suggestions about things they do not know. He must be familiar with refinements in agriculture, carpentry etc., that are outside the range of the ordinary craftsmen, and he must be able to help these craftsmen by his greater ability to repair tools. Suppose the farmer has to labour eight hours for his living, the teacher must be able to demonstrate that it is possible to produce the same amount with four hours' labour. But instead of being real experts in their craft, the teachers in centres of basic education appear to possess only a very superficial acquaintance with it. They do not feel, as they should, as much at home in the craft as fish in water. Shri Krishna as a soldier was completely at home in his craft; he was also an expert and scientific cow-man. This is the standard of craftsmanship which should be attained in our schools.



In the same way, the discussion of the principles of living that goes on in our schools must be really illuminating, and new ideas must continually be emerging. Thought must be given to the reform of social philosophy. Communism is a live topic of discussion now-a-days; various kinds of socialism are being tried out, and our own government is preparing what it calls a "socialist pattern" of society. Then there is Sarvodaya, and there is the social order framed by our ancestors. All these ancient and modern ways of ordering human life must be studied in our schools.

Some people think that *Nai Talim* means that less attention is given to knowledge as compared to work. But this is a misunderstanding. They do not realise that the big difference between Nai Talim and the ordinary schools is that their knowledge is superficial while ours is solid and firmly grounded. This is because their instruction tends to be theoretical while ours springs from experience, so that ours has an assurance which theirs lacks. The assumption that Nai Talim will turn out students less well-informed than the old system, is quite unfounded.

Nai Talim is in progress wherever the gulf between knowledge and work is bridged. In our ashram we would sit down to a meal, and consider at the same time the knowledge which is needed for proper nourishment. We cooked, and kept a strict account of our cooking. After the meal we would sit down to clean rice. We counted this as our period of rest after food, and did the work in a leisurely way, talking with one another and not troubling about the speed. We called it our discussion circle and the conversation would range widely over world affairs. We did not call it study, however, and although we certainly were being educated by it, we did not call it education—it was all so natural.

When Visvamitra asked Dasarath for Ram and Lakshman he asked for them to protect his sacrifices. Ram and Lakshman went with him without any thought that they were to learn under a guru. They went with him purely in order to serve and quite rightly so. As I said in the beginning, the service of the guru should be for the student completely satisfying, an end in itself. It should not be undertaken as a means to gaining knowledge for oneself. Greed for increased knowledge is one form of the desire to enjoy the fruits of action.

When evening came on, Visvamitra said: "Now it is time for the *Sandhya* worship, let us make ready for it." After prayers they had some serious talk, and then Visvamitra made ready couches of leaves and grass, and Ram and Lakshman lay down



to sleep. Remember that these two boys were princes, the apple of their father's eye—what kind of bed would they be accustomed to at home! Their university course began with sleeping on grass couches.

At four o'clock next morning, long before sunrise, Visvamitra roused them. They had slept on beds of grass in the open air beneath the stars, and now they were awakened so early! At home in the palace, no doubt, they were roused by bards and palace singers, saying: "The sun is rising, the bees are murmuring, O Ram, arise!" But now, before the dawn, when all the world was still asleep, Visvamitra awakened them with a quiet word. No doubt Visvamitra was thinking that he must give these sons of his the true nectar to drink, and that he could not do so if they slept through that nectar-bearing hour, the *Brahman-vela*.

Later, as they were travelling, they saw ruins, and Visvamitra told them how formerly there had been a great kingdom there, and why it had come to this condition. So they were taught history. Afterwards he taught them archery also and together with this he had them guard the sacrifices.

Ram and Lakshman did not think of themselves as having joined a university to be educated. They had come to carry out a piece of service. But as they worked, they did receive the finest of educations. Yet neither did the teacher think of himself as teaching, nor did the learners think of themselves as learning. Nevertheless, the best of knowledge was given and received. That is our model for Nai Talim.

* Bhagavadgita II: the last 18 slokas.



Chapter 41

"Only Teaching"

A certain young man said that he wished to be a national worker. "Tell me," said his interlocutor, "what kind of work do you feel you could do well?"

"Only teaching, I think," replied the young man, "and that is what I am interested in."

"Yes, of course, if a man knows a thing he is naturally interested in it; is there any other work that you could do?"

"No sir, I can do nothing else, I can only teach, and I feel sure I shall be able to do it well."

"Yes, yes, I do not doubt that, but *what* are you going to teach well? Spinning? Carding? Weaving? Could you teach any of those?"

"No, I can't teach those."

"Then tailoring? or dyeing? or carpentry?"

"No, I know nothing about them."

"Perhaps you could teach cooking, grinding and other household skills?"

"No, I have never done any work like that, I can only teach....."

"My dear fellow, you answer 'No,' to every question, and yet you keep on saying you can only teach. What do you mean? Can you teach gardening?"

The would-be national worker said, rather angrily, "Why do you ask all this? I told you at the beginning I can do nothing else. I can teach literature."

"Good! good!" cried the other, teasing him. "I'm beginning to understand now. You mean, you can teach people to write books like *Ramachrita-manas*?"

This made the young man so angry that he began to splutter. "Take it easy, now!" laughed his interlocutor. "Excuse me, can you teach patience?"

That was too much; it was like pouring petrol into the flames, and the fire flared up, so that the interviewer made haste to quench it. "Come, my boy, I know what you



mean. You can teach reading and writing and so on. Well, they are not entirely useless, there are times in life when they are needed. Now then, would you be willing to learn weaving?"

"I don't want to learn anything new now. Besides, I couldn't learn to weave, I have never before done any kind of handwork."

"In that case it might of course take you longer to learn, but why should it make you unable to learn?"

"I don't think I could ever learn it. But even supposing I could, it would mean a lot of hard work and a great deal of trouble. So please understand that I could not undertake it."

"Very well; you say you are willing to teach writing. Can you work at writing yourself?"

"Yes, I could do that. It would be troublesome, of course, simply to sit and write; still, I would have no objection to doing that."

So the conversation ends. Its result need not concern us. The conversation is quite enough to enable us to understand the psychology and characteristics of far too many of our "teachers." To be "only a teacher," means to be:

- (1) completely ignorant of any kind of practical skill which might be useful in real life;
- (2) incapable of learning anything new and indifferent towards any kind of craftsmanship;
- (3) conceited;
- (4) buried in books, and
- (5) lazy.

"Only teaching" means being a corpse cut off from life; it means dead-alive teaching from a dead-alive man!

Some people call this living corpse an "intellectual worker." But this is a corruption of language. Which men have truly laboured with the intellect?—a Gautama Buddha, a Socrates, a Sankaracharya, a Gnaneswar: these are the men who have kindled and held aloft the light of the intellectual life. In the Gita it is said that the



life which is apprehended by wisdom is the life which is beyond the senses. Those who are slaves of the senses, who are burdened by attachment to the body, are not the bearers of life-wisdom. The husband of intellect is the soul, and when intellect abandons the soul and becomes a slave in the house of the body, she commits adultery. The life of this adulterous intellect is death, and those who live it are the "dead-alive". The existence of those who live by "only teaching" is a living death. Manu called these "mere teachers" teachers of death and "hirelings" and forbade them to take any part in the *sraddh* ceremonies. Quite rightly. The purpose of *sraddh* is to keep alive the memory of the ancestors, and what place in it have those who have interpreted life as death?

In former times a teacher used to be called '*acharya*.' An *acharya* is one who is perfect in the *achar*, the Law. He only is an *acharya* who is himself a pattern of good living, and who moulds his nation on the same pattern. By the labours of such *acharyas* nations have been founded. The task before us in India today is the building of a nation, and the foundations of a new era have to be laid down. Without teachers who are true *acharyas* that will not be possible.

It follows that the question of national education is of the utmost importance. We have to understand very clearly what it is and how it is to be spread. Our educated classes are becoming steadily weaker and more ineffective, and the only remedy is to kindle the flame of a truly national education.

But this flame must be the holy fire of *Agni*. *Agni* is held to have two powers, "*swaha*" and "*swadha*". Where these two powers are found, there is *Agni*. The meaning of *swaha* is the power of self-sacrifice, of giving up oneself. The meaning of *swadha* is "the power to possess oneself." It is only in so far as these two powers are active in it that we shall have a national education worthy of the name. Without them it is lifeless, mere empty teaching.

It appears on the surface that our national teachers have made a great sacrifice of self. But that is not really so. The sacrifice of various kinds of self-interest and comfort is not the same thing as the sacrifice of self. The touchstone is this: wherever there is the power to give up self, there is also the power to possess self. If the power of self-possession is not there, how can there be anything to give up? If a soul is not strong enough to stand upright, how can it jump? In other words, the strength to possess oneself is the first ingredient in the power of self-sacrifice. So far our national



teachers have not attained to this *swadha*, this strength of self-possession, and therefore, the appearance of self-sacrifice is an appearance only. *Swadha* must come first; and afterwards *swaha*. The teachers of the nation must set themselves now to attain the strength of self-possession.

Teachers will have to give up the mistaken notion of "only teaching," and take upon themselves the responsibility for their own support, just as peasants do. They must let their pupils share fully in this responsibility and make their whole environment a means of education—that is, they must let the education come about of itself. "The Vedas should be read after the guru's work has been completed," says the text. If we take "the guru's work" to mean only personal service to the guru, how much service would that mean, and how many students could be employed in it? No, the meaning of doing the guru's work is to share in a responsible way in the guru's life. Whatever questions and problems arise while they are carrying out these responsibilities, they will take to the guru for solution; it will be the guru's duty to answer them to the utmost of his power, and to consider this a part of his life and responsibility. That, in outline, is education as it ought to be.

A short time should be set apart specially for the reading of the Vedas just as for prayer. All our work, it is true, ought to be done as an offering to God; nevertheless there should also be a brief period of worship morning and evening. The same principle applies also to education or the reading of the Vedas. To sum up, we ought to spend the greater part of the day in working for our living, and regard all this as essentially educational work; in addition, we should set aside an hour or two specially for education.

It is our duty, as workers for national education, to make our own lives a pattern of what the life of the nation ought to be. If a man can really fulfil his own duty in life, the radiance of education will stream out of itself upon everyone around him, and the atmosphere of the whole neighbourhood will feel its influence. A teacher like this is a school in himself, and to live with him is a liberal education.



Chapter 42

The Village Teacher

Nai Talim is so broad and far-reaching an idea that every form of service to India is included in it.....Those who practise it can only give to others as much vision as they have themselves seen. You should not attach too much importance to the guidance of other people, but should use your own minds. After all, we who have made this plan are only children in experience. It is true that we have reached a new starting-point, a new point of view, but our own education was the old kind of education. So that we are a sort of hybrid monster, like Narasimham, who was neither wholly beast nor wholly man. The previous *avatar* was Varaha, who was wholly beast; the following one was Vaman, who was wholly man. Narasimham, who was neither the one nor the other, is the most fearful of all *avatars*. We like him are monstrous creatures, for our education is in the old ways and our thoughts are in the new.

It seems to me that we ought not to need to spend a single cowrie on the kind of education that we want to give. The Gita says: "Abandon all greed." "Work with your hands." Suppose I were to decide to start Nai Talim in some village, I would go and work in the fields with the local labourers and live on the wages which the landlord gives. By living in this way I could become a first-class teacher of Nai Talim. In the old days, that was how those whom we recognize as our greatest teachers used to live. Kabir was one of them—a great teacher, whose teaching India has not yet forgotten. Valluvan, whose wonderful teachings were given in Tamil Nad, was another of the same kind. Namdev worked as a tailor, Kabir and Valluvan were weavers. There have been other saints also who like them followed a craft. "While the lips sing the name of God, the hands find serviceable work"—that is the pattern of life they have showed us. What more do I need, then, beyond my two hands, to enable me to go to a village and work in the fields?

People are afraid to go and live in villages. And yet, if townsfolk would compare their own lives with the affection that awaits them in villages, they would see how poverty-stricken the town life is. The village has a corporate life, whereas in the town each one lives in isolation. People go to the city seeking their own gain. So the poet said that "God made the country and man-made the town." If some-one who is fitted to be a teacher were to go and join the farm labourers in their work, he would find



himself both learning and teaching. We may teach the village boys at night or in the middle of the day, as opportunity offers. If you need a *charkha*, it will pay for itself in fifteen days; if you want a *takli*, it will pay for itself in one day. This is the virtue of these small, simple tools. If you can make your own tools, and do so make them, you will soon understand what a valuable piece of education that can be. Therefore go into the village and begin work on your own initiative, taking with you faith in manual labour, love for your village brothers, skill in craft, a scientific outlook and an independent mind.

I have said that I would start work in the village as a field labourer. But at present our schools have holidays at a time when there is no work in the fields. The English taught us to take hot weather holidays, and we cling to the habit. They taught us that the heat decreases energy and lessens the output of work—and yet we see that the strongest trees grow in the hottest parts of the earth! If there have to be holidays from school, then they ought to be in the rains. But I should not call these days holidays. I can understand a holiday from jail, and since our old-style schools are like jails, they need holidays. But we ought not to need even one day of holiday—if knowledge is joy, why a holiday?

At one time I used to go daily from Paunar to Sargaon, three miles away, for scavenging. I continued these daily visits even in the rains. People used to ask me why I came when it was raining so heavily. “Friend,” I would say, “other people may take a holiday, but how can the scavenger have one? My pattern is Suryanarayan, the life-giving sun. The sun is the greatest scavenger of them all. We make so much dirt that if India had not been blessed with strong sunlight, we should all have perished.” I am sorry to say that I could not emulate the example of the Sun-god and work for a whole year without a break; I had to take nine days off because I was ill. But the reward of my labours was that the villagers began to look on scavenging as a specially sacred task.

One day, the Ganapati festival day, the whole village had been cleaned before I arrived. I got there at seven in the morning and seeing that every part of the village had been cleaned up, I asked who had done it. The villagers replied: “Today is the Ganapati festival, and so we thought that we ought to engage in some holy work. So the young men got together and finished this job.” I call that a revolution. No political power could have brought about such a revolution. So when someone said yesterday that there can be no social revolution without the use of force, I could not agree. My



point of view is the exact opposite. No Government can ever bring about a revolution; revolution-making is not the Government's job. Neither can the Talimi Sangh, or any other Sangh, succeed in bringing about a revolution of this sort. Revolutions are the work of individuals; they are made by the intelligence which God has given you. A Sangh is a mindless thing; intelligence resides in the soul, in the individual.

The teacher in our school should also be the servant of the whole village, and the village school should be the centre of service. If the village needs medicine, it will be supplied through the school, and the children will help. If the village needs cleaning, the school will be the starting-point, and the teacher and children will help the people to do the work. The people will turn to the teacher to help them to settle disputes. The school will make plans for the observance of festivals. In this way the school will become the centre of the village community; it will develop whatever is of value in the village, and introduce the things that are lacking. Yesterday we mentioned agriculture and weaving. Agriculture is important because it goes on everywhere; weaving is important because it does not go on everywhere. So the school ought to take up agriculture in order to improve it, and weaving in order to introduce and establish it.

When people ask how much money we can earn by agriculture, or weaving, or carpentry, they are asking the wrong question. We have to understand that what we get out of weaving is not money, but cloth; what we get out of agriculture is not money, but food; what we get out of carpentry, is not money, but houses. We cannot measure the value of these things with money. People tell me that milk is expensive and water is cheap, but if you are thirsty, will milk quench your thirst? The fact is that in this world of God's making, the most truly precious things are also the most easily obtainable. We ought to stop thinking in terms of money and look at life as a whole.

The whole of this work of ours depends upon the teachers. Therefore our teachers ought to be well acquainted with what is going on in India and in the world. They should also be ready to offer solutions for the difficulties which confront the country. Yesterday we were talking about whether India could grow all the food she needs, and someone said that even the Minister for Food and Agriculture could not answer that problem, so how could we expect our teachers to be able to do so? My reply would be that even though the Minister is unable to answer the question, our village teacher must have the answer. For this reason: the Food Minister has to look at the problem as a whole, on a world scale; and you know that the Vision of the Whole was something that even Arjun could not bear. But our teacher sees the world in terms



of one village. If he can solve the problem for that one village, he has the clue for solving it throughout the world. He can invite the Food Minister to come and see how the food problem has been solved in his village. We have to keep this broad outlook before us in all our experimental work, so that by means of Nai Talim we may find the solution of our various national difficulties.



Chapter 43

The Vanaprasthi as Teacher

In Basic Education there is a strong emphasis on the need to give education through craft, and so forth; but it does not seem as though anyone has considered, or felt any need to consider, at what stage of life a man should become a teacher.

What happens today is that some boy who has failed in matric is taken and given some training in Basic Education; he then begins his career as a teacher. At the same time he also begins his domestic life as a householder. But these two beginnings are both so important, and carry such grave responsibilities, that a very serious problem is posed for our consideration. Are the two of the same nature, so that it is possible to take them up together? Or can each of them be kept within certain limits, so that it is possible to manage them both together?

I have been thinking of this matter for many years and I have come to the conclusion that the proper time of life for teaching is the *vanaprasthashram*. The *sannyasi* cannot become a teacher, because he is for the whole world; he is free to roam; his life cannot be devoted exclusively to students. The *brahmachari* is himself a student; that period of life is not for teaching. There remain the *grihastha* and the *vanaprastha*. It is confused thinking to imagine that both these periods are suited to the work of teaching.

During the *grihastha* period, while a man is a householder, he is accumulating experience. When he becomes a *vanaprasthi*, he must be freed from household cares. But he must not become a *vanaprasthi* only when his body and mind, his powers of reasoning and of expression, are beginning to fail. No, he ought to enter the *vanaprastha* period when he feels that he has acquired some experience of life, and is now qualified to pass it on to others. He can look clearly and dispassionately upon the world of sense-objects, yet his body and mind, his senses and his reason, are still at the height of their powers. Such a *vanaprasthi* can become a teacher; he is capable also of being a preacher, a proclaimer of truth.

There is certainly one kind of education that householders can give; it is the kind that is given in the home, the education which all fathers and mothers give to their own children. It may be that in current social conditions it is necessary to organise such



training on a mass scale; instead of children staying with their own mothers, the children of thirty or forty mothers are got together and put in charge of one mother, so that the other mothers are free to go to their work. It is perfectly possible to make such an arrangement. But this education will not be of the kind that changes the form of society; it will be based upon the current form of society and will be capable only of introducing a few reforms. I do not call that Nai Talim—*new* education; it is simply the old education.

To my mind, one part of the meaning of Nai Talim is that it will make a new society. We have to understand, too, that this business of making a new society is a never-ending one. We must not imagine that we will make one new society, and after that nothing will remain to be done. The society we make will grow old, and so once more the work of making a new one will have to be taken up. The meaning of Nai Talim is that education which makes for the ever-new building of society. Such an education can only be given by people of experience, who are skilled in imparting their experience, and who have achieved personal purity of life. Only they can raise the flag of revolution.

If some Napoleon arises, he will tell the people of his heroic exploits, and put his experience before them. Is a man who has no experience of warfare going to mould the children into heroes? A merchant who has traded, faithfully and honestly, in crores of rupees can, if he becomes a teacher, give the children the benefit of his practical knowledge of commerce. How can a man teach them about commerce if he has never dealt in commerce, but merely taken a degree at a Commerce College? Similarly, it is only those who have gained experience through work in various honourable callings who are qualified to impart education to children.

That is why I said that the work of teaching ought to be in the hands of *vanaprasthis*. We shall be able to get the kind of Nai Talim that we want only if we have the courage and enterprise to establish a *vanaprasthashram*, to set aside a period of life for that purpose. Otherwise I have no hope.

The most important question to be considered is, in what direction do we wish the education of our students to be turned? Do we want to improve our present society, or to make a new one? If we merely want to make our current social set-up more comfortable, then the need which I have just expressed for a *vanaprasthashram* will not be felt so keenly. But if we consider that our business is to build a new society,



then it is essential that education should be in the hands of teachers who have played a worthy part in life, who are qualified by their practical experience, who can look upon the world of sense with a pure, untrammelled heart but with wide sympathies, and who can bring to their work a mind and body unimpaired, with all their faculties alert and keen. Only a *vanaprasthashram* can supply teachers of such a calibre.

Rajaji (Shri C. Rajagopalacharya) once said, in the course of a discussion on the importance of Nai Talim, that an education of this character would need above all things a supply of teachers of experience. When asked why Nai Talim should not be started in Madras, he replied that if he were to be set free from responsibilities of State, he would himself become a Nai Talim teacher.

Rajaji is quite right; there should come in every man's life a time for teaching. There ought to be a time in the life of Jawaharlal Nehru when he too becomes a Nai Talim teacher. In the same way Dr. Radhakrishnan and Ghanshyam Das Birla ought to have the opportunity to become Nai Talim teachers. If you make a plan of this kind, it will be a source of new life.



Chapter 44

The Family School

Because the link between thought and practical life has been broken, thought grows lifeless, and life is emptied of thought. Man lives in a home, and he learns to think in a school, so life and thought do not mix. The cure for this is that on the one hand the school should enter the home, and on the other hand the home must penetrate into the school. Social science demands that the family become a school, and educational science demands that the school be a family school. The purpose of this essay is not to discuss the school-family, but to outline the idea of a family-school.

The only kind of school that can be called a family-school is one that recognizes that the foundation of education is a home where the pupils live with the teachers, and builds up its teaching around that. This essay contains some suggestions about the ordering of the life of such family-school—not including the programme of formal study.

1. Faith in God is a fundamental of life. Therefore some family meditation or prayer every morning and evening should be part of the permanent programme. The verses of the saints will be a help towards the remembrance of God in prayer. Part of the time may be allotted for the recitation of some suitable *slokas*, such as *Sarveshamavirodhena*. There should be a time of prayer before going to bed and another immediately after getting up.

2. There is a close connection between pure food and pure thoughts. Therefore the food should be wholesome and simple. Hot spices, chillies, fried dishes, sugar and other luxury preparations should not be given, and milk and milk dishes should be used in moderation.

3. The cooking should not be done by a Brahmin or other professional cook. The art of cooking is an important part of education, and a knowledge of cookery is needed by all who work for the public good. It is part of the meaning of self-reliance, and soldiers, travellers and *brahmacharis* should all know how to cook.

4. The members of the family-school must keep their own latrines clean with their own hands. The removal of untouchability means not only the refusal to regard any man as untouchable, but also a willingness to undertake any kind of work that is



useful to society. The idea that it is degrading to clean latrines has to go. In addition, this work is the proper way to teach cleanliness. It is a training in the maintenance of good standards of public cleanliness.

5. The school must be open to every caste including the untouchables. Most schools do admit them nowadays; in the family-school however, there must be no separate eating arrangements for meals. The rule of purity in foods must be kept, and that is enough.

6. The morning routine of the school should include time for bathing, though this rule may be modified on grounds of health. Cold water baths should be the rule.

7. There should be an evening routine as well as a morning routine, and the body must be clean before going to bed. This evening routine is a great aid to deep refreshing sleep and to chastity of body and mind. Each should sleep in a separate bed, in the fresh air.

8. The school should emphasize manual work rather than book-learning, and at least three hours a day ought to be given to this. Without work, the study programme will not be vigorous and lively. It is the rule of the *Shrutis* that study of the Vedas should occupy the time that is left over after the work is done.

9. When the pupils are working three hours at some practical task, and also doing their personal household work, there is no need to make any special provision for physical training. Nevertheless, it is a good thing to have a time when they can play, roam about, or practise some special physical skill in the open air.

10. Spinning should be looked upon as a national duty and should be as regular as prayer. At least half an hour should be set apart for this, not including the time given to craft. There is no harm if the spinning during this half-hour is done on a *takli*. In fact if we are to keep up the regular practice of spinning, even during journeys or wherever we may be, the *takli* is the most suitable tool, and one must learn to use it.

11. The members of the school should always wear khadi, and so far as possible, use other *swadeshi* goods.

12. No one should keep late hours except when it is necessary in the service of others. For example one may stay up to nurse the sick, but not for fun or for study. Everyone should be able to have seven and a half hours' sleep.



13. The evening meal ought to be taken before night-fall, from the point of view of health, convenience and *ahimsa* alike.

14. Whatever routine is adopted should be carried out fully and wholeheartedly, so that there is an atmosphere of stability in the school.

These fourteen suggestions for the life of a family-school are based upon practical experience. I have not gone into the question of book-learning or of the craft programme, which ought to be considered independently.



Chapter 45

The duties of students

It is usual to distinguish between students and citizens and to say that their duties are distinct. Students, however, are the citizens of the future, so that the two classes merge into one another. Today's student is the responsible citizen of tomorrow; today's citizens ought to be regarded as students also. People generally think that when a man has reached the age of 25 and has the vote, he is a citizen. But this division is merely a matter of convenience. There are hundreds of examples on record of occasions when children and youths have guided a nation. Sankaracharya wrote his famous commentary in his sixteenth year and there are others. Age therefore need not be considered as of any special importance. Students should be regarded as citizens; citizens should be regarded as students still. It appears that many citizens in these days are deficient in knowledge and experience.

There is a notion abroad that when a man has completed his student years and takes up the burden of family life, his studies are at an end. This is a completely wrong idea and is contrary to the cultural tradition of India. Indian culture teaches that a man should go on studying and learning till the day of his death. The rules of life prescribed for the householder include the requirement that he should continue his studies. The Taittiriya Upanishad also states that every one of a man's duties must be linked with study. It mentions the various duties in turn and with each one adds: *svadhyaya pravachanecha*. Our newly won independence will be in great danger if the citizen does not study.

The student stage is usually thought of as the beginning of life; when a person has acquired the power to study independently of his own free will, we consider him to be a citizen. If that citizen, having left behind the student stage, leaves off studying as soon as he has acquired the power to study it would be as though a man should leave off earning as soon as he had acquired the power to earn. What would happen if a person stopped walking as soon as he had learned how to walk? And what shall we call a man who stops studying as soon as he has learned how to study?

We shall therefore not attempt to keep students and citizens apart. We shall however say that there are certain special duties that pertain to the student stage, and



others which are the special responsibility of citizens. The two sets of duties are complementary, but at present I deal with the duties of students.

I have a great affection for the students of India, and when I am among them I talk to them as one of themselves. Whatever else I may be, I am a student first and last. I am still learning, I am still studying. It is not true in my experience that as one grows older one's powers of memory decline. On the contrary, my own experience is that as the bodily powers decline the memory becomes keener. As a child, I had to repeat a *śloka* ten times to get it by heart; now I need to repeat it only twice, because I have kept up the practice of study. The Lord Buddha said that just as one bathes daily to keep the body clean, just as one sweeps daily to keep the house clean, so one should study daily to keep the mind clean. In accordance with this saying I have studied without ceasing, and I hope that I shall still be studying on the day the Lord takes me out of the world. Because of this love of study I feel myself naturally to be one at heart with students.

The first duty of students is to preserve the full independence of their minds. If anyone has a right to full freedom, it is the student. Knowledge cannot be had without faith, so the student must have faith, but it is equally essential that along with faith he should have intellectual freedom. Many people think that faith and intelligence are incompatible, but that is a mistake. The ear and the eye are different senses, but they do not contradict one another, and it is the same with faith and intelligence. Without faith it is impossible to learn anything. The mother points to the moon and says: "Look, my little one, that is the moon." If the child had no faith in his mother, if he were to say to himself: "Who knows whether what she shows me is really the moon or not?" he would learn nothing. So that trust, or faith, is fundamental to learning. Knowledge begins in faith. But the completion of knowledge is in reason. Knowledge begins in faith, but it is perfected, completed, in independent thought. Students therefore must never let go their right to freedom of thought.

A teacher who tries to compel the students' assent is no teacher. A real teacher says: "You should accept what I say only if, on examination, it appears good to you. And if it does not, you should certainly not accept it". A real teacher gives his students this mental freedom, and the only true freedom is the freedom of the mind. By all means let us respect and reverence great men; but it is wrong to say that because a man is great, what he says must be accepted. It gives me much pleasure to meet a man who is not convinced of my ideas and therefore refuses to accept them. Naturally,



I am also pleased to meet someone who accepts them because he is genuinely convinced. But it saddens me when people accept what I say without being convinced. I repeat that there must be freedom of the mind—a better phrase might be “independence of thought.” We must not allow our independence of thought to be interfered with, and we must guard the privilege of freedom.

I want to warn students that this student-right is in danger of being lost in the modern world. An attempt is being made, in the name of "discipline", to force all students' minds into the same mould. I am a believer in discipline; I know that no work can be done without it. If a house catches fire, there will be nothing but confusion unless there is discipline. A few people working in a disciplined manner can put it out much more quickly and effectively than a large number of undisciplined workers. But in the name of discipline we are imposing mechanical uniformity, and this causes injury to students' minds.

Throughout the world education is under the control of Governments. I consider that this is extremely dangerous. Governments ought to have no authority over education. The work of education must spring from a faith in service, and should be in the hands of men of wisdom. But as things are, the Governments of the world have got it in their grasp, and every student in the country has to study whatever book is prescribed by the Education Department. The six crores of people in all the fifty-one districts of Uttar Pradesh will all be set to read one and the same prescribed book. Now that we have Greater Andhra, it will mean greater mechanical monotony, for the text book that used to be prescribed for eleven districts can now be prescribed for twenty. If the Government is fascist, students will be taught fascism; if it is communist, it will preach communism; if it is capitalist, it will proclaim the greatness of capitalism; if it believes in planning, the students will be taught all about planning. This is an extremely dangerous situation. The education department must be free; the first, most urgent need is freedom. I want to warn you students that people are trying to force you all into one mould, and therefore you must be alert to preserve your freedom of mind, your independence of thought.

Students however do not understand this, and are forming themselves into various “Unions.” Unions are for sheep, not for lions, and students must be lions, not sheep. If they are convinced that something is true, let them preach it; but if not, let them withhold their assent. It seems to me that the minds of our students are being deadened by Government policies, and they busy themselves in making unions. There



should be lakhs of schools and colleges in the country but not one single student should join a union. The student's attitude should be: "When I have become an adult citizen I shall need to accept limitations on my freedom; then, possibly, I may join a union. But today I am a student, and my privilege is to be completely free. Certainly I shall think about politics, I shall be open to ideas, but I will not make final decisions, I shall keep the right to change my mind. By joining a union I should lose that right." This does not mean that there should be no cooperation. Cooperation is essential for service. But unions which stamp everyone in the same mould are a danger to the freedom of the country.

The second duty of students is to exercise self-control. Only a man who can control himself has the right to freedom. A student must feel confident that he can carry out his own resolutions, that once he has made a true resolution, no power on earth can destroy it. This means that he must be able to control his body, his impulses and his mind. If I decide to get up at 4.30 a.m. my senses must have no power to turn me away from that resolve. Without self-control students cannot take their rightful place in the world, and therefore every student should take a solemn vow that along with his studies he will practise self-control. Learning without self-control is a feeble thing, for the real strength is the strength to govern oneself. You know the *sthitaprajna* slokas. Who is the *sthitaprajna*?—the man whose mind has the strength to make a resolve.

The problems of the world today are many and great. The small problems no longer exist, for the world has become one; thinking has now to be done on the grand scale, and decisions have to be reached speedily on this broad basis of thought. Formerly, when people were unaware of the outside world, such large problems did not arise. A great and decisive battle was fought at Panipat in India, but China and Japan never heard of it. Now, all this is changed. The smallest incident in the remotest corner of the world casts its shadow over the whole. Events in Europe and America immediately affect the market in India. Today's problems are therefore not only on the large scale, they demand also immediate resolution. Men need greater powers of decision than formerly. Nowadays, it seems, one scarcely gets a chance to walk; men rush about in aeroplanes and trains as if a tiger were after them! People sometimes ask me why I don't travel by air; I answer that by going by air, I might get air, but not land, and as what I want is land, I am obliged to travel on the earth on foot.



To sum up, our times are such as to demand quick, well-founded judgement. The power of decision is therefore of the greatest importance, and it is this power of decision that is called *prajna*. The man whose *prajna* is steadfast is called *sthitaprajna*. Students must have this steadfast mind, and to that end they must learn to keep their impulses, senses, and minds under control, and strengthen their powers of resolution. If we make a resolution and then break it, our whole strength is undermined. So that once we have made a resolution we must stick to it, even if it costs us our lives. Control of the senses is essential to this kind of strength of decision.

The third duty of students is to devote themselves to service. Knowledge cannot be had without service. The Mahabharat has a story of how once Arjun, Shri Krishna and Dharmaraj were sitting together. Arjun had vowed to kill anyone who insulted his bow Gandiva. Dharmaraj, in order to incite Arjun to greater efforts, remarked: "You and your Gandiva are supposed to be so strong, and yet look at the straits we are in, with our enemies still not destroyed!" Arjun was a religious man and he loved his brother, but although he could bear an insult to himself, he could not suffer Gandiva to be insulted. So, before Krishna, he raised his hand against Dharmaraj. Krishna caught his arm, saying: "What a fool you are! Have you no sense? . . . But how could you have gained knowledge, seeing that you have not served the elders?" In another place in the Mahabharat is the story of the questions of the Yaksha. One question is, how is knowledge to be obtained? The answer is: ज्ञानं वृद्धसेव्या—by the service of the elders. The elders have experience, and they open their hearts to those who serve them, and give them all that they have. Students then must devote themselves to service—of the elders and parents, of the poor and sorrowing, of society. They should think that this service will leave them no time for study, they should have faith that knowledge comes by service. When Visvamitra asked Dasarath for Ram and Lakshman to guard his sacrifices, Dasarath, blinded by affection, replied: "Ram is not yet sixteen years old, how can I give him to you?" "Very well," said the great sage Visvamitra, "then I take leave of you." Valmiki tells how the whole earth trembled at the words, for not even a king may refuse the request of a Sage. Vasishtha said to Dasarath: "Why are you so foolish? Visvamitra asks for your sons for their own good; they will serve him, and by doing so they will gain knowledge. No school of learning can equal that of service." Dasarath then gave Ram and Lashkman into Visvamitra's keeping, and Valmiki goes on to describe how they learned through their service.



The fourth duty of students is to be alert to what is going on around them. They should study all the movements of the modern world, and the current ideologies, with open minds. Their outlook must be broad, and they must not allow themselves to think within narrow limits. A student should not think of himself as a Telugu speaker, or an Indian. He should think of himself as an observer, looking on at the panorama of human activity, but apart from it, distinct from it. He should remain aloof from religious and linguistic parties, and study them with an open mind. The student must strive continually to develop this broad outlook. Today however we see the opposite tendency—narrowness of heart has been shown in the quarrels that have arisen over the establishment of linguistic States. That narrowness must be overcome, and students must think of themselves in large terms, as citizens of the world, whose duty is to establish a universal world-citizenship. The adult citizens of today may be citizens of India, but students must not think of themselves as such. “We students,” they must say, “have reached a higher place even than Indian nationhood. We belong to humanity, we are devotees of learning, we are open-minded thinkers, we cannot be narrow sectarians.”



Chapter 46

The high calling of the teacher

त्वं नो अस्या अमतेरुत,
क्षुधो अभिशस्तेरव स्पृधि
त्वं न भूति तव चित्रया,
धिया शिक्षा शचिष्ठ गातुवित्।

"O strong one, O Pathfinder, do thou give us the highest instruction. Display before us thy various powers. Reveal thy intelligence. Show us thy power to save and to produce. Many evils oppress us, and who but thou can drive them away?"

All you who are assembled here are basic school teachers. You are, that is, the foundation of the whole structure of nationhood which it must be our task to build, you are the basic teachers of the whole nation. And so, if what I put before you seems good to you, it may reach the whole country through you.

In the Vedas, the teacher is called "*gatuvit*," in English, pathfinder. *Gatu* is the road to be travelled, *gatuvit* is he who searches out the road. This is the special title for a teacher in the Vedas. The Vedas regard the guru as a very strong pathfinder, or guide. The sloka which I have quoted says: "O mighty guru, O pioneer of the road, do thou teach us." The teacher is called a very mighty man. A teacher then must never be weak-minded. In the teacher's hands is supreme authority, he holds a great position. The teacher, by giving of his wisdom, may be the pioneer and guide into the future; there can be no greater power than that. But if the teacher is weak, the guidance that he gives will also be weak, the plans for the future will be faulty and the whole nation's life will be weakened.

At the present time, however, the status of teachers has sunk so low that they feel themselves to have no authority at all; they are nothing more than servants! They must follow whatever path the Government directs. It is the Government, through the scholars it employs, that makes the plans for education. But in the last resort these scholars follow the lead of the Government, and their teaching is tinged with the colour of the Government in power. They are not much better than slaves, and they are not men of independent mind. They are under orders, the servants of authority.



The teachers then have to plan out their own work on the basis of the schemes drawn up by these scholars. They may perhaps modify these readymade schemes by a comma here or a semi-colon there, but they cannot do more than that. Everyone knows what the position of the teacher is. The students also see it, and consequently they do not trouble to keep in touch with their teachers in later life, the teachers have no place in the real lives of their students.

Today there is an attempt to expand education, and the number of schools and of teachers is being increased, but the spirit of the true *guru* is not there. A good teacher means one who is a good servant; a bad teacher means a bad servant; good or bad, he remains a servant. The mother is not a servant in her own house, neither is the father, nor the brother, nor the friend. But the teacher is a servant. So in the serious crises of their lives students seek the advice of a mother, a father, a brother, a friend; they may even seek the advice of some great leader; but they do not seek advice from their teacher.

All this results from the fact that the Education Department is a Government department, it is not independent. The Judges of the High Court are also appointed by Government and they are bound by the laws which the Government makes. Nevertheless, they are independent. They also are servants, and they cannot change the laws, they must accept them. But they are free, and they have the power, within the bounds of law, to give a verdict against the Government. The teacher ought to have a much greater freedom than the judge, yet today the Education Department is less independent than the Department of Justice. Must not the teacher act as guide to the intellect and the heart of the whole nation? And therefore he ought to have great power. That is why he is called in the Vedas the supremely strong one—*Shachishth*, the most excellent and mighty—and *gatuvit*, the pathfinder. This means that the freedom of his thought, its splendour and vigour, is completely unfettered. Its flight is strong and swift, like that of the wild geese in the open sky. The teacher must sweep forward on his path with the boldness of the eagle or the hawk.

The Vedas also describe what we should desire to receive from the teacher's guidance. They are the same things that we still desire today: “त्वं नो अस्या अमतेरुत, क्षुधो अभिशस्तेरव स्पृधि. Show us the way to rid ourselves of our ignorance, of our hunger, of our various diseases.”



Here three things are mentioned, ignorance, hunger and ill-health. It is the teacher's task to show the pathway of deliverance from these things, and for this task he must be *shachishth*—he must be a man of knowledge, he must be efficient in productive work, for otherwise how could he satisfy men's hunger? He must also be familiar with the various branches of the science of health, for otherwise he will not be able to heal the many and various diseases of mankind. By his knowledge of the natural sciences he will cure sickness, by his practical skill and productiveness he will satisfy hunger, and by his wisdom and intelligence he will dispel ignorance.



PART VI

Some Educational Anomalies



Chapter 47

Manu for today

There is a saying of Manu: "When a child reaches the age of sixteen he should be treated as a friend." I understand this sentence to mean that after the sixteenth year the child himself must assume the direction of his own life. We may give a friend advice, we may give him help too when he needs it, but he himself must bear the burden of his own life.

What we call the burden of life is really no burden, it is a treasure. Our education ought to fit us to recognise it as a treasure. Until they reach the age of sixteen children ought to be getting this kind of education from their fathers and mothers. When I say "from fathers and mothers" I mean that the social group must make the arrangements for the education of the children, and see that every child has the chance of such an education. After sixteen, he must get further education by his own efforts.

This sentence of Manu also implies that it is not right that any child should have to take full responsibility for his life before the age of sixteen. This does not mean that he should have no responsibility at all, but that he should not have to bear it alone. "Education" is the means by which he is made ready, step by step, to take complete charge of his own life.

I have not referred to this saying of Manu in order to use it as a "proof-text." "Manu" is not an authoritative individual, it is the name given to the wisdom gained from the social experience of a thousand years. Visvamitra came to Dasaratha and asked for Ram to protect his sacrifices. Dasaratha replied: "Ram is not yet sixteen years old; how can I let him undertake so responsible a task?" If Ram had been sixteen, Dasaratha would not have used this argument. Vasishtha then explained to him that the work would be done under Visvamitra's guidance as a part of Ram's education and Dasaratha at once accepted the proposal.

Manu's sentence embodies the same approach which Dasaratha uses here, and modern educationists also accept it. Those who planned for Nai Talim prepared a scheme of education over a seven years' period up to the completion of the fourteenth year. In socially advanced countries no child is allowed to work in a factory until he has completed fourteen years of age. Manu is a year ahead of them; he would not have



allowed children to go into a factory until they had completed fifteen years, nor would he have allowed them to waste their time in a college after the age of sixteen.

"But," someone will ask, "are you going to let the colleges stand empty? How is the country to make any progress?" The colleges will not stand empty, they will be filled to overflowing with the children of the poor. The colleges will demonstrate how every student, by his own labour, can gain food through knowledge and knowledge through food, nourishing his stomach with his two hands and his mind with his two eyes. They will show how the breach between knowledge and work can be closed. The students will have no fees to pay, there will be no hostel expenses and no salaries for the teachers. The workshop, the library and the laboratory will be provided by Government. There will be no need for holiday periods, for no one will feel any sense of confinement there.

The colleges of today are not fitted for the poor, even though a few poor students may be admitted without fees as an act of grace. But the colleges we envisage will be open to all. If the children of the rich cannot adjust themselves to such hard work, we may have to excuse them from an hour or two of labour as an act of grace. But if that has to be done, they will be stamped as weaklings in the sight of all, and no self-respecting boy is going to submit easily to that!

At present even agricultural colleges are located in towns, and no student is admitted to them unless he has passed matric. This means in fact that a boy is admitted to the Agricultural College only when it is certain that he will be quite unable to work in the fields in the cold and dew, the sun and the rain. That is all that "matric pass" means in our present system. The professor and students learn agriculture while seated at ease in their chairs! For experimental purposes, there is an apology for a field, and even that is in charge of labourers—it is they who carry out the experiments. The parents have to pay for every student, the equivalent of the produce of twenty-five acres; the college cannot be run on less.

There have been discussions about what form higher education should take. I suggested that the students may work six hours a day to earn their bread and should be taught, in two hours a day, all the knowledge and science which bears on their work. There will be no cost either to the school or to the parents, and rich and poor can be treated alike. This is the only way to make a real experiment and help the country forward.



In our present system we are ignoring both the implications of Manu's sentence. Countless poor children have to begin working for their bread at a very tender age; and even so they do not get enough to eat, still less do they get any education. At the same time, other young people, right up to the age of twenty-five, are getting a travesty of education; they give their minds to finding ways of getting rich without working, while crores of people who do work cannot even get enough to eat.

Our motto must therefore be: "Education for self-sufficiency up to sixteen, education through self-sufficiency after sixteen." Unless we make our educational plans on this basis, those twin evils of our present system will not be overcome.



Chapter 48

Why does Nai Talim not make progress

In Bihar State an important and far-reaching experiment in basic education has been carried on for a number of years and is being watched with interest by the whole country. But it does not seem to be doing as well as it should. Gandhiji said that Nai Talim ought to be self-supporting, but the complaint today is that it is expensive.

The reason for this is that although we talk about a change in our scale of values, no such change is apparent in our practice. In Nai Talim institutions, just as in other places in the Education Department, there are different scales of pay and the same ideas of salary and increment are prevalent. The Government also appears to have no fully thought-out programme. They sanction any number of old-type schools—they are the Grand Trunk Road of education but find it difficult to start Nai Talim schools.

.....The difficulty is that a man who finds himself unable to stand on his own feet even after he has received training in Nai Talim, is also going to prove useless when he is put in a position of authority. It is possible to imagine that a successful blacksmith might also make a success of the job of Prime Minister; but if a man simply sits idle because he is not given a salaried post, he will prove equally incapable of using the opportunities which high rank would give him. He will not be able to change the Government machinery, the machinery will simply swallow him up. The common soldier who cannot perform his own duties properly will never make a Shivaji, even if you were to seat him on Shivaji's throne.

Today the old educational coinage is still current, cast in the same old moulds. We need a new coinage, of a new pattern, but we do not get it. It is not the Government that holds the key to change, but the voters. The teachers of today can have a decisive voice in these matters, if they will go among the voters and get them to change their ideas. Even the formation of a Government will be in their hands. The teachers will not themselves enter the Government, but they will make the Government. They will not themselves receive salaries, but they will control those who do. Nai Talim teachers will be able to do this when they actually begin to practise a new scale of values.



I am in the habit of going to see the work of any basic schools that happen to lie on the route of my Bhoodan pilgrimage. I ask the teachers where their own children are studying. The usual reply is that they are in Gaya or Patna or some such town. Why do they not keep their children with them, where father, and teacher, and a good type of education, are all to be had together? The reason, obviously, is that they have no faith in Nai Talim.

Basic schools make khadi, but the children do not wear it. They are like hotels, where men prepare food for other people to eat.

The wife of the village basic school teacher takes her children and goes and lives in the town. The children will undoubtedly learn one thing from her: "Son, whatever else you may do in the world, don't be such a fool as your father."

I say to the teachers: "You have some craft work going on here. Suppose that you yourself were to work three hours a day at the craft, and spend another three hours, teaching. We would pay you for your three hour's teaching the same sum as you earn in your three hours' labour. Would you agree to that?" They say, "No," and that means that they are unable to support themselves by their crafts. If we are to raise the standard of our spinning, weaving, and other crafts, we shall have to bring down our own standard of living, but we are not ready to do that. How then can we tell the children to work at the crafts themselves?

I then suggest to them that even though the Government does not give them all the same rate of pay, there would be nothing to stop them from pooling the money and sharing it equitably, just as is done in families. But they are not ready for this either.

All this means that not one of the new values of Nai Talim is being adopted in these "Nai Talim schools"; what then can we expect from them? It has even come to this, that persons who are clothed from head to foot in mill cloth, and use nothing but foreign goods in their homes, are bold enough to make speeches to the workers at Nai Talim conferences! I do not want to single out individuals for criticism, but I do want to ask this: "If you really believe in Nai Talim, why don't you wear the khadi the children make?" Nothing worthwhile can be achieved by such a lame and imperfect kind of experiment in Nai Talim.

If I were starting a school, I would go to work in a different way. I would go to some village and start a one-hour school. The boys would work all day in the fields,



and their schooling would not cost them a pice. Then I would encourage the villagers to sow a little cotton, and when they have done that, I would suggest that they should make themselves bamboo charkhas, and show them how to do it. When charkhas have thus made their entry into the village, they will be available free to the boys in the school. You can either start charkha spinning in the school in such a way that it will change the outlook of the village, or start the craft in the village and later introduce it into the school.

Whatever is made in the school should be used in the school. All the vegetables grown should be shared out between the children and the teachers, not reckoned as a source of school income. In the same way, whatever khadi is produced should be given to the boys. All that you have to do is to see whether or not a satisfactory amount has been produced. The expenses of the school may go up a bit if you give all the produce to the children in this way, but let them do so, at first. After all, is the Government responsible for the cost of education, or not?

In the Nai Talim training centres which have now been organised the teachers, I see, are living without their wives. But how can we get on without the guru's wife? She must also be trained and then share in her husband's work. I am reminded of a story in the Upanishads. A boy named Upakosal was staying in his guru's house. One day he did not eat. He was too much afraid of his guru to confide in him, but when the guru's wife asked him why he did not eat the boy replied: "A man has various desires, and when they are not fulfilled he has no appetite for food." The guru's wife went and told her husband that the boy was longing for knowledge, and should be given what he needed. In this way the guru's wife is a gateway into the guru's presence. The teacher's wife ought to live with him, and in my opinion she too should receive a salary, for there is much that she can teach the boys. She can, for example, teach them to cook. Suppose that you are now paying the teacher a hundred rupees, you may instead give him eighty and give his wife forty.

Today Nai Talim is being opposed because Nai Talim schools are being started only in villages, and the villagers get the impression that it is somehow inferior, a kind of Government charity for them. One of the reasons for the opposition in Madras to Rajaji's scheme of education was that it was intended for the villages and not for the towns



Chapter 49

Queer facts about schools

(On our Bhoodan pilgrimage) we stay quite often in village schools, for in small villages the school-house is usually the only good building. It is convenient for the people to let us stay in it, and it also gives the children a treat, for they get a holiday for our visit.

In the room in which I am staying today there hangs a list of the school holidays for this year. There are forty festivals great and small for which fifty-five days' holiday have been allowed, and the holiday for our coming made the fifty-sixth. Our country is a land of many religions; each religion has many saints, and each saint has many devotees, and all these find their place in the holiday list. The idea of respect for all religions ought surely to come natural to the children!

Births and deaths are also held in equal honour. When I was a little boy I remember getting a holiday because the Emperor died, and of course we always had one for his birthday. In Hindu practice too there are sweets on the twelfth day (after birth) and sweets on the thirteenth day (after death). Whoever is born or dies, he always sweetens the tongue!

These holidays are given by the Uttar Pradesh Department of Education. But the interesting thing is that there are no holidays for saints like Tulsidas, Surdas and Kabirdas who are universally revered by the people of this State; if there were, our places of learning would have more holidays than ever. There must be holidays for Guru Nanak and Guru Govind Singh, for Buddha, Mahavir, Mohammed and so on. In other words, where sects are strongly organised and quarrels might arise, where the fires of jealousy are quick to break out, there is a holiday to stop the quarrel!

This year there are three holidays for eclipses of the sun and moon. Eclipses or no, the sun and moon do not stand still. But pious men have discovered that owing to the eclipse they slacken speed, and the teachers and children are given the benefit of it. A gentleman was once explaining to me that one should always lie down for a time after the midday meal. "Even the sun," he said, "rests a little at midday."

The Lord created the world in six days and being weary rested on the seventh day. From that time a regular holiday has been observed, in some sects on Friday, in



some on Saturday and nowadays everywhere on Sunday. But there has never been a holiday from eating, for no one ever gets weary of that. Some people in fact make a habit of eating their fill on Sundays, because then they have plenty of time to sleep after food, whereas on other days they have to go to the office. So if we eat we eat, if we don't we don't. There is no record of the Lord eating on Sunday, for He needed only rest, not food. We need both, we seem to be one step ahead of the Lord in this!

There is no doubt that a holiday is a pleasant thing, and so is eating. There is no need to go into the reasons for it. But if we take a holiday, how shall we get the food? This is a really serious problem nowadays. Even when we work, we do not get enough to eat our fill, so how can we expect to get it if we leave off working?

Apart from festival days and Sundays there are long holidays in the hot weather which are the gift of the British to this country. "The whole discipline of the mind is in knowledge and ignorance together," says the Upanishad, and this teaching fits in very well with our hot weather holidays. Ignorance gets her opportunity for three months on end, and the children get a chance to throw down the heavy load of knowledge that has been piled on their heads. The Goddess of Knowledge could never let anyone "pass" without one hundred per cent marks, but as Knowledge and Ignorance are doing the job together, it can be managed on thirty-three per cent.

The Vice-Chancellor of Nagpur University was saying that it was not possible for University staff to teach more than twenty hours a week. The State Government was asking them to teach twenty-four hours a week, because the country needs more work done. I do not know how the debate ended. It could easily be settled, it seems to me, if both parties were to agree on eighteen hours. Six days a week, three hours a day would make eighteen hours, and the number eighteen is so auspicious that even Vyasji would approve it. But let no one insist that the teacher's hour should consist of sixty minutes like ordinary hours today. Experience has shown that children cannot keep their attention and interest on a subject for so long. Our religious teachers have decreed that a new subject ought to be begun in a new *muhurth*. A *muhurth* is equal to forty-eight minutes. So according to this reckoning a period of forty to fifty minutes should count as an hour.

I also fully agree that it is not possible to teach more than twenty hours in a week. In teaching, as I know by experience, the brain, the lungs and the throat must all work very hard. Teaching is hard work, and nowadays I cannot manage it for more



than one hour at once. Anyone who throws himself into teaching with his whole heart will have a similar experience. All the same, there ought to be no difficulty in agreeing to the suggestion that one may teach for three hours and do some form of productive work for another three hours. But as manual labour has not been recognized as part of the teacher's code of conduct, the conventional orthodox teacher will not easily be prepared for this.

I have written the above in a light vein, but nevertheless, as a manual labourer, I cannot conceal my concern about the whole subject.



Chapter 50

Change the time of holidays

For thousands of years there have been in India the teachers and the taught, but it did not occur to anyone to arrange for a long holiday in the schools. Holidays came into education only with the coming of the English system. Before that, there used to be one day in the week on which there were no classes; besides this the arrival of the students was celebrated, and there were special talks and discussions. Nowadays, however, the schools are open for only six or seven months in the year; but since these schools have become little better than prisons, we ought not to complain about that, for it is clear that the children need a holiday from them.

If we admit the need for a long holiday, we should re-consider the question of when it should be. It has become the custom to give such holidays in the hot weather. The heat of India was too much for our foreign teachers, so in the summer they gave their pupils a holiday and went off themselves to some cool place. That problem no longer exists, for these foreigners have left India and gone back to the cool air of England. That being so, it would be a good thing to change the holiday from summer to the rainy season. During the monsoon, there is a lot of cultivation to be done, and the children can help their parents in the fields. There is no need to give six or eight weeks' holiday all together, but instead several periods of fifteen days each can be given at the proper time for weeding. The summer days are long and there is no work for the children in the fields; if they are on holiday they either wander about in the blazing sun or get bored in the house—there is no other alternative. A change of holiday season is therefore urgently needed, and now that the era of the foreigner is over and the era of the peasant is at hand, we should all give our minds to it.



PART VII

The organisation of Education



Chapter 51

The root purpose of Education

When I think about education it often seems to me that we have entangled ourselves in needless complexities. If we were to keep a firm hold on the root of the matter, we could easily keep our direction, but we waste our energies in worrying about the branches.

The single purpose of all education is that the whole nation should become skillful craftsmen and clear thinkers. But we sub-divide this one purpose into so many aspects—urban education, rural education, adult education, child education, nursery education, basic education, women's education, men's education, craft education, intellectual educationand on top of all these there come literacy campaigns!

We shall make no progress if we start thinking of all these aspects separately. If our attention is distracted, a little for this, a little for that, we shall find no real satisfaction anywhere. We should keep a firm hold on the root and concentrate on seeing that that is properly attended to. The root, in my opinion, is basic education, which has been defined by our experts as the education of children from the seventh to the fourteenth year. If we feel that it is necessary, this period may be extended—we may begin from the sixth year and continue up to the fifteenth, in fact we may do whatever is needed to make it a complete course. We should take up this one task and do it really well and thoroughly, and this type of education should be made compulsory throughout the country. It includes craftsmanship, it includes the development of the intellect and it includes literacy also. In this type of education, the problem of how what has been learned is to be remembered does not arise, for knowledge is so integrated with experience that there is no room for forgetting. Moreover, this type of education will expand of itself. We sow one seed to obtain many seeds, and in the same way the boys who are educated on these principles will go on to multiply their knowledge a hundred fold.

It is an illusion to think that we shall make more rapid progress by sub-dividing the problem and considering each branch separately. If we concentrate on providing really good basic education the children who receive it will grow up into educated adult citizens and will themselves plan for pre-basic (nursery) education in their own homes. There will be no need to worry about adult or nursery education programmes.



The kind of adult literacy campaigns that go on today bring no particular benefit to anyone. Adult education should be through craftsmanship, so as to enable the unemployed to do useful work and at the same time to develop their intelligence.

Take for example a village with a population of two thousand people. If a complete basic school with an eight or nine years' course is organised for the village, there will be about three hundred children in school. About ten teachers will be needed to work with them, and we may employ two or three additional ones. We shall arrange that different members of this team are skilled in a number of different crafts; they will all co-operate in the work of the basic school, and at the same time they will be able to teach the adults things which are of real use in life. Together with this practical knowledge they will also be able to introduce the villagers to the events of the outside world, to geography, hygiene, science and many other things.

It will be said however, that Government cannot start complete basic schools because it has not got the money. I answer that whatever money there is should be put into complete schools. It is a complete waste of resources to run a basic school for four years only. If the course is complete the children can gain a real mastery of their work and there will be some income. But in our niggardliness we appoint too few basic school teachers, and then pay adult education instructors separately! It would be far better to appoint a full complement of basic school teachers, so that they may also undertake the education of the adults.

Basic education is an ocean where many streams of thought mingle. Differences between men's and women's education, between city and village, are overcome, for the fundamentals of education are the same for all. At a later stage, different branches may perhaps diverge, but these divergences will never contradict the basic principles.



Chapter 52

A one-hour School

I have recently been speaking a good deal about the idea of a "one-hour school." It would not be a Government school but a village school and it would work every morning for one hour only. I have practically equated Nai Talim with this one-hour school. At first I did not expect that people would accept such a queer idea, but to my surprise I find that they not only accept it, they welcome it from their hearts. It has gone down well, a morning basic school is a practicable proposition.

There should be, similarly, a one-hour university meeting at night. The children below fifteen would go to the morning school; from the sixteenth year upwards all would have the right to go to the university, whether they had studied in the school or not. The school would teach reading, writing, arithmetic and so on; the university would teach by talks and discussions, and through music, devotional songs etc.

Boys and girls would be free to help their parents during the day, and the teacher also would be free to do his own work. He would not be paid a salary, but would receive three or four seers of grain from each peasant at harvest time.

Everything that is taught, whether in the school or in the university, would be linked up with the crafts and activities of the village. Among these activities are to be reckoned cooking, house-work, scavenging, celebrating festivals, games, births, deaths, sicknesses and so on.

The gram-panchayat would be responsible for developing the existing crafts and introducing new ones. The teacher would be a member of this village council. If the panchayat were to undertake the management of a model farm or workshop, the teacher and children could go and work in it, but not for more than three hours daily. Their earnings should be reckoned in kind, not in cash. The school would not be responsible for introducing crafts which the gram-panchayat did not want. The university however would do its best to arouse the sense of need. When the community begins to feel the need of a new craft, the panchayat would make plans for it, and after that it can be introduced in the school.

Education does not need money; it needs to be free of money.



Chapter 53

Education in one hour a day

There is a great deal of time wasted in the schools which are being run now-a-days for our little five-year-olds. If the children were really busy reading and writing for the whole five hours, it would be too much for them. Moreover, really poor children cannot attend the schools and the education given in them is of no real value.

My suggestion is therefore that we should have a one-hour school. It would be held in the early morning, about sunrise, so that the children would be free to work during the day, and every child in the village, even the poorest, would be able to attend. This morning class would be for reading—for the "three R's."

In the evening there would be an hour's class for adults, what one may call a "hearing-class," for it would not teach reading and writing. There would be readings from such books as the Ramayan and the Bhagvat. There would be stories and hymns of the saints. There would be discussion of village problems, new ideas and suggestions for agriculture. There would be songs and *bhajans*. This class would deal with every type of knowledge needed in practical life. The children would all go to the morning class to learn to read, but for general knowledge they would go to the evening class. No holidays would be necessary in either class. Our ordinary schools have a five-hour day but they also have about six months of holidays, so that they are really only two-and-a-half hour schools. In our daily schools there will be no reason for forgetting what has been learned. Experience also teaches that just as the body grows strong by daily nourishment, and is kept clean by a daily bath, so the mind is satisfied and contented by a little daily study. We have no reason for desiring a holiday from this intellectual nourishment, any more than we desire a holiday from daily food. (With five-hour schools the case is different). One hour schools of this kind could be established throughout India within a year at very little expense.

The teachers of these one-hour schools would also be occupied with their own work during the day, so they would not need large salaries. The villagers would give them a share of the yearly harvest in return for their hour's service. Such schools could be run for practically nothing. The teaching given in them would be linked up with agriculture, village industries and other aspects of village life. Cooking and eating goes on in every home and that too would be a medium of education. Some of the principles



of nutrition would be taught in this connection. The work of keeping the village clean is a basic tool of knowledge. An epidemic disease in the locality would give an opportunity to study and learn from the measures taken to check it. A death in the village is also a means of knowledge. When there is too much rain, and there is consequently a poor harvest, one can learn from that also. All the festivals and weddings are equally instruments of knowledge. So are the quarrels and the bites of mad dogs! There is something to be learned from everything that happens.

Do not imagine that it is impossible to get all this into one hour a day. A great deal of knowledge can be got into an hour every morning and evening, the two hours including both the "reading" and the "hearing" classes. I say this from practical experience. I taught some boys for several years, most of them for not more than one hour a day. Those children learned a great deal, and today they are good servants of society. Children would not be debarred from attending the evening "hearing-class" planned for the adults, so they would get the benefit of both classes, morning reading and evening discussion. For two hours a day they would be reading, writing and listening. If the village council organises village industries efficiently, the children will be able to learn those industries during the remainder of the day, and will be occupied in their own fields or other work. It is not the duty of the school to organize such industries, but that of the Gram-Panchayat or village council. The expenses which may have to be incurred will be borne by the panchayat, not by the school. The school will have very few expenses, and the children will become expert craftsmen.

The mind is eager and active in the early morning, so the children will readily grasp what they are taught. In the evening there will be entertainment—stories, tales from Bhagvat, music, etc. Knowledge will be acquired without any sense of fatigue. After the stories are over, the evening programme will regularly close with some beautiful bhajan, which will be sung and its meaning explained to the people. Young and old will go home to bed with this bhajan ringing in their hearts.

Our wise men say that a man dies in perfect peace, if his heart in his last hours is filled with devotion. The end of life is a solemn time, and it should be spent not in frivolities but in the peace of heart which comes from a spirit filled with the love of God. Then the well-being of the soul is assured and it will know the divine peace. Now this principle applies to the end of the day just as much as to the end of life. At the end of the day, when we lie down to sleep, we experience a kind of daily death. We shall awake next morning only if it pleases God to wake us. If not, our end has come. Sleep



then is a daily death and if a man lies down to sleep with his mind filled with devotion to God, it will have a profound influence upon him. He will have dreamless sleep and be filled with peace and vigour. Therefore this last period in the day, just before sleep, is of great importance. So let there be some lovely bhajan at the end of the evening class, and let young and old, men and women, go home with its music ringing in their ears, to sleep in the arms of the Lord.

This kind of plan for education will cost very little, it can be widely adopted and quickly established in any village. The teachers and the organiser, who give an hour of their time for the morning or the evening class, may receive a yearly gift of grain from the villagers. But even this may not be necessary. We are asking for part of a man's wealth as a gift to society and in the same way a man may make a gift of his wisdom and knowledge, by teaching others freely, for love, for an hour a day. Such a teacher will ask for nothing, nevertheless he may accept, as the grace of God, whatever the villagers offer him for his needs. If the Government should be willing to provide books and other equipment for schools of this kind, by all means let them do so; it is after all their duty. Literate villagers may also hand over their books to the school after they have finished with them. Every villager would consider it a privilege to help to make the village reading and discussion classes as good as possible.

Answers to questions

1. Would it be possible for children to get a proper education in only one hour of school? Villagers are already underfed physically, would this plan not mean that they would be underfed mentally too?

It is sufficient for the children's education to have a regular daily hour of intellectual study. The teacher, like the other villagers, would be supporting himself by his craft, so that all through the day he will be in natural living contact with village people, and the children will continually be learning things from him informally. But even apart from that, one hour of regular "lessons" is enough for children. It seems to me a good principle that the same amount of time as is spent on eating, that is on nourishing the body, should also be spent on education, on nourishing the mind and intellect. The rest of the day should be allowed for digesting this nourishment. Even if we eat three times a day, we still do not spend more than an hour and a half on our food; we should not give more time than that to our intellectual food. The knowledge that can be imparted to children in a whole hour, assuming that we are really teaching



properly, is such that it will take them a long time to digest it, that is, fully to assimilate and practise it. Education is not merely, as people so often think, a matter of doling out information. Education means giving children the power to acquire knowledge for themselves. Once that is done, and the thirst for knowledge is awakened, the rest is easy, the pupils can educate themselves. One hour is enough to do this.

2. What you say may be all right for general primary education, but will it be enough to prepare children for higher education?

Certainly. In a regular daily hour the very highest knowledge can be given. I have taught children the Upanishads in this way. But the plan for a one-hour school which I placed before you is intended for basic or primary education. We shall have to see from experience whether in fact the children in our one-hour schools are as well grounded as those in ordinary schools, or not. Besides this, as I have already said, there must be a University in every village. The one-hour school is intended for ordinary general education, but I shall not be satisfied merely with that. People spend their whole lives, from birth to death, and do their whole work, in their village, and therefore there should be also an opportunity for a complete education. It seems to me that the plan by which elementary education is given in the village, the next higher stage in the district town, the next higher in the big city, and a higher stage still somewhere else, is quite wrong. The means for every kind of education ought to be available in the same villages where we spend our whole working lives. I say, and I believe, that there can and must be provision in every village for the highest “University” education.

3. It may be possible to have advanced teaching of philosophy, or the social sciences, in every village, but is it feasible to provide for physical sciences, and higher technical education or research. Where could the equipment be had?

When I say that there should be a university in every village, I do not mean that there should be provision in every village for every sort of learning. Is that the case even in our existing universities? A university does not make provision for every faculty, or every type of research. Other things being equal, students choose the place where the subject is best taught. This will happen in village universities also. In general, there will be provision for advanced study everywhere, but where there is forest, there is an opportunity to develop faculties of forestry, wood-craft and medicine which cannot be undertaken elsewhere. One must also remember that there is a great deal of advanced knowledge which does not depend wholly on material equipment. There



is no need to use a telescope every day in order to learn astronomy. It is enough to use it occasionally. So that even if there cannot be a telescope in every village, there can still be astronomical studies. The telescope can be set up at some convenient centre and people can go and use it as they need it.

Scientific research needs three things: the power of conceptual thought, dexterity of hand and physical apparatus. So far as I can see, there is no obstacle in village life to the development of scientific concepts. There is plenty of opportunity for acquiring manual dexterity, as people do all kinds of work with their own hands. The greater part of the physical equipment is also available, for the whole creation is open to us. I have already discussed the question of equipment (such as telescopes) which cannot be made available everywhere.

Seen from this point of view, every village offers opportunity for advanced education and research, and every village should make provision for it. The foundation should be laid in the organisation of the one-hour school. Knowledge today is limited to a narrow circle. If it is to be made universal and its doors thrown open to all, this is the way it can be done.



Chapter 54

Village and Town Education

People are thinking a great deal about education now-a-days, and thoughtful men feel anxious about it. But the matter is very simple. Most of our people live in villages, so the education of the nation as a whole should be village-centred, so that the villages will benefit by it. The people of the towns must be given the kind of education which will direct their interest towards the villages, so that there may be healthy co-operation between town and village. The country will suffer greatly if the towns get one kind of education and the villages get another which is incompatible with it.

There are a great many things in life which are common to all humanity, whether townsmen or villagers. The five elements affect the people of village and town alike. City and village people are equally in need of fresh air. A life lived in close touch with Nature is good for them both. This may be rather difficult of attainment in cities, but an effort ought to be made to provide it nevertheless. A knowledge of the laws of health is equally necessary for both. It is true that one type of provision for public health may have to be made in towns and another type in villages, but the basic need is the same for both. Ethical principles like mutual aid, affection, unselfishness, are the same for both. The only real difference is that the villages produce the basic necessities of life, so that the education of village children has a sound natural basis; whereas the towns produce things which are of secondary importance, so that town life, as a medium of education, is on a somewhat lower plane. This inferiority of city education is inherent in the nature of city life, and cannot be cured until we can make the cities more like villages.

We must accept the fact that city education will be lacking in certain respects. This lack can be compensated for, however, if two conditions are present. One is that the eyes of the towns should be turned towards the villages; the second is that they should keep in close touch with other countries. I certainly expect town's people to learn foreign languages, so that they can put to good use in their own tongue the new discoveries which are described in other languages. If their faces are really turned towards the villages they will regard it as their duty to serve them. One might even make a kind of epigram, saying that the villager's duty is to serve God in His creation,



and the townsman's duty is to serve the village. If we keep this vision before us, both town and village can offer complete human development, and each can assist the other to live a full life.

My thought is that full provision for education ought to be made in every village. Each one should have its university or *Vidyapith*. For every village, no matter how small, is a microcosm; it contains the whole world in miniature. Therefore a complete education must be obtainable there. The village is in close touch with the natural world of creation, and has ready to hand therefore the materials for the study of physical and natural sciences. It is an excellent place for the study of biology, for all kinds of birds and beasts, and other living creatures, abound there. Agriculture, weaving, road-making and many other industries are practised in villages; the advanced study from which these crafts will all benefit could and should be undertaken in the village itself. The human community has been established in the villages from ancient times; history and sociology can well be studied there. Moreover the greater intimacy in which men live in villages is conducive to the development of ethics and religion. The elements of conduct which make up ethical living—breadth of outlook, a readiness to work with others, reverence for truth, and so on—show themselves readily in the village environment. The planets and constellations of stars are much more clearly visible to our villagers than to town-dwellers. We may surely look for the springing up of poetry, for the poet's vision is easier there than in the town.

We could not imagine Vyasa or Valmiki living in one of our modern towns, but only in or near a village. Bold and valiant men, able to fight with wild beasts, are to be found in villages. So when we want heroes we must seek them there, and nations have always found that peasants make good soldiers. So that, with all this wealth to be had in the villages, can we not make the tools of education there also? The answer is that we can certainly make them, but that there is no need of many tools. What is much more important is trial and experiment. Village boys should sometimes visit the town universities, city boys should visit the villages, so that each may learn from the other. But by far the most necessary thing for the village university is good teachers, men who can really think and develop ideas. If only one such man were to settle down in a village, it would not be at all difficult to arrange for education there.

In addition to this, our forefathers had made provision to enable villagers to have access to kinds of knowledge which no one in the village possessed. This plan must be carried on. It is the tradition of the wandering *sannyasi*. The sannyasi travels



continually among the villages for the greater part of the year, remaining in one place only for the four months of the rainy season. The villagers thus get the full benefit of his knowledge. He can teach them both knowledge of the world and knowledge of the Self. A *sannyasi* is a walking university, a wandering *vidyapith*, who goes at his pleasure to each village in turn. He will himself seek out his students, and he will give his teaching freely. The villagers will give him clean, pure *sattvik* food, and he will need nothing else. They will learn from him whatever they can. There is nothing more tragic than that knowledge should be paid for in money. A man who possesses knowledge hungers and thirsts to pass it on to others and see them enjoy it. The child at the breast finds satisfaction, but the mother too takes pleasure in giving suck, for God has filled her breasts with milk. What would become of the world if mothers began demanding fees for feeding their babies?

Now-a-days, in the city university, nothing can be had without at least one or two hundreds of rupees. But the “knowledge” which is purchased there for money is no knowledge at all; knowledge bought for cash is ignorance. True knowledge can only be had for love and service, it cannot be bought for money. So when a wise man, travelling from place to place, arrives at a village, let the people lovingly invite him to remain a few days, treat him with reverence and receive from him whatever knowledge he has to give. This is quite a feasible plan. Just as a river flows of itself from village to village, serving the people; just as the cows graze in the jungle and return of themselves with full udders to give the children milk; so will wise men travel of themselves from place to place. We must re-establish this institution of the wandering teacher. In this way every village can have its university, and all the knowledge of the world can find its way into the villages. We must also re-invigorate the tradition of the *vanaprasthashram* so that every village gets a permanent teacher for whom no great expenditure will be incurred. Every *grihastha*’s home must be a school, and his field a laboratory. Every *vanaprastha* must be a teacher and every wandering *sannyasi* a university. The students are the children and the young people who want to learn; in every village there will be people who give an hour or two to learning and spend the rest of the day working. This seems to me to provide a complete outline of education from birth to death.

The purpose of Sarvodaya is that the village as a whole shall solve the problems of its life by its own strength. The wealth and resources of the village must therefore belong not to individuals but to the village itself. Only then is it possible to plan for all



children to have an equal chance of education. If we cannot even give them all their share of pure and nourishing food, how can we give them an equal education?

Sudama was the son of a poor Brahmin, Shri Krishna was a prince, a king's son. Both lived in their guru's home, ate the same food, shared the same labour, were given the same knowledge. How can there be a real school in a village when one boy comes in rags and another in fine clothes, when one boy comes to school fasting and another has stuffed himself until he is lethargic? If we desire that everyone should have a proper education, we must arrange that the villagers live like one family, and all the wealth, all the wisdom, all the strength of the community should be used for the good of all.

The secret of Nai Talim is in the non-violence whose light pervades the work of *Bhoodan* and village industry. May God grant that a true guru, wise, tender and affectionate, may be found for every village in India.



Chapter 55

The Educational Community

After many years observation it seems to me that when a hundred or a hundred and fifty workers live together in one place, the concerns of the community take up so much time that there is no time left for any other work. Moreover, such a big community cannot manage without money. But once the money basis is done away with, the group has to enter into relationships with its neighbours and without money there would not be danger of these relationships being false.

A false relationship is one that is based neither on thought nor on work nor on knowledge, but on money. Whatever we may do in such conditions is merely a show, it does not touch the heart. It is like a play, and has the same effect as a play. The influence which ought to be exercised by living together in real fellowship cannot be had from this kind of play-acting. So let us think whether it would not be good to limit the size of our institutions to about fifteen or twenty workers. I should have no objection to a larger group, however, provided that they abandoned the money basis. In fact I believe that a community of this sort could really start a revolution.

There appears to me to be another weakness in big communities. A big community needs elaborate arrangements and these have to be well planned. The basic school children also get the benefit of these amenities. And then, after having been educated in these comfortable surroundings, they go out into a world where no such conveniences exist, and they feel confused and lost, poor things. Our Nai Talim schools must be so organised that the students will be able to stand up against discomfort and misfortune, and make use of these experiences in building their own lives.

Our methods of work in the Nai Talim schools which we have organised are in many ways good, but it appears to me that we need to do more thinking about this matter of the standard of living. Our schools are rather like the Princes' Colleges! Of course the comparison is not exact, our standards are not so luxurious as theirs. But in one thing they are alike, in that neither have any real relationship with the people round about. Our organisation needs to be flexible, and we need to conduct many experiments of different kinds in different places. We ought to try out in practice the plan for a one-hour school which we have been discussing.



Some people say that the cost of a Nai Talim school is so great as to be prohibitive, and that the Government is in no position to run such costly schools. This criticism is usually made by those who are opposed to Nai Talim. The fact is that it is not expensive, and it is moreover trying to become free from money. At present there are still some expenses, as this work is not yet complete.

A village is self-sufficient and does not depend upon assistance from outside. All needs have to be satisfied locally; the people work at their crafts, they produce goods, and every household has some food to eat. Life is a whole in such a village, independent and free from artificiality. A man works because he is hungry. He contrives tools for his work because he is intelligent. A place of this kind is an excellent field for Nai Talim, in fact the villagers are already practising Nai Talim in their own way, and all that is needed is some raising of the level of cleanliness and culture. Let us therefore abandon our false vanity of 'education'—people will not remain uneducated because we don't educate them! Let the teacher go into a village and take part in the crafts which are being practised there, along with his pupils. Through this work he can teach the adults also.

What matters is that knowledge should be linked up with the crafts and occupations that are actually being carried on, and irrelevant information should not be given. If *charkhas* are not in use, why should the teacher take it upon himself to bring them in and make them the medium of education?

If I were to go to a village, I should not need even a cowrie-shell for expenses. I would tell the people that I have some knowledge which they do not possess, that is all that is needed. (If the people have no ignorance, the plan won't work; if the teacher has no knowledge, it won't work). If the villagers work in the fields, so will I; if they tend the cattle, so will I. I will teach them cattle-husbandry and along with it I will also teach the Upanishads. Books are not essential to Nai Talim. If they can be had, very good; but if they cannot be had, then also very good. For ordinary schools you must have at least a blackboard, chalk and books. But for Nai Talim you need nothing. God has given me a tongue, he has given people ears to hear, and to all of us a place to sit down—what more is needed for a school? The one need is a good teacher who will give an education which is linked up with village life.

The Government has decided that "Basic Education should be introduced." Government is giving orders, and there will be regulations for the use of a basic craft



as the medium of instruction, and so forth. Are regulations enough, or do we need also a rule of life?*

What can be achieved by external regulations without an inward rule of life? The inward rule which inspires Nai Talim is a faith in manual labour and in equality. Now it is not compatible with these principles that teachers should be paid different salaries according to their various “qualifications,” some forty rupees, some eighty, some a hundred. This is to create different classes and grades among teachers, and that won’t do in Nai Talim. In Nai Talim it is essential that all teachers should be paid on the same basis. I am not now talking about freedom from the money economy. I am talking about equality. This is not a suggestion for saving money; it may cost the Government more to give everyone equal pay, but Nai Talim can make no progress without equality.

Nai Talim does not recognize any difference between the values of bodily and of intellectual labour. There is no justification for giving larger salaries to those who direct and organise the work. The salary of a teacher, and of a Minister of Education and other administrative officers, should be on the same level. If this is not done, how can the pupils conceive any reverence or respect for Nai Talim? In fact, the very word and conception of “salary” for a teacher is wrong; the right thing is for a teacher to receive *dakshina*.

* There is a neat play of words in the original contrasting *tantra* (“regulations”) with *mantra* (“rule of life.”)



Chapter 56

Nai Talim and Government

Bapu used to say that Swaraj did not mean merely that the foreign rule should be ended; swaraj meant that a new society should be formed, in which there should be no exploitation, in which there should be as little centralised authority as possible, and in which every person should have full opportunity for development as a complete human being. This was the kind of social order which he called "swaraj"; he called it also "Ramraj." It means that every citizen should feel that the country, in a real sense, is *his*.

In 1937, ten years before independence was achieved, Bapu placed the idea of Nai Talim before the country. This Nai Talim sets up new standards of value. The old education teaches that it is wrong to steal. The new education teaches that it is equally wrong for a man to accumulate more goods than he needs. The old education assigns different values to bodily and to mental labour. The new education not only regards both as of equal value, it integrates them both into one whole, and makes use of both as a unity. The old education honours ability; the new education considers ability to be the handmaid of equality. The old education honours Lakshmi, Shakti, and Saraswati* as three separate divinities. The new education places humanity upon the throne of honour, and considers these three merely as the instruments whereby humanity is to be served. Swaraj, as I understand it, does not mean merely the transfer of power. It means the abolition of power and the establishment of service in its place.

Nai Talim has been apprehended so far in so one-sided a manner that there is a grave risk in accepting it as it now is. The extensive experiments in "Basic Education" which are in progress today are almost all being conducted by State Governments. It has seemed to me for years that the result is a caricature of Nai Talim. Nai Talim is based upon a philosophy of life, and when this philosophy is not accepted all that is achieved is a poor, ugly imitation of some of its external features in isolation. There is no hope at all that Nai Talim will get anything but a bad name from what is going on today. The Governments are digging the grave of Nai Talim.

The responsibility for this mis-shapen education is upon those who put Nai Talim under the care of Governments. What we should have done was to set up a few unadulterated examples of Nai Talim in different places. In practice, education officers



approach it in two different ways. One is a deliberate attempt to give basic education a bad name—"it is expensive, the knowledge-content is poor, the parents are dissatisfied; the children are discontented." This is obviously an improper, dishonest approach and I will not discuss it. Others, however, accept Nai Talim honestly according to their lights. That is to say, they accept some of its features, but they keep their old standards of value, they do not adopt the new values of Nai Talim. This is an honest approach, but it will not be able to show the country the real nature of Nai Talim. It is therefore very important that as many full-fledged, complete experiments as possible, based upon the new values, should be made. This means that we must find a way to integrate Nai Talim with Bhoodan Yagna and the Sarvodaya programmes.

When the country was under foreign rule, people were fired with the idea of national education, and independent *vidyapiths* were opened. Now we imagine that since we have achieved independence, the Government schools have automatically become national schools. But such changes do not happen by a stroke of the pen; they have to be *made* national, and I hope that they will be. Even so, there will still be a need for independent enterprise in education, apart from Government. There ought to be an independent school in every village, managed by the people themselves in their own way to suit their own environment. Otherwise, if the whole education of the country comes under Government management, there will be a danger that all the children's minds should be cast into the same mould. From this point of view also we need some experiments in Nai Talim that are independent of the Government.

* Wealth, Power and Learning.



PART VIII

Education and Peace



Chapter 57

the spirit of Non-violence

Nai Talim is based on a faith, a faith in *ahimsa*, non-violence. There is not a single individual or group to be found in the world today that does not want non-violence. The thing is naturally attractive. Nevertheless, although people in their hearts love and desire non-violence, they do not in practice put their faith in it. They want non-violence but they put their trust in force.

Mothers and fathers do their best to train their children. When the children do not understand they scold them, they threaten them, and if the children still do not understand they finally beat them. They do it all for love, and because they desire the children's good. But when the children do not understand what they should do, the one unfailing instrument of explanation is a beating.

This reliance upon force pervades every aspect of life today. In the home, there is the stick. In the Government, there are penalties. In society, there is boycott. In the international field, there is the army. Violence is everywhere, on a small or on a larger scale. From the home right up to the international sphere, the final appeal is to force.

But a faith in non-violence means that when we explain something to children and they do not understand, we should explain it again, more affectionately still. If even then they do not understand, we should explain more gently still. When we put our trust in non-violence our progress is from gentle to more gentle and still more gentle means. Work that cannot be accomplished by beating and striking may possibly be done by scolding; what cannot be accomplished by scolding can surely be done by reasonable explanation; where reasoning fails, friendly service may succeed; what even friendly service cannot do may be accomplished by sacrificial love. If that is our faith, then it deserves the name of non-violence.

Now-a-days I am talking with people about Bhoodan, going from village to village and asking for land, with gentle, loving words. When I do not have as much success as was hoped, people suggest that some sterner step should be taken, and if that too has no effect, that still sharper measures must be tried. People who argue in this way believe themselves to be keeping within the bounds of *ahimsa*. So long as they do not actually beat or strike anyone, they think that it is consistent with non-



violence that sterner and sterner methods should be used in the work. It seems to me, however, that this is a violent attitude of mind, and that this way of thought is not consistent with non-violence. If we think of military measures we can see the process clearly. If the soldier cannot achieve his aim with small weapons he gets out bigger ones, and if those also prove insufficient he resorts to still more destructive ones. If the devotees of non-violence think in terms of sterner and sterner measures, their non-violence is non-violence only in name, and not in spirit. In real non-violence we must think in terms of a progress from gentle to more gentle and most gentle. Many of the questions which arise can be solved if this basic principle of non-violence is kept in mind.

Hardworking people are apt to be gentle in speech and patient in explanations. But many of us, if we are not immediately understood by those to whom we speak, proceed to raise our voices and shout. That shows violence of spirit. If we do not get results by loving reasonableness, we shall certainly not get them by harsh words. Such an action shows that our love is inadequate, and we must desire to love more. This principle is applicable to every part of society—to Government, trade, social relationships and family life. It is a fundamental principle of education. If this principle is once grasped clearly, the reasons for the various activities of Nai Talim can easily be explained.

Ahimsa means much more than mere disarmament, merely to refrain from killing. That is only its negative aspect. We must always remember that true non-violence means an entirely different way of thinking.

I now come to a second point. We talk of “we.” Who are “we”? We each have a thinking part and a bodily part. The path of our duty will be clear if we consider these two parts together. Our eyes may be able to see a long distance, nevertheless they have their limits. There is a limit to the hearing of the ears, to the strength of hands and feet. Because of this, our field of work will be determined by the limitations of our bodies. The pattern of our lives ought to be determined by concern for the service of our neighbours. That should be our watchword for practical work. But in thought we can travel infinite space—we may sit here on the ground and consider the heavens themselves. The range of thought has no limits, and therefore in thought we must become universal men. Physically we may live in one particular place, but in mind we must be citizens of the world. There must be no pettiness in thought. In practice, we must so serve our neighbours as to cause no injury, but rather do benefit, to men in



more distant places. A universal benevolence that counts none as an enemy, combined with the service of one's immediate neighbour—that is the secret of life.

Our education will therefore be complete if it has this double strength. Let thought be unconfined and universal in its scope, but in our practical activities and plans of work let us concentrate on our immediate neighbourhood. You should consider that the heart of the Lord Jesus was filled with love for all mankind, but his work was done within the bounds of Palestine. Jesus knew nothing of the geography which our children know today, and would probably have failed in our geography examinations. He spoke one language only. Yet this man whose knowledge of language and geography was so limited loved the whole world because his soul was great.

The Lord Buddha similarly had compassion for the whole world. He spoke in Pali, the language of the peasants of those times. He travelled only in Bihar and in a part of Uttar Pradesh. Bihar is the name given to the regions which he visited. His wanderings were limited to this small area, and perhaps he had very little knowledge of the world outside. He served only his neighbours, but his thoughts were for the welfare of all mankind. This is the principle that Nai Talim also must follow

What of the methods of this education? Political science says that the country is best governed which is governed least. The smaller the exercise of governmental authority, the better is the state. The best imaginable kingdom would be one where there appears to be no government at all. Is not that how the Kingdom of God is operating all the time? God governs the world with such marvellous skill that it seems as if He is asleep in some corner—no one knows where! He has distributed among His creatures all the various kinds of strength and intelligence—He has, we may say, organised a completely decentralised system. He has also put into all His children the impulse to co-operate. As a consequence, it is possible for men to doubt the very existence of God. The greatest achievement of this plan of God is the fact that people can discuss boldly whether He exists or not. They do not merely doubt, they become atheists and declare positively that there is no God.

India too ought to have a really fine Government in Delhi. If anyone were to go there to see who is governing, he would not be able to find out. There would be no Parliament to be seen, no big official buildings. If he were to ask where the members of the Government are, he would be told: "They are working in the fields." "What?" the visitor might ask, "are those men the Government?" "Yes," would be the reply,



“most certainly they are.” Now they have finished their work and are sitting in the field under a tree talking things over together. “Well, now, about this affair in Egypt, what can we do? What advice can we give?” —and so forth. If the visitor were to ask what they were doing, they would reply: “We are the world rulers. We are also Indians, so after we have finished our work in the fields and are at leisure, we have to think about these things.” —“You think, then what do you do?” —“We give our advice.” —“Then what happens?” —“If people like our suggestions, they adopt them; if not, they don’t.” When it becomes clear that the world is getting on very well indeed in this fashion, it will be acclaimed as the best form of Government.

Our actual condition is very different. If it were even suggested that Pandit Nehru might relinquish his office the whole country would be rocked to its foundations and there would be a big problem of who should govern the country. The task of Government keeps Panditji at work for sixteen hours a day. But how many hours a day does God work to govern the world? If you were to ask Hindus this, they would answer that God is asleep in Kshirsagar; he does nothing at all. The meaning underlying this is that Government is not an activity but a thought, an idea. The world must be governed by thought. The smaller the place taken by activity, by movement, by planning, the better the Government. That would be the best of all states where there should be no governmental activity at all, no armaments at all, no legal penalties at all, and where nevertheless the people should exercise the power, accept the best advice, and be open to the influence of the moral law.

This kind of political morality is part and parcel of education. The best kind of Nai Talim is that in which there is no atmosphere of "teaching" and "learning." If someone asks us what we are doing, we answer that we are eating, resting, playing, reading—naming various activities. But we should never think of replying. "I am breathing." Yet the people who are talking, reading, eating, sleeping are also breathing all the time; but they never mention it, they mention only their outward activities. In the same way, if you ask what the children and teacher of a Nai Talim School are doing, you will be told that they are working in the fields, serving the sick, cleaning the village. While they do these things, they are giving and gaining knowledge the whole time. As soon as they are conscious of "teaching" and "learning" as a separate, special activity, the situation becomes artificial.

If you ask someone what he is drinking he will answer “milk” or “tea.” There is sugar in it, but he never mentions the sugar, he never says that he is drinking milk-and-



sugar, or tea-and-sugar. The sweetness of the sugar permeates the milk and the tea, but the man drinks and says nothing about it. Education must be like the sugar, doing its work in secret.

We can see that hands, nose, ears, eyes and tongue are active, but no one can see what the soul is doing. It is however an illusion that your ears appear to be listening, my tongue appears to be talking. If your ears were to be cut off would they be able to hear? If my tongue were to be cut out, could it then talk? It is plain that no matter what the appearance may be, it is not *only* the tongue that talks. In spite of appearances it is not the ears that hear. That which speaks and hears is the spirit within. And the spirit is invisible. The best Nai Talim is similarly invisible. The more it is seen, the more imperfect it is.



Chapter 58

Education, Democracy and Peace

We have just been listening to a very lovely *bhajan* in which the devotee says that as Thou art with me and I am in Thy keeping, I shall fear nothing. But in our modern world many countries are living in the shadow of fear. The reason is we men do not put our trust in God; we put our trust in force. The most powerful countries are all bent on increasing their armaments.

Ravana also had many armaments, but he was not free from fear. The *Ramayana* describes how when the monkey army reached the ocean, Ravana's heart was overshadowed by fear. Yet he was himself a mighty warrior, and his army was well armed. The world today is in a similar condition. Both those who have most armaments, and those who have least, are alike afraid. Those who have least think that they must have more, and those who are already heavily armed wonder how they can increase their defences still further. The whole world is in the grip of fear.

Governments create all this fear. They have constituted themselves protectors of the people, and the people are no longer self-reliant but depend upon the Government and expect it to protect them. This is what is happening in India, in Pakistan also; and it is the same in Russia and America. America is manufacturing a great stock of powerful bombs. So is Russia. They explain to their peoples that all this is necessary for the defence of the country. They also teach them that it is because of their fearful weapons that the world is at peace, and that without these weapons there would be no peace. Peace is something that has to be protected.... Americans are not monsters devoid of kindness and compassion; yet they teach their children that the peace of the world depends on the bombs, and that these weapons are doing a work of mercy. The children learn as they are taught.

Throughout the world today, the direction of education is in the hands of Governments. The teaching given in the schools is controlled by the Government. The result is that there is no public opinion—that is to say, no independent public opinion. What is called democracy is democracy only in name. In India, Pakistan, Russia, America, everywhere people have the right to vote. Nevertheless, real power remains in the hands of a few, and it is assumed that whatever they do is right. They create “public opinion,” and then take their stand upon it. There can be no peace in the world



unless this state of affairs is changed. That is why it is a fundamental principle of the Bhoodan movement that the problems of the people should be solved by the people themselves in their own strength.

One of our brothers, who is giving his service in a village, was talking to me today about the Government—the Government does not do this, the Government fails to do that. I was reminded of devotees who cannot speak without bringing in the name of God, no matter what the subject may be! Our workers seem to have the same tendency, they cannot get on without bringing in the Government. If one were to forbid them to mention the Government, they would not be able to talk at all. Weddings, births, deaths.....even then the Government comes into it. The Government arranges everything—the marriage law, rules of inheritance, social reforms, distribution of land, protection. It also provides medicine. The people must eat what the Government gives and learn what the Government teaches. Whatever the Government says is knowledge, has to be accepted as such. What the Government calls ignorance, must be accepted as ignorance. All we have to do is to vote—they will do the rest. They will do all the planning for every village in the country.

All this is very disturbing and should rightly cause us anxiety. It is true that those who are in power today are up-right men, but no matter how good they may be, it is still not right that all administration should be in the hands of a few. The good and wise ought to be giving their advice, not carrying out the work themselves. All over the world, in every country, Governments are usurping the place of parents. There is no hope of peace, so far as I can see, so long as this goes on.

Even my fellow workers, however, do not fully understand this line of thought, and it therefore does not trouble me that the people should not be ready to accept it today. But they listen to me, and a few years hence they will remember what I said.

India has never been lacking in learning and scholarship; it was in India that the tradition of learning was first established. But the rulers, the kings, never had any authority over it. The *guru* himself decided how and what he should teach. The king thought it a privilege to serve him. Princes were sent to study with the *guru*, and he put them to live with other boys in his home. When the other boys went out to beg, the princes were sent also. The king helped the ashram, but he asked for no special privileges for his own sons. Education in India was independent of the kings. Those who know Sanskrit know what freedom of thought exists in the Hindu tradition. (I do



not know how it may be in other religions, but where there is mutual antagonism each sect appears to impose on its adherents a single orthodoxy of opinion.) Kapil, Kanad, Jaimini and others all held mutually contradictory opinions, but no one accuses them of being enemies of Hinduism. In Tamil Nad there is a school of thought that does not believe in God, but it would be wrong to say that they have no religion. This freedom of thought existed because there was freedom of education, and the rulers had no authority over it. Today education is as wholly controlled by Government as the army—so all-pervading has Government power become.

It is good that a Government should think widely and on a large scale; the narrowness of outlook which formerly existed was bad for the country. But the executive powers of the Government must be limited, they should not be as wide as they now are. Thought must be broad and unfettered, but power must be kept within bounds. In old days both the thought and the power of Governments were limited. We desire to see the interests and outlook of Government greatly enlarged, but its powers restricted.



Chapter 59

The growth of Fearlessness

Vykom has become a place of pilgrimage; its name is known throughout India because of the *satyagraha* that took place here. *Satyagraha* is a most powerful instrument for our work. What is the real meaning of *satyagraha*?—it is to stand firm in the truth. *Satyagraha* means basing one's whole life on faith in truth, it means holding fast to what we believe to be true no matter what difficulties come, and being willing to endure suffering for it. And yet there must be no feeling of endurance or suffering, but rather an experience of joy in the striving to fulfil truth. We are on a sacred pilgrimage. When the road climbs steeply the feet grow weary; when it runs downhill they travel easily. But the pilgrim cares little for the ups and downs; his whole mind is fixed upon his goal. The man who has made this faith in truth the purpose of his life pays no heed to the difficulties of the road.

The road will certainly have its ups and downs. Nevertheless the people must possess the strength to stand fast in the truth in spite of all obstacles. This is the one power that can save the world from violence, and it is the power that can solve the problems of every society. Our education ought to aim at awakening in our students the spirit of *satyagraha*. I have never forgotten a *sloka* which I learned when I was a child, about how Prahlad stood fast in the name of God in spite of all his trials. This kind of training in *satyagraha* ought to be part of our education both in schools and in society. Now-a-days we give students a bit of practical education and hope to get a little discipline from it, but we do not expect more than that. There is no doubt that discipline is a desirable quality, but it is not the supreme and all-inclusive good. It is difficult to say what the greatest excellence of character is, but in the Gita the Lord names it as fearlessness, अभयम्. Therefore our whole education should be based on fearlessness, and so should the whole social and political structure of the country. Such a social structure is in existence nowhere at present, in this country no more than in any other. But we should not find any consolation in the thought that other countries are equally backward; on the contrary it should increase the sense of our own failures.

In order to make the students fearless, the teachers must undertake physical labour. Without this, faith in truth cannot flourish, and the strength to stand fast in the truth will not develop. That is what our ancient *gurus* used to do. In the Upanishads,



when the *guru* is teaching his disciples, he says to them: यानि अस्माकम् सुचरितानि तानि त्वयोपास्यानि, नो इतराणि—O my students, whatever good conduct you find in me, that follow; whatever you do not find to be good, that do not follow. That is to say, the *guru* gives his students freedom. He tells them to use their own judgment in deciding what is right and what wrong. They are not to think that whatever their *guru* says is wholly right. It is certainly true that the *guru* is endeavouring to live by the truth, otherwise he would not be *guru*; but he nevertheless cannot claim that his every action will be in harmony with truth. And so he tells his students to be alert, to use their intelligence and examine his conduct, and to disregard whatever seems to them wrong. How humble-minded is this wise sage of the Upanishads! And by this means he enables his students to grow in fearlessness. What a wonderful sentence that is in the Upanishad!—that is how the truly wise speak.

Fearlessness means that we should neither fear anything, nor inflict fear on others. Both these things are parts of fearlessness. A tiger cannot be called fearless; it may not be afraid of any other animal, but it is afraid of a gun, and it also inspires fear in other creatures. True fearlessness has this double aspect. It involves the power to recognise that one's Self is not identical with one's body. No animal possesses that power, the physical life is all that it experiences. Little human children are at the same level of experience, and there are some people who remain children in this respect for their whole lives, and are in that way on a level with the beasts. A man who recognises that he is other than his body also recognizes that others also are not to be identified with their bodies. He neither enslaves another, nor does he slavishly submit to another. He is afraid of no one, neither does he inflict fear. That is the double test of true fearlessness.

The most important thing for any kind of education, whether in school or in society, is to bring about the recognition that we are other than our bodies. It is this self-knowledge which is the foundation on which the power of *satyagraha* can be built. The call to self-knowledge has been sounded in our country from ancient times. The old *rishis* knew that without self-knowledge there could be no faith in truth. For the sake of truth difficulties must be endured and death must be faced. The only sufficient basis for such fearlessness is the knowledge of the self, and every child must be given this self-knowledge.



But the education which children get today is the direct opposite of this. If a child commits some fault we slap it, and it begins to obey us because it is afraid. But we have taught it nothing of truth by our action, merely a number of wrong things. The first wrong is that we have shown anger in slapping it; the second is that we have frightened it; the third is that we have treated it as identical with its body, and a fourth is that we have forced it to obey us out of fear. Our action is thoroughly wrong, it has nothing good about it. Until education is really based on fearlessness there is no hope of any reform in society. If we desire reform we must teach the lesson of fearlessness. We ought to teach children never to submit to those who beat and strike them, but now-a-days children are getting a regular education in fear from the beatings they get. The pity is that even fathers and mothers are doing it too. God has given them a child who trusts their every word, who has complete confidence in them. The mother says, "Look, that is the moon," and the child believes fully that it is the moon, there is no shadow of doubt in its mind. God has put into the parents' hands such a completely trustful disciple, and yet even he gets beaten. These things need to be well considered. We shall never get a fearless society so long as parents go on beating their children. We have to begin the teaching of fearlessness in the family and continue it in the school.



Appendix

Sources of materials used

S. V. = *Shikshan Vichar*, Hindi edition 1956

N. T. = *Nai Talim*, monthly magazine in Hindi

* * * * *

