



A most conscientious and committed educationist, **Jane Sahi** (B. 1949) was brought up in a Quaker family in England and attended a Quaker residential school. Came to India in 1968 out of her interest in Gandhiji's life and ideas. Married to Jyoti Sahi in 1970. Interested in the educational ideas of Rudolf Steiner and Rabindranath Tagore, started a small school in Silvepura village on the outskirts of Bangalore in 1975. A Kannada medium school upto the 7th class, **Sita School** is totally outside the formal educational system, following its own curriculum and methods of teaching. Artistic activity is one of the principal mediums through which children educate themselves with the help and guidance of the teachers. Most children attending Sita School are from the common poor folk who would otherwise have had to go without education. The children come from the five surrounding villages and are mostly first generation school goers.

The children are at school from 8.00 a.m. and the older children stay until 6.00 p.m. They are divided into five groups according to ability rather than age. A number of activities are shared and there is a stress on interaction and co-operation between the different groups.

Work plays an important part and gardening and printing are an integral part of the school curriculum. Art and craft help the children to use their hands, heads and hearts to make learning something alive and dynamic. There is a framework of projects related to such themes as house-building, the food we eat, the history and geography of the village etc. which are explored for one to three months. Books are used as a resource but rarely as conventional text books.

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Education and Peace

Jane Sahi

Akshar Mudra

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Preface

The trustees of the Marjorie Sykes Charitable Trust did me a signal honour in inviting me to deliver the inaugural Marjorie Sykes Memorial Lecture. The lecture, entitled 'Roots and Branches', was delivered in two parts on 7th and 8th September 1998, at Pune. I take this opportunity to thank the Trustees for giving me this opportunity to reflect on my educational work.

My heart goes out to all the children of Sita School and my numerous teacher-colleagues over the past quarter of a century, in love and gratitude, for enriching my life and mind.

The essay 'The Place of the Individual in Gandhi's Concept of Education' and a few other occasional notes that I wrote over the years are included here at the suggestion of Vasant Palshikar. Most of these notes were written in connection with the Alternative Education Network's annual meetings, where 25-30 of us, engaged in the field of education, come together to share our experiences and reflect on them together.

I would like to thank Vidya and Sujit Patwardhan and Vasant Palshikar for their support, encouragement and, on occasions, challenging questions.

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Introduction

The space in education discourse and action in which one can raise questions and enquire is an endangered one. Both activists and teacher educators propagate the idea that there is nothing to be learnt by reading and reflection - what we need is action. The theoretical, set in opposition to the practical, has been turned into unnecessary baggage to be gotten rid of. Activists eschew any attempt to examine, or reflect. Many even arrogantly claim that they never read educational writing! Both the problems and the solutions seem so 'obvious'. Efficient management and implementation, along with some attitude building and love seem to be the need of the hour. Teamed up with international donors, the focus and the funding for any educational activity is heavily oriented towards 'implementing solutions through pyramidal models of diffusion'. Incorporating enquiry or renewed articulation of direction in education into these programmes is treated impatiently as an unnecessary waste of time.

Teacher trainers and most of education research have contributed to the same syndrome by presenting theoretical enquiry in its most shallow and least informative form. Generations of new teachers leave the B. Ed, with the conviction that philosophical and sociological enquiry is a ritual gilding. Only the mechanistic psychology they learn seems to have some relevance to the 'real stuff - classroom teaching. But, ultimately, they all learn only by jumping in at the deep end and flaying about to keep afloat.

Caught between shallowness, impatience and arrogance, the public space for reflection is shrinking. Articulation of a foundational character whether of concerns, or aims or direction, is being delegitimized. Yet many of us know that to engage with the real business of educational activity - of teaching children to learn - it is impossible to go very far without beginning to ask questions, reflecting, and charting a course. Questions of what we are doing, why, what we need to do, who benefits from it and how, why this and not that, why things that are 'obvious' to us are not to others... Call them existential questions that problematize all aspects of life, or call them by the narrow classical heads under which the discipline of education addressed them ; 'aims of education', 'ethics and education', 'sociology', 'issues in Indian education', etc. These very 'theoretical' concerns come back to haunt and to demand attention, enquiry and insight. Programmatic efforts which ignore this need get caught in contradictions and dead-ends, but the

managerial framework in which they are conceptualised does not even permit the recognition that the solution is not the simple one of 'better planning and implementation', or 'attitude-building'. We don't get very far in the 'practical' without addressing the 'theoretical' and at the same time it is in relation to the practice that the theory is generated.

In this scenario, the Marjorie Sykes Lecture (and other writings) of Jane Sahi are an important effort to bring forth private cogitation, and re-establish the necessary public focus we need on continuing to engage in reflecting on the foundational aspects of education, through enquiry and reflection, that is not circumscribed in either scope or method. Marjorie Sykes herself was such a bold thinker and practitioner. It is fitting that the renewed focus and exploration of the practical philosophy of education should be in her memory. The mode chosen for this engagement - the lecture - also deserves mention. Although currently unfashionable, criticized, and replaced by more 'interactive' forms, there is still much merit in the old-fashioned lecture. It is simultaneously a process of enquiry and a dialogue. It demands a continuous engagement with an idea or a group of ideas, to systematically explore, build upon and give shape – a discipline that many of us would benefit from. The act of listening to a good lecture also is far from passive - the listener is drawn into dialogue, both during and after.

Jane Sahi is an educationist who is unafraid of intellectual enquiry as a part of evolving her philosophy of education. Although a pioneer in her own right, she has the rare virtue of reading, engaging and learning from what others have said and done, as a part of her own enquiry and practice. Perhaps it is only natural, given her own philosophy of education where the concepts of connectedness and rootedness are as important as growth and individuality. The active context for her is undoubtedly the school she runs in a village near Bangalore. Active, not only because of the responsiveness to the life-force that bursts out of children, but also active because the pace of changes that the village community and the school need to respond to. *Roots and Branches* presents her search for a mode of practice for educating children to be rooted and to grow. For her, 'growing the soil' and 'nurturing the plant' are not only metaphors; ecological sustainability is both a philosophy of human existence and a spiritual beacon, giving 'interconnectedness' a scope wider than human society and culture. Her insights, anecdotes and stories infuse these metaphors with a new vigour. In an approach to understanding Gandhi's philosophy of education which breaks away from the stereotyped and narrow productive approach that goes under 'basic education'. In this essay Jane Sahi is critical and yet responsive to Gandhi, not merely as a follower but as an enquiring and creative educationist

Jane Sahi has amply established both the continuing relevance of philosophizing on fundamental aspects of education, and the potential of the lecture. Hopefully, in the years to come we will hear more voices and ideas take shape in and give to this space created by the Marjorie Sykes Lecture series.

Bangalore. 8.1.2000

Padma M. Sarangapani

I

Roots and Branches

Marjorie Sykes Memorial Lecture 1998

“Our moral ideals do not work with chisels and hammers. Like trees they spread their roots in the soil, and their branches in the sky!”

Rabindranath Tagore

A Tribute to Marjorie

I think that Marjorie Sykes could share Gandhi’s claim to be “a practical idealist”. Marjorie Sykes was one of those rare people who combined a clear and broad vision with an extraordinary attention to practical details. Her life and her thoughts, woven so closely together, are both an inspiration and a challenge to us to try and bridge the gulf between our own dreams and theories and our everyday lives.

I am reminded of Gandhi’s similar commitment to the smallest action as a reflection of the whole. There is a story about Gandhi that took place in the 1930s at the height of the political turmoil. Gandhi had been trekking through a number of villages throughout the day, but in the evening he insisted on returning some distance to the simple home of a village girl in order to give her medical aid. Those accompanying Gandhi were indignant at the waste of time and energy required to attend such a minor matter when there were so many other pressing concerns. The story is, however, typical of Gandhi’s attention to detail despite the momentous political struggle going on at a national level, which hinged so much on his involvement. Gandhi did not dismiss the significance of the smaller concern, because the larger issue seemed more visible or important. For him the whole was reflected in the part and demanded equal attention. He wrote that, for him, the smallest work was as important as the biggest. And that whatever is in the atoms and the molecules, is in the universe. Elsewhere he wrote that God “rules the tiniest details of my life”.²

I remember first meeting Marjorie Sykes in 1969 in an elegant apartment in Mumbai’s Marine Drive. A year later my husband and I stayed with her for a few days in her simple home in Kotagiri. She seemed at home with herself wherever she was but it was at this second meeting that I began to recognize her astonishing qualities of honesty and humility.

I was young and eager at the time, and had heard of her rich and wide experience both with Gandhi and at Shantiniketan with Tagore. I imagined I would have much to learn. However, almost in the tradition of a Zen master, she turned my expectations upside down and inside out. As far as I can remember she spoke at length about the history of various saucepans and kitchen utensils and how she had preserved and repaired them through years of usage. Marjorie did not dwell much on her own history but in the course of sharing the daily chores of cooking and cleaning she did express her concerns about immediate challenges and her practical response to them. She lived until the age of 92 and, apparently, was working, until two days before her death, meticulously and painstakingly on the book later published as *An Indian Tapestry*. She left a clear, hand-written manuscript as a last reminder of her thoroughness and attention to detail.

Marjorie Sykes has been described by a friend as “a most lively personality”. She was a strong and rugged individual who had an inner freedom to hold on to truth as she understood it. She lived a life of great selflessness, determined by her unbounded concern for “the welfare of all beings”, and illuminated by the Inner Light which she believed lay in each one.

It was in her conclusion to a talk given at Sevagram on the occasion of the Jubilee of *Nai Talim* (Basic Education) that she expressed her hope that the shaping of a meaningful education would continue. She said, “We, older ones shall not live to see this task completed. We pass the vision on. Insofar as it is a true vision, its time will come.”³

Marjorie Sykes was not only widely known for her interest in education, literature and philosophy, but was also involved in the ecological movement long before it was given a name. She was a keen gardener, and in her time at the Friends Centre in Rasulia, near Hoshangabad in Madhya Pradesh, she was engaged in practically applying her knowledge of re-cycling waste, exploring principles of water and soil conservation and promoting diversification in cropping in various agricultural projects. Both the concerns of agriculture and education were close to her heart, and in her life’s work realised the interconnections.

Her own vision for Sevagram was a radical one, but I think what she asks of us is not an uncritical acceptance or imitation but a response to the here and now, in a sincere effort to work out our own particular balance between our dreams and our practice. This essay is part of that ongoing effort.

Prefatory Remarks

This essay has arisen from my involvement over a number of years with the teachers and children of an alternative school in a rural area on the outskirts of Bangalore. It has also been shaped by discussions with friends in the Alternative School Network who, in different ways and in a wide range of, contexts, are concerned to respond constructively to certain destructive elements often at work in schooling. I would hesitate to make a sharp divide between ‘mainstream’ and ‘alternative’ schools or formal and non-formal kinds of teaching. Alternative schools themselves are in a process of search and cannot lay claims to being models of non-violence. Secondly, within the constraints of unwieldy size, governmental pressure and a rigid structure of text book and examination control, individual teachers often respond to children in essentially non-violent ways. The distinction, therefore, is between violent patterns in education as against non-violent structures and ways of teaching and learning.

This essay falls into three parts: the first section compares aspects of unsustainable growth in modern agricultural practice to present imbalances in schooling caused by different forms of disconnectedness. The second section focuses on correlation as an underlying principle of plant life and its implications as a conscious process towards evolving non-violent forms of education. The third section looks at the nature of balanced growth of plants and the role of the sensitive cultivator in order to draw conclusions about conditions that foster children’s positive growth in schools.

Balanced growth, whether we are referring to the life of plants, the building of cities, the methods of a school or our own personal development, needs both space and

boundary, freedom of movement and stability and rootedness. Human beings share with plants a life-force but they are, of course, also quite distinct. A plant by its nature is fused into the environment. Its roots are embedded in the soil and its branches stretch into the sky to gain sustenance from air and light. The plant changes with the seasons and is susceptible to the effects of heat and cold, drought and rain. Human beings, in contrast, have neither tangible roots nor visible branches but do have the gifts of movement and language. We also have consciousness, the capacity to make choices and the means to create or to destroy. We are also distinct from other forms of biological life in our restless search for meaning and our longing to realize fulfilment.

There is a prevalent reductionist view of the person that proposes we are nothing but what is determined either from within by our genes and temperament or from without by sociological, historical or economic factors. But experience, even of extreme conditions, would suggest otherwise. Viktor Frankl writes of a freedom not from conditions but in our “stand” towards them. He writes: “Man does not simply exist but always decides what his existence will be, what he will become in the next moment.”⁴

Gandhi suggested that education is a process of learning to be free, to stand apart from conditioning without and negative tendencies within. He writes : “Liberation means freedom from all manner of servitude even in the present life. Servitude is of two kinds : slavery to domination from outside and to our own artificial needs.”⁵

The freedom of movement and choice of expression poses risks unless, like the roots and branches of trees, limits of growth are recognized and relatedness is acknowledged.

1

A Pattern of Unsustainable Growth

The pattern of growth from seed to fruit through the cycle of seasons, and its movement from life to death to life again, as a metaphor for our human condition has almost been discarded as a jaded, outworn dream. It is, for some, an image that has spent itself to the point of exhaustion through over-use. Yet it is a metaphor that in diverse ways has undergirded a world-view for millennia, whether in the so-called primal faiths or in the literary traditions of meta-cosmic religions.

Its death as an idea has coincided with its near tangible destruction in nature itself. The growing degradation of the soil actually threatens the earth’s very fertility. The deteriorating environment resulting from urbanization, large scale development projects, over-exploitation of resources and widespread pollution is presently estimated at endangering 2500 plant species. In addition the genetically-engineered world seed market, which is controlled by a mere handful of multinational companies, is fast depleting the world’s store of seeds and grains.

It is no longer possible to use the metaphor of earth as life-giving or the images of spring and monsoon rains as a symbol of re-birth and renewal, without including the fragility and vulnerability of these patterns of growth. There is a shadow of impermanence that hangs over nature itself. However, to abandon the metaphor of seed and fruit as a romantic and outdated notion would be reckless, for the real illusion is the fanciful dream that progress can be separated from the health of the soil, and that we can

survive in an artificial, unnatural, man-made world. Such a fantasy cannot acknowledge a limit to growth or consumption.

Nature's movement between fullness and emptiness, restraint and abundance, and its intrinsic rhythm of waxing and waning is increasingly recognized as a pattern within human growth. Intuitively, the human body has been recognized as a miniature of the earth, a microcosm of the macrocosm. Now, increasingly, the scientists are able to show this empirically. For instance, we share the same proportion of water to our bodies as the oceans to the earth's surface. The well-being or disease of the earth is reflected in our health and sickness because we are dependent on the earth for the food we eat, the water we drink and the air we breathe.

The present imbalances in the environment are caused in part by modern agricultural practice. Development, which is largely based on commercial interest and is leading to the destruction and irreversible pollution of natural eco-systems, is comparable in some respects to the present crisis in education. In schools and colleges there is a stress on the immediate need of producing the limited, though sophisticated, work-force required for an industrial, technologically oriented society. Such an education profits a few but systematically marginalizes the larger, weaker sections of society. There is a monoculture where learning has become standardized and streamlined. This is reinforced by a centralized examination system, which is increasingly taking on global proportions, whereby the majority will inevitably fail. This calculated cultivation of an elite that is groomed to dominate leads to a society that is based on exploitation, self-interest and violence.

A school does not exist in a vacuum. It comes out of society and flows back into it. It is not only a preparation for life but an integral part of the social and economic reality. At present it is subject to the same strains and pressures that the wider society is facing, namely, the pulverizing forces of commercialization and competition. The way that schools have evolved is not accidental but a logical extension or reflection of the society and its values, expectations and felt needs. The violence, divisiveness and injustice in our present society has shaped the hierarchical structure of different kinds of schools, the content of the curriculum, and the methods of learning and evaluating. In a rather negative sense, and from one point of view, schooling is not cut off from life but is very much part of the harsh reality of injustice and inequality.

A school in many ways can serve to cut us off from ourselves and from each other. It largely reinforces an uprooting from nature and alienates us from work. School learning tends to separate information from knowledge, and knowledge from wisdom.

The uneasy question raised by this is whether education is for survival of the strongest or a shared creative life. We will look next in more detail at these aspects of disconnectedness.

Disconnected from the Self

Uprooting implies being cut off from sources of natural energy and sustenance. A child's inherent vitality and capacity to be purposefully engaged is often not recognized as the basic resource of learning. Over-educating certain faculties of a child and

neglecting others is “a lop-sided affair” that distorts growth. Anxiety and unrealistic expectations create an artificial dependency and deny autonomy.

In his story *The Parrot's Training* Tagore describes the intrinsic violence of the conventional school when it disrupts and seeks to control the life of the individual. The parable tells of a

Rajah who notices a parrot that can do no more than sing. The Rajah is determined to improve and cultivate the ignorant bird's mind. He orders the unfortunate bird's capture. The helpless parrot is kept in a gorgeously decorated golden cage, with his wings clipped. The ministers are given the responsibility to instruct the parrot. The bird is force-fed culture in the form of vast quantities of books. At last the prisoner's throat was so “completely choked with leaves from the book that it could neither whistle nor sing.”^{fi} The bird finally dies unobserved and unmourned by its insensitive captors. Tagore's story remains pertinent eighty years after it was written. It reminds us of the destructive element that even well-meaning, hard working and efficient teachers can inadvertently play through over-protection and over-education. There is a real danger when the child is cut off from the natural, familiar resources without and the teacher ignores the child's dynamism to grow and learn from within. The teacher's narrow expectations that are directed at one aspect of the child can be paralyzing. Such over-education could be compared to the tendency in modern agricultural practice that weakens roots by excessive irrigation or depletes the soil by too many artificial inputs. Such a process in agriculture exhausts the earth's own regenerative forces and in education stifles spontaneity and stunts initiative.

The teacher working in the normal school system often seems to play the role not of a sensitive cultivator but rather of a shop-keeper that sells hybrid seeds, fertilizers and pesticides in the arid, artificial, even poisonous atmosphere of a closed shop, or of an abrasive salesman intent on selling his wares to a disinterested customer!

It is, maybe, the reverse of the famous Zen story which tells of the eager student who comes to the master for instruction.

The master, sensing the student's impatience, proceeds to fill his bowl full of tea. The master continues to pour tea regardless of the fact that the cup is over-flowing. Often in the school it is the impatient teacher who saturates and soaks the child with information. The teacher does not seem to notice that the child is full to overflowing, and has no space to receive more.

In recent times adults have tended to assume that the child is totally dependent and in need of protection. Such a custodial relationship denies or minimizes the power and autonomy of a child. The tendency amongst school-educated parents, to separate the child from participation in adult community life or from taking responsibility often leads to a kind of pampering. This has been intensified by market forces that target both children themselves and indulgent, sometimes guilty, parents. There is a deliberate promotion of an ever-expanding notion of what children's special needs are. The marketing of some kinds of toys has seriously undermined the capacity for creative play that is marked by being self-activated and open-ended. The child is turned into an owner rather than a creator. The other side of indulgence is abuse of various kinds. Both indulgence and abuse are linked by an assumption of the child's powerlessness.

The technician-farmer similarly presumes a seed's powerlessness. Yet the way a seed changes and develops is only partly predictable. Its delicate but complex relation to the whole of nature has scarcely been glimpsed. Botanists are still discovering the extraordinary ways plants have adapted and modified themselves to survive in any particular environment. Present alarming trends to manipulate patterns of growth by "doctoring" seeds and genes have not taken into account the risks or far-reaching effects that such interference might precipitate.

We see this tendency to control, monitor and centralize reflected in the management-oriented approach to children in school. The solution to the problem of education is thought to lie in building evermore sophisticated systems and introducing techniques that promise efficiency, economy and quality control. This management approach, which so often loses sight of the child as a person, has been shaped in part by those who have equated mathematical-logical thinking with all learning and ways of knowing. The linear development and stages of conceptualizing as outlined by Piaget have proved an invaluable means to understanding the ways a child thinks, but like all tools it inevitably has a restricted purpose and meaning. Howard Gardner writes about Piaget: "We learn much from his writings about children's conceptions of water, but little about their fears of floods, their love of splashing, their desire to be minnows, mermaids or mariners."⁷ The process towards understanding, even in maths or science itself, has been shown to be more holistic and multi-faceted. It does not necessarily follow clear-cut, sequential steps from concrete to abstract ways of thinking. Furthermore such a framework does not explain and cannot contain the nature of creative thought or the role of intuition which is linked to originality. A management approach to education is inclined to think more in terms of products and functions than of children with varying gifts and abilities or temperaments.

School itself usually comes across to the child as all boundary, with the stress and strain of rigid rules and regulations. For some teachers the child comes across as a potential threat to order and so, often, the child's space is constricted physically and, if possible, mentally to forestall the impending chaos should the child run wild. The walls of the classroom, the fixed benches and desks, the tyranny of the text book, the shadow of examinations, and fear of failure are all effective weapons to keep the child in place without the leeway of space.

In time, often, the child not only learns to conform but also to totally depend on the teacher, the structure and the curriculum. Children then come to distrust their own experience and resources. The prime motive becomes to win the approval of the all-powerful adult or to avoid punishment. A school that is centred on only one kind of learning and measuring success only in terms of worldly acclaim is profoundly limiting because so many children will be excluded. A de-personalized education that cuts a child off from himself and others, where obedience and conformity are everything is potentially dangerous. To remove a person's sense of self-worth, possibility of choices and self-confidence means that the desperate desire for autonomy may result in violence that is channelled either inwards in self-destruction, or projected outwards in aggression to another.

Primo Levi in his book *The Drowned and the Saved* describes the character of the guards of Auschwitz, one of the infamous concentration camps under the Nazi rule

during 1939-45. He traces their indifference and inhumanity to the education or mis-education they received. He writes: “They were made of the same cloth as us, they were average human beings, and save for exceptions they were not monsters. They had our faces, but they had been reared badly - many (of them) indifferent, fearful of punishment, desirous of a good career or too obedient. All of them had been subject to a terrifying mis-education provided and imposed by school and youth groups.”⁸

One wonders whether the growing numbers of volunteers or ‘goondas’ ready to serve political parties in acts of terrorism, vandalism or violence, have not similarly arisen from nursing a sense of deep frustration at the unnatural oppression suffered sometimes from the kindergarten classes upwards.

To sum up: to deny children autonomy whether through over-protection, over-education or abuse is to reduce them to the role of victims. Mis-education that minimizes self-esteem and confidence is liable to lead to violence as the child seeks other areas of control in order to assert the self, and later as an adult is often uncritical of violence legitimized or otherwise.

Disconnected from each other

In mainstream schooling children are often separated from each other by rivalries of competition, streaming, and rigid groupings according to age, economic status, gender or ability. Children spend much of their time herded together in enclosed areas with their own age group with little contact with adult working society.

The school reflects the larger society’s disconnectedness. Education, formal or non-formal, has always served the process of socializing the child to become a member of a specific society with particular needs, customs and skills, bound by relationships and responsibilities. This educational process has been compared in biological terms to the process of cell development, or differentiation which serves to renew the total organism by the single cell’s integration into the larger whole. Edward Goldsmith in his book *The Way* writes: “From the point of view of the society itself education is the means for renewing itself, or progressively reproducing itself, by integrating successive generations into its critical structure.”⁹

The present crisis is that the larger organism of society, which the individual is expected to be part of, is a fragmented one. The systematic destruction of traditional societies began in the 19th century by European Colonial Powers. The ongoing effects of globalization are effectively displacing local cultures by providing mass media entertainment and controlling patterns both of production and consumption. In addition, traditional knowledge has been undermined, local history overlooked and communities and families destabilized.

The threat of erosion of a whole society’s moral framework is leading to a resurgence of religious fervour largely without the spiritual values that had given rise to religion originally. The ambivalence of trying to recover what has been lost, or clinging on to the security of old forms, has been understood as the impetus behind religious fanaticism. The “cell” or the individual is floundering to find an organism to identify with and so is tossed between the amorphous mass of consumerism or the violence of fundamentalist organizations.

The school itself can be used to promote communalism. This can be in the form of distortion of facts in the history text book or by deliberately disregarding the reality and richness of plurality of cultures, religions and languages.

Throughout known history, in diverse ways, different societies, whether literate or pre-literate, have felt the need to prepare its youth for responsible adulthood by setting aside a period for systematic instruction. The school, not unlike the rigours of initiation ceremonies in the past, promises to introduce the child into appropriate ways of thought and behaviour. This code of conduct and its implications may be beyond a child's immediate grasp of meaning but is understood within a wider framework. However, the difference now is that in many ways the school functions to finally exclude rather than include so many.

The response of some Australian Aboriginal children to Western forms of learning has been negatively described as ritualistic.¹⁰ It is a mindless surrender to an external authority over which the person has no control. The experience of school, especially for the socially marginalized or economically disadvantaged, has been described as a passive participation that is to be endured in order to achieve status in the adult community. It renders the person powerless but at the same time promises empowerment.

Ivan Illich describes schooling in the urban slums of U.S.A. as "a ritual game of graded promotions" which initiates people into "the sacred race of progressive consumption."¹¹ For the poor the 'myth' lies in the illusion that the system is open, democratic and just whereas in fact inevitably the poor become the scapegoats because they have failed. People are further deceived that the institution of school and its system of rigid certification is the only entry point to knowledge.

The 'De-schooling Movement' of the last 40 years has been a reaction to the hollow mystification of institutionalized learning and its "hidden curriculum" of entrenching privilege. However, the Free School or Alternative School Movement does not easily acknowledge that mainstream schooling has a magnetic pull which may in part be explained by the very ritualistic element that is so despised by the radical critic. Ritual, even of an impoverished and superficial kind, exercises a powerful attraction because it addresses the longing of the individual to be part of a whole. For those already marginalized, mainstream schooling seems to prevent being further sidelined. There is an appeal in the ordered school structure, hierarchy, a text book shared with a generation of learners, the clarity of single, readymade answers to be memorized. The meaning of school is not looked for, either in skills acquired or knowledge learnt, but is rather a rigorous 'rite of passage' that promises a way out of being disadvantaged.

Most surprisingly, children themselves are reported to be largely uncritical of the school's oppressive nature. Where there was failure it was blamed not on an unjust system, but either on their own inadequacy or the family's circumstances. Meaning or relevance of the subject matter of the curriculum is not even expected, but the larger framework of the school is comprehensive as an entry point to achieve status in society and possibly as a means to secure employment that is not demeaning.

Interaction in a co-operative way has become minimal in many schools. The individual is isolated and yet anonymous within a depersonalized system. Rituals that formerly drew people together now serve to divide society. Rituals that were to celebrate

purpose and give meaning to life and death are now largely directed at material advancement for the chosen few.

Disconnected from the world of Nature and Work

Uprootedness can mean being cut off from one's own resources to think, imagine, empathize and work. The link between person, family, work and market has shifted dramatically. School has become increasingly estranged from life and work. It has been a gradual distancing from the time when children acquired the skills needed for everyday survival. Children learnt by watching, imitating and doing in the midst of the life of the community whether in work, ritual, dance or song. The modern secular school has become even further sidelined from the stream of life. Children learn about the world rather than through the world of physical touch and human contact. At best this kind of schooling

is with the aid of books, maps, laboratory experiments and computers. At worst, it is a continuation of the same system of memorizing but without the rhythm and poetry of religious texts or any link to the cultural life outside the school walls. This kind of school is cut off from so many aspects of daily living - unconnected with issues involving the sources of food, water or clothing and divorced from issues of health, well-being and shelter. The teacher has become neither a person of action nor of vision but rather a talker, as Krishna Kumar says "a meek dictator." The child has, in the process, become a receptacle for fragmented information.

The kind of learning that is unrelated to practical life is illustrated in Mulla Nasruddin's humorous story of the Grammarian and the Ferryman which tells of their journey across a river. The scholar was sitting comfortably in the ferry boat while the ferryman was exerting much energy to steer the boat safely across the choppy waters of a river. The scholar inquired whether the ferryman was a learned man, and if he knew the rudiments of grammar or not. The ferryman informed him that he was a simple man and had no such knowledge. The grammarian responded scornfully saying, "Well, my dear fellow, half of your life is wasted." The ferryman continued his strenuous work in silence, until they reached about midstream, and the deepest part of the river. The ferryman then asked the scholar whether he knew how to swim or not, to which the grammarian disdainfully replied that he did not. The ferryman then said, "Well, my dear fellow, the whole of your life is wasted. The boat has sprung a leak, and we are about to sink."

Disconnected from Wisdom

Disconnected learning can be understood in a variety of ways. It can come from an excessive, rootless freedom that is couched in a futurist ideology which ignores the past. Simone Weil describes such an illusion of movement that is not grounded in a sense of purpose as futile as a person who tries to light a lamp with no oil. Education is also limited when it is bound by rigid convention or dominated by propaganda of one sort or another. Inappropriate freedom or boundaries cause stagnation or disruption. The perils of a disconnected learning and teaching are well illustrated in a variation of the *Panchatantra* story which goes as follows:

There were four learned men. One day they decided to go deep into the forest with the idea that there they would prove their great learning. It was a kind of testing. On the way one of the four found by chance the thigh bone of a tiger. Eagerly he picked it up, and proceeded with great skill and uttering of mantras to construct the skeleton of a life-size tiger. Whereupon, another of the four scholars, not to be outdone by his friend, put flesh and skin on the framework of the tiger to make him look more real. The stripes appeared with a flourish. Tail, whiskers, claws, and lolling tongue were all placed in a most lifelike way, until at last a stationary, but ferocious looking tiger stood before them. The man looked with pride at his handiwork.

One more of their number stepped forward. He, however, belittled his friend's achievement saying that he had the greater power, for he had the knowledge to make the tiger breathe and live. The fourth of the four men was, naturally, alarmed and interrupted the man's boasting, assuring him that it was unnecessary to prove his great learning by such a dangerous and foolhardy experiment. The third man was by now totally engrossed in the prospect of showing his superior skills. He refused to listen to what he dismissed as foolishness. While the third scholar chanted more and more incantations, and his friends gazed on admiringly, the fourth man climbed high up in a nearby tree, and there, from a safe distance, watched the spectacle with a healthy mixture of fear and wonder.

Suddenly, the motionless tiger changed to a snarling, growling, hungry tiger, and before the three worthy scholars could escape, he pounced upon them and with a few deft strokes of his sharp claws, killed them all. The fourth man watched as one by one the three men were greedily devoured until nothing was left of his friends, the philosopher, the artist and the scientist, but their bags of books which the tiger disdained to touch or taste. Nervously, the sole survivor of the unhappy party, descended from the tree, and returned to the town, and organized the rituals to commemorate the early demise of the three renowned scholars.

In some respects teachers could be compared to tiger makers. The three scholars used their different intelligences, one to imagine and give shape to an idea, one to construct and elaborate the design, and one had the power of thought to make it work. What, of course, they lacked, was the wisdom to see the effect of their actions on the whole, or to recognize themselves as part of the whole. Together the three were proficient in both the arts and the sciences, but there was nothing to give them a sense of purpose or meaning to their learning, except to compete with each other, and to feel a sense of pride at their own ever-progressing achievement.

The folly of the three scholars and the tragedy that followed is part of our present dilemma. It maybe that we identify with the fourth man, who ran before he was eaten, and stayed up in the tree, but was powerless to stop his friends from their madness and pride. Can we do no more than organize a commemoration of those who perished, and say "They died as they had lived"?

In a lighter vein, the American poet Ogden Nash, writes of the dangers of mindless ambition, and the fate of the North European flightless bird, the auk. He entitles the poem, "A Caution to Everybody."

"Consider the auk;

*Becoming extinct because he forgot how to fly,
and could only walk.
Consider man, who may well become extinct
Because he forgot how to walk and learned how to fly
before he thought.”²*

If the binding dimension of wisdom in learning is absent and teaching is not related to the whole self, the other and Nature, then it leads to folly and decay, if not tragedy.

Correlation as a Pattern for Sustainable Growth

In this section we will first look at growth as a continuing metaphor to conceptualize education. Then we will explore the parts of the plant and its fusion with the environment as analogous to ideas of correlation in education. Next we will think about how the person discovers correlation to nature and society.

Growth as Metaphor

The analogy of biological growth to education with its use of vague terms such as “unfolding” and “flowering” has been dismissed by some as a stale metaphor, or a confused and sentimental one. The growth of a child cannot literally be identified with plant growth. For example, a child’s development is not a process of unchecked, natural, inevitable maturation, but is determined in part by the external forces of culture, history and economics, which shape ways of thinking and patterns of relationship. Further, the growth of a human person cannot be predicted, or determined by an ideology, either positively or negatively. However, by identifying in what ways biological growth continues to be a valid metaphor to conceptualize a child’s development we are able to understand the energy of life-giving forces which are nurturing.

Both in agriculture and in industry an effort to restore balance, and to check what E.F. Schumacher termed as “the forward stampede,” has been outlined by J.C. Kumarappa. In the 1950s he wrote *An Economy of Permanence* which challenged “an economy of predation” which is characterized by ruthless exploitation and profiteering.¹³ These ideas in agriculture have been further developed and implemented through the Permaculture Movement. Permaculture attempts to find a method of cultivation which works within nature rather than against it; for example, artificial inputs in the form of pesticides and chemical fertilizers are reduced to a minimum. One of the aims of Permaculture is to restore and maintain the fertility of the soil by natural means, and to cultivate plants in such a way that they will not deplete or exhaust the soil. Permaculture has sought to use inputs that strengthen the soil’s capacity to be resilient, and not to create a chain of dependency that rests on a network of artificial support systems. The term “grow the soil” implies an effort to work from below rather than to impose from above.

Development also suggests growth from below, not fashioned from without. The word “development”, in its older usage, was understood as the opposite of envelopment. It meant “to unwrap” or to “lay open by removal of that which unfolds.” In other words, it

is to reveal more of that which exists. This suggests a process of reaching down, in order to reach out, not unlike the relation of the depth of the roots to the height of the branches.

Correlation in the Plant and in Education

A plant is made up of separate parts but life is possible only insofar as the parts are related to each other. The distinctiveness of the tough knotted root or the delicate petal does not detract from the whole but is essential to its life. Further the plant is fused into the elements of earth and air. It is a relationship of exchange and not dependence. The plant is both supported by the earth but also stabilises it. Similarly, it receives its nourishment from the air and light, but the plant serves to purify the air through its own inner processes.

Correlation describes a relationship in which the elements are neither separable nor identical. Vinoba Bhave compares correlation, which he translates as *Samavaya*, to the relation between the clay and the pot. Correlation in education has been understood by Gandhi as consciously drawing together the work of the head, hand and heart, for each person, in service to the whole of creation. Gandhi writes: "I hold that true education of the intellect can only come through a proper exercise and training of the bodily organs." Unless the development of the mind and body goes "hand in hand with a corresponding awakening of the soul" it would prove to be "a poor lop-sided affair."¹⁴

Tagore understood the process of learning as a holistic process and not a fragmented or single dimensional one. He writes "Our eyes naturally see an object as a whole not by breaking it into parts but by bringing all the parts together into a unity within ourselves."¹⁵

Secondly, correlation is understood in terms of the individual's relation to the whole of life beginning with the immediate environment and neighbourhood. "Education becomes co-extensive with life itself, with cleanliness and health, with citizenship, work and worship, play and recreation... for the development of a harmonious and balanced life."¹⁶

Correlation of Human Life and Values

Gandhi spoke of the need to "keep the child rooted in the soil with a glorious vision of the future."¹⁷ This effort to integrate the world of fact into the vision of value adds another dimension to correlation. The conscious struggle to see life in a framework of meaning is distinctive to the human condition.

Both Gandhi and John Ruskin were critical of a technologically oriented society which had emerged out of the 19th century. In 1932 Gandhi read and shared the ideas of John Ruskin on education, which he had gleaned from a collection of his letters. He felt that Ruskin's theories and his own practice were closely linked. He explains Ruskin's theory of education as follows:

"Ruskin says that every human being requires three things and three virtues. Anyone who fails to cultivate them doesn't know the secret of life. These six things should therefore form the basis of education. Every child, whether boy or girl, should learn the properties of pure air, clean water, and clean earth, and should also learn how to keep

air, water, and earth pure or clean and know their benefits. Likewise he has mentioned gratitude, hope and charity as three virtues.”⁸

Gandhi understood Ruskin’s use of the word ‘gratitude’ as the ability “to step beyond self-conceit” and to recognize goodness and beauty. It is an acknowledgment of our interdependence on the living world of people and things around us.

I am reminded of a simple grace said before meals:

*“Earth that gives to us this food,
O Sun, that makes it ripe and good.
Dear Earth, dear Sun by you we live.
To you our loving thanks we joyfully give.”*

Ruskin balances this attitude of gratitude and receiving with the idea of charity and giving. Gandhi explains Ruskin’s idea by describing the person without charity as one “who cannot look upon all living things as his kith and kin, will never know the secret of living.”¹⁹ Charity is linked with a sense of responsibility. Responsibility quite literally means a capacity to respond to the other, to empathize and reach out, not only in thought and imagination, but also in terms of work and action. The relationship of ‘the three virtues’ of gratitude, charity and hope bring together the past, the present and the future into an undivided whole.

Correlation is thus understood on three levels. Firstly, as a drawing together of the whole span of bodily and mental faculties and a way of learning in order to see the whole person. Secondly, to see the relationship of the person to the environment and to see the link between work and learning. Thirdly, correlation is to understand existence itself within a framework of meaning, and for Gandhi this was a continuous process of deepening a commitment to creation through service.

Ways of Recognising and Fostering Growth

The last section focuses on how conditions that foster plant growth reflect the movement to maturity of the person. By looking at the soil, the characteristics of the seed, the necessity of roots and the growth of branches that culminate in flowering and fruitage, and the role of the cultivator in supporting that growth enables us to understand more clearly the nature of balanced education.

Growing the Soil

The term ‘growing the soil’ in Permaculture means to strengthen existing resources. It is a judicious use of inputs that enables the soil to support growth by its own regenerative processes. ‘Growing the soil’ both recognizes the rich potential but also accepts limits. It is the nature of the soil and the terrain that should determine what is grown, whether it be sand or rich loam, river bank or mountain peak.

In education, especially at the early stages, the existing resources could be understood as the immediate physical environment and the child's own varied capacities to grow in awareness and skills. Tagore wrote: "True education is to realize at every stage how our training and knowledge have an organic connection with our surroundings."²⁰ The reality for the child is most obviously the immediate environment through which the child establishes a sense of time and space, and appreciates an amazing variety of form. It is the physical surroundings which provide a rich resource - the house, the work, the flora, the fauna of that particular vicinity, whether city or village. The child's particular experience and encounters at home and in the neighbourhood are a further natural resource.

It is here that we see most clearly the fallacy of the standardized text book where the idealized, stereotyped family presented in the text is rarely related to the child's own experience of family life nor is the house with sofa sets and all modern conveniences likely to be close to the child's physical surroundings. A child's capacity to observe and relish the tiniest details is overruled by a generalized disembodied house, not the home of the child. The family most probably does not have one boy and one girl and the roles are not so clearly defined. It may well be that the father does not work and that the mother is the earner. An alternative to the text book is for the child to keep a diary of pictures. It is their own description of these pictures that naturally enable the children to express themselves and to create familiar images to identify with. Later, the children can be encouraged to share their ideas and experiences in a written diary, mini-autobiography - or wall newspaper. At another stage, the children can work together to construct a history and study the geography of their village.

The details of a curriculum, especially of environmental studies, which initially can in part be the foundation for learning basic skills in numeracy and literacy, cannot be fixed because the subjects which are explored are often fluid, and it maybe that the very process of change is the focus of learning. For example, the surrounding villages of the school where I work have undergone rapid and far-reaching changes in the last twenty years. Habits of eating, place of work, style of dress, usage of fuels, resources of water have all been greatly affected in both positive and negative ways. The usage of a centralized curriculum or the standardized text book for young children would be comparable to the folly of transporting vast amounts of soil from one place to another because the locally available soil is dismissed as infertile. The immediate and local experience has to be the starting point and the base from which to explore further a field.

Tagore and Gandhi both recognize the child's own capacity to imagine, work, think and create as a vital resource. People who visit the Sita School often ask who teaches the younger children art and are surprised when they are told that the children are mostly encouraged to draw on their own fund of experience and observation and are discouraged from copying.

Gandhi believed that each person had an Inner Voice within which he termed as 'the Self of the self, with which to discern the true course of action. Truth was for Gandhi "the ground of all existence" and "the goal of our life". For Gandhi, each one's *Swadharma* was particular and went beyond the world of social obligations of family and caste. He wrote in a letter to a friend : "One's 'dharma' cannot be pointed out to one by somebody else. He who has seen it adheres to it despite the opposition of the whole world."²¹

Gandhi encouraged self-reliance not only in practical matters but in decision-making and an “obedience to the law of one’s being.”²²

The acceptance of limits in education is connected with an essential simplicity. Both Tagore and Gandhi in different ways sought to re-orient education towards a simplicity that saw richness in nature. Simplicity is not understood as poverty but rather an attitude that distinguishes essentials from the superfluous. Tagore compared extravagant schooling to the folly of “squandering all one’s money on buying money bags.”²³ For Tagore wealth was like a golden cage. He described it as an artificial world whereby “the children of the rich are bred into an artificial deadening of their powers.”²⁴ Gandhi argued for simplicity because he wanted schooling to be universal and accessible for all.

On one occasion I visited a centre for ‘street children’ in Bangalore. The building was still under construction and so various waste materials were strewn about. The boys were set the task of building model houses with the discarded materials. The boys set to work with enthusiasm and through sheer inventiveness and skills of improvisation a variety of models took shape. Wire, paper bags, broken bricks, sweet-papers, bottles, string and cigarette packets were assembled for construction. The results were imaginative and full of surprising details with wire and a bottle top serving for a loudspeaker, a piece of wood tied up for a T.V. aerial and a live dog procured as watch dog. It seemed as though the very lack of readymade materials sparked such creativity.

The Seed

The seed is the focus of visible growth upwards to reach space, light and air, and a hidden movement downwards in search of water, nutrients and stability. The organic metaphor of the seed as child reminds us that the dynamism for growth comes from within, and that efforts to control, manipulate, or mould from outside are inevitably limited and sometimes stunt rather than foster growth.

The Seed is complete in itself at each stage

The seed has a wholeness and identity in itself. It is not unformed, but at a stage of growth with its own particular mode of being.

The seed contains within it the potential of the whole plant. It has been suggested that the idea of childhood is an invention of the Romantics of Western Europe since the time of Rousseau. Tagore himself has been seen as a descendant of this tradition. Rousseau’s one-sided view of childhood can be partly explained as a reaction to a long history in the West of children being viewed as naturally flawed, and in need of the strictest discipline, including the rod, to inculcate virtues. The problem may lie not in Rousseau’s conclusion that childhood is a specific state that “has its own ways of seeing, thinking and feeling,”²⁵ but more in the making of the equation of “natural goodness” with ideal childhood as the ultimate shape and model of perfection. Rousseau writes: “Let us lay it down as an incontrovertible rule that the first impulses of nature are always right; there is no original sin in the human heart/”²⁶ The implication of such an assumption is that a child’s natural flowering in goodness, or lack of it, depends entirely on a freedom that the adult, working from his or her stunted growth, chooses to give or withhold. Gandhi writes of an essential goodness that is part of our makeup, but he does not identify or confuse this with the

complexity of childhood. Gandhi writes: “There is an inmost centre of us all where Truth abides in fullness.”²⁷

The actual child includes both the ideal of childhood in all its innocence, spontaneity, freshness and capacity to wonder, and vitality, plus the reality of childishness as shown in wilfulness, fretfulness and egoism. These two dimensions, the positive and negative sides of the real child, remain in different ways from our birth to death. It is not accidental that old age is commonly spoken of as “a second childhood”. The child has elements both of completion and incompleteness, and similarly the adult carries within a potential for further growth, and a reality of immaturity.

In different cultures there has been an underlying wisdom in recognizing the various phases of human life, and that there is a potential movement towards greater self-knowledge and understanding of others. The Greeks outlined ten seven year periods, while the Chinese spoke of three major periods dividing an individual’s life into 21 year spans of receiving, fighting, and lastly growing in wisdom. In India the Ashramdharma has provided a framework which comprehensively includes four ideal states of life, which, if adhered to, facilitate ultimate self-realization. Tagore compares the four stages of human life to the morning, noon, afternoon and evening of a day. Each has its task and is moving into fuller life from the individual body to the community, from the community to the universe, and from the universe to infinity. Tagore likens the process to the hardening of the seed within the pulpy fruit that is shed.²⁸ Erik Erikson does not present ideals but more points of growth, reached through resolution of particular conflicts.²⁹ He outlines eight distinct stages in a lifetime, where each is marked with its own peculiar crisis. For example, the baby is challenged to overcome the fear of insecurity, and so to discover trust; the school-going child wavers between an acquiring of competency and industry as against a sense of inadequacy. It is a time of learning the boundaries of the ego through skills that put the child in touch with the limits of materials and tools. This period presents a time of creative tension where the freedom of space is balanced against the boundaries of the “other”, both in terms of people and material things. The final stage is that of the old person who often struggles to accept death without bitterness or despair.

There is a direction and continuity in biological and mental growth, but in human terms it is not necessarily linear, nor is there an inevitable progression towards greater rationality.³⁰

The Unpredictability of Growth

Some sociologists tend to see children only in terms of their context and relationships with the family or as an appendage of social, political, and economic structures. Erich Fromm suggests that, while social and economic forces are significant influences, both on the child’s home life and on learning behaviour, the person is not “infinitely malleable” by external forces. The human person cannot be summed up as “nothing but a puppet directed by the strings of social circumstances.”³¹ Ironically, there is a danger of shifting the exaggerated image of the powerless child to the whole human condition either as a victim of economic forces, or as a raw material to be magically transformed by political and economic change.

There are different layers that affect a child's identity : the child's own biography or individual life cycle, the immediate historical context which includes social and economic factors, and the broader ideological context that continues to evolve within human history, Human beings are neither puppets, nor are they self-propelling individuals operating in a vacuum. The creative tension lies in the constraints of being grounded in a particular cultural, historical and geographical context, with its negative and positive elements and the space of freedom to break through what is known. The positive elements of a tradition can give a foundation from which an individual can evolve something new. This tension could be compared to a story that evolves through, and is shaped by a common language made up of layer upon layer of word and gesture that binds together a community and yet has something original and hitherto unspoken to say and share.

Unpredictability lies in the capacity to make choices, the ability to be creative and original, and the possibility to meet others through mutual relationships. All these suggest an inner core of being that is in some measure not determined from without and that is self-transcendent.

The Resilience of the Seed

The seed has both a fragility and an innate resilience. For instance, seeds that have lain dormant in Egyptian pyramids for millennia have recently been found and subsequently germinated. The power of resilience and the ability of children to cope in adversity and poverty have been recognized as basic to childhood. It is remarkable to see children's capacity to enter fully into drama, singing, painting, the excitement of a story or playing a game when one knows the difficulties, frustrations and sadness a child may have experienced.

Gandhi recognized this strength and advocated an education that would make neither beggars nor parasites of children. He recommended an education that would enable self-reliance. He argued that the child grows through taking responsibility for his own actions, work and learning. Gandhi wrote: "A wise parent allows the child to make mistakes. It is good for them once in a while to burn their fingers."³²

The Need for Roots

Roots both support the stability of the individual plant and prevent erosion of the soil. A plant without roots cannot survive and similarly a child needs in some sense the stability and boundaries of roots to sustain growth.

The 'growth ideology' that has been linked with 'child-centred education', which believes that children need freedom and spontaneity in order to grow, has come under much criticism. Such an approach does not always sufficiently acknowledge the need for discipline or the boundaries of responsibilities. An image that describes this creative tension is that of a small child painting a picture. The child is confronted by a blank piece of paper, but there are constraints also: the size and fragility of the paper, the run-a-way nature of paint and water, and a brush that requires careful handling. It is in discovering the necessary control within that a child can give shape to spontaneity without. The child learns simultaneously that materials have breaking points and impose limits in order to be used and explored fully.

The kind of freedom a young child thrives on to explore the sensory world of texture and colour is different, for example, from the necessary mixture of experimentation and rigorous practice that an older child experiences in trying to master a musical instrument. It is important to make a distinction between enabling children to take initiative, to be self-reliant, to give space for experimentation and self-expression on the one hand and on the other licence to be disruptive and destructive. Further, the process of conceptualizing, when it is looking beyond what is tangibly apparent, is not a random unguided activity for it necessarily draws on an established theoretical base.

Matthew Fox, the controversial American theologian writes: "All spirituality is about roots. For all spirituality is about living a non-superficial and, therefore, a deep rooted, or radical (from radix, root) life. Roots are collective and not merely personal - much less are they private or individualized. To get in touch with spiritual roots is truly to leave the private quest for *my* roots to get in touch with *our* roots. Where roots grow and nourish in the bowels of the earth, there things come together and there a collectivity of energies is shared. No root that was ruggedly individualistic would long survive. In the earth's bowels roots feed on the same organisms as they twist and turn interdependently among one another. The name we give this collectivity of roots is tradition."³³

Ritual is the visible manifestation of tradition. The meaningful ritual element of a school is not in the mechanical dreary monotony, but in lived celebration that brings children and teachers together and gives meaning to the discipline, precision and perseverance demanded by work. Ritual in this sense, according to Erich Fromm, means "to respond to the world with our senses in a meaningful, skilled, productive, active, shared way."³⁴ It could be defined as grounding the creative energy of an individual in a shared experience of making and doing.

Roots of the plant both draw sustenance from the surrounding soil and channel the necessary nourishment for the individual plant. The root is the link to integrate the whole plant into the earth. Similarly the shared myth, the ritual, celebration or festival integrate the individual into the whole without diminishment.

There are positive elements of boundary and space both within the school and outside it. The child's sense of belonging to the community provides a rootedness that the school must recognize. Vital sources of energy are generated within the close-knit bonds of the community at times of shared celebration or grief. In the village context there is little that the child is excluded from, whether at times of death, crisis, quarrel or birth. Entertainment is shared; religious practices and ritual are participated in. School in comparison may seem like the artificial world of the hot-house. Margaret Mead in her book *Growing up in New Guinea* warns about over-evaluating the role of the school and points out that the best system in the world of education in terms of technique, resources of people and materials is a very poor substitute for a rich culture. She warns that we cannot "create something out of nothing but must develop individuals who can mould old patterns into something new and richer."³⁵ In the present time of transition, where local cultures are being eroded, a school cannot replace the binding roots of a village community, but it can support it through sharing the celebration of festivals through making and doing things together, by bringing stories alive through drama, music and puppetry, so that festivals are shared and are not allowed to become divisive. Festivals are in danger of being exploited either by marketeers who mistake consumption for celebration, or

fundamentalists that use festivals to assert political power. The school could become a time and a place set apart not in a negative sense but as a stage where the unadorned roots, the essentials of any religious tradition, are recovered.

The Branches

The branches of a tree reach outwards and upwards. They fuse into the air. The process of growing up is a growing into relationships. The headlong search of the individual for expression must be tempered by a growing sensitivity towards the needs of the others. The process of growing up itself is a process of discovering boundaries and laws, and a gradual acknowledgement that the ego itself has necessary limits. School continues this process that has begun in the home to help the child towards being a part of the community, and finding work that is constructive and purposeful.

Recently, a young child of five visited our home. She was bursting with news of an experience of the day before. She had been staying at a relative's house in the city, and a small bird, frightened by Diwali crackers, had sought refuge in the house. The small Muniya bird had, in his panic, nestled among a shelf of tapes and books, and only the following day had ventured outside again. The little girl was engrossed in the feelings and actions of the vulnerable bird, and not only talked and thought about it, but drew an elaborate picture to remember and honour the occasion.

Many who have spent time with children would not be surprised by the child's intensity of feeling sympathy for and the imaginative entering into the world of a frightened bird in the enormous city. The adults around her could easily have destroyed the moment of growth by laughter, carelessness or dismissal. Yet for a child these seemingly insignificant events - insignificant to us perhaps in the face of our adult concerns and responsibilities - are what are formative to an inner life and an outer concern.

The terms, 'Creativity' and 'Spirituality', are both over laden for many by the negative overtones of ego-centricity, self-indulgence, or even a sense of being cut off from the "real" world in an isolated individualism. Yet, spirituality could be understood as just the opposite, because it demands a reaching beyond oneself - a stretching out to discover a kinship with people, the animal world, and the material world of wood, stone, sand and water etc. The specialness of childhood lies in part in this capacity to not differentiate so readily, and to share a sense of oneness with the animate and inanimate world.

Creativity is linked with relatedness. It is a process towards dialogue. It is a meeting point of the inner world of feeling, thought and emotion and the outer world of the other. Creativity is not necessarily being production-oriented, but rather an ever-widening relatedness. This manifests itself not only in the tangible expression of word, sound, line or colour, but also in a way of being with ourselves, with others, and all creation. Creativity includes the capacity to love and accept another. Thomas Merton, a modern Christian mystic writes: "Often, our love for others is not love at all, but only the need to be sustained in our illusions, even as we sustain others in theirs."³⁶ In contrast, creative relationships involve not merely the superficial external self, the individual "I", but essentially the unknown and hidden Self that only slowly reveals itself through our living and our dying.

It is not easy to prescribe for a school an atmosphere conducive to a greater creativity where learning is not inert and passive, but active and alive, for it is as elemental as the air we breathe, or as intangible as the joy we feel. It certainly does not seem to be in relation to resources and materials available, which, increasingly, in an urban situation serve to saturate rather than stimulate. It seems almost the reverse, where the minimum, the simple, and the elemental, provide the richest possibilities.

The Aborigines of Central Australia, with the bark of a tree, a minimal palette of earth colours, and a brush made of pliant twigs, produced an extraordinarily rich and dynamic art. I am reminded of Rabindranath Tagore who as a child was often confined by an oppressive servant to a chalked circle (*Lakshman Rekha*) within the house, so that all his fantasy was focused on the hanging branches of a Banyan tree outside the window. This is not to advocate harsh limits to children's freedom and spontaneity, but it is good to be reminded that creativity is linked with simplicity.

The atmosphere in our schools, in our classrooms, and in our relationships with individual children which enable children to grow inside as well as out, cannot be manufactured. It is, inescapably, a reflection on the teachers, the environment, the space and time given to fostering that inner world by stories, songs and celebrations, and the attentiveness shown to the child's changing perceptions of the world. Maybe, most vital is the underlying acceptance of the child's own potential for growth, which is not a mere extension of the teacher's own creativity, but calls for a recognition of a partly hidden and mysterious Self that is the child's own. It is in experiences like that of the child and the bird and innumerable other such incidents in a child's life which demand our consistent and unsentimental respect.

In school the building and surroundings, the books and materials all require care, and a sense of responsibility. Cooperation in contrast to competition also demands that children respond to each others' needs, limitations and gifts. There are various ways that a school can devise to facilitate co-operative activities whereby children learn to work together rather than against each other. They can make things for each other such as small books, reading cards, dolls. Children of mixed abilities and ages can work together on projects of all kinds and share responsibilities for cleaning and maintenance. Sometimes it is possible for an older child to be especially responsible for a younger one, and have some regular task, for example listening to the child read.

The teacher's ability to respond to the child's needs and the child's ability to respond to people and things around are closely connected. It is an acceptance of differences which, in organic farming terms, is called diversity as opposed to "monoculture". Diversity is a necessary factor both in terms of balanced cultivation and also in harmonious education. The family and local community generally tolerate and support a range of variety in terms of mental and physical abilities, strengths and limitations, temperaments and qualities. Ideally each one is accommodated and their needs met and their gifts shared. This is, of course, not always true in practice but in school this ideal is often not even on the horizon.

Linguistic, mathematical and logical skills are the forms of intelligence that are generally valued in school, partly because these are the areas that can be most readily tested. However, society depends on a variety of intelligences, including musical, bodily and emotional intelligences, but these faculties are given little scope to develop in school.

Children are often expected to react and respond at the same pace and in the same way while the reality is, of course, very different. Children are usually assessed in an identical way for the sake of convenience, but in the process disregarding children's individual abilities or interests. It is precisely this obsession with categorizing and labelling that divides the able from the less able, the passed from the failed, the accepted from the rejected.

Schools generally want to exclude those with learning difficulties because such children are labelled as sub-standard, abnormal, malfunctioning and unproductive. Yet to "throw them away" reflects society's growing inability to come to terms with weakness, and a false assumption that there is only one kind of development and one kind of success which is a worldly and material one. Yet it is sometimes the person who is apparently not able to function very well that draws us back to essential values. The sick person, or the child with learning difficulties is often left untouched by advertisements that lure us into thinking that more luxury, more leisure and more comfort gives us more happiness.

It would be a rare teacher who has never found a particular child difficult to relate to at times. It may be just this experience that assists us to work through our own ambivalences. For some it is the child who is messy and easily distracted that poses a challenge. For others it is the child who is assertive and independent and unbothered by the teacher's demands that is threatening. Martin Buber says teachers are not expected to be "moral geniuses".³⁷ Their only strength is in a dogged faith to continue a journey that always offers another possibility of being open and responsive to the child as a person beyond our judgements and expectations.

Relatedness through Play and Wonder

The word we use to describe the place of education is 'school' which is derived from the Greek word "skole", which means "leisure". It has also been linked to the meaning "hold back" or "rest". Leisure for the Greeks has been explained as "a receptive attitude of mind... it is not only the occasion but the capacity of steeping oneself in the whole of creation."³⁸ Leisure is not spare time, nor idleness, but is connected with the celebration of meaningfulness. It is the play, the drama, the festival that serve as pointers to make the whole of life, including work and duty, worthwhile. Maybe, leisure carries within it the idea of a meaningful space.

Relatedness begins for the young child largely through the space of play. It is by seeing, grasping, moving, letting go, dropping, listening, undoing and constructing that the child discovers concepts of time and space and explores the laws of nature. The texture, shape, colour and sensation of the physical world is first experienced through the child's own body beginning with the fingers and toes/ and the touch of the mother's body. Gradually the child explores the rich diversity of the human and animal world, and the unexpected qualities of water, earth and air. Play along with other basic necessities of life is increasingly in danger of being captured by markets, privatized and polluted. Play is particularly vulnerable in the face of commercialization which tends to make simple available things complex and expensive to obtain.

Play has tended to be understood as a technique whereby certain predetermined concepts are taught. The adult often interrupts a child's play and intervenes with

judgements and readymade expectations and so stifles and dulls the child's possibility to explore and to see beyond the limited vision of the habitual, This is not to dismiss the use of games and activities to learn through, whereby a meaningful connection is made between hand and brain, and so helps build a child's capacity to listen, talk, sort, read and write, but this is only one aspect of play. The random, self-activated and seemingly unproductive play of children often has a different logic and pattern from prescribed games of learning exercises. Occasions of uninterrupted play can be a way of learning to concentrate, to be absorbed and to persevere. Children need space, time, privacy, natural materials, everyday things, and respect from parents and teachers. Materials should be flexible allowing for many possibilities with which to make and imagine. In the village children are rarely given readymade toys, and if they are, such things are soon broken because they do not remain private property for long. Spinning tops, marbles, balls, waste materials and the natural surroundings have given ample stimulus to children for centuries.

The school's role is to give some direction and coherence to the inherent qualities and vitality of play. It is play that lays the foundation of so much later learning, whether in creative expression, in writing, enjoyment of listening to and reading stories, drama, craftwork, or in explorations into the composition and nature of materials and structures. Painting and clay work with young children should be loosely directed in terms of subjects and expectations of a product, but care of materials, the needs of others, and an atmosphere of mutual respect should be encouraged.

There is a gradual move from random play and playing alone to a more co-operative purposeful play. The children's imagination, memories of an experience and powers of observation and attention to detail can be stimulated by a story, a festival, a recent event or changes in nature. Processes begun through play such as the capacity to think, construct, express and discover relationships form the basis for further learning.

In school the child is often not given time to play, to wonder, to explore or to be alone. Teachers rarely draw on a child's vivid sensory impressions and emotional involvement with colour, sound and movement to give life to later experiences and investigations of natural phenomena. There is a story about young Galileo who on one occasion was in Church. He was feeling rather bored when suddenly his attention was arrested by the movement of a swinging candelabra. Measuring the swings of the pendulum against the rhythm of his own pulse, he found that no matter what the range of the oscillations, the time remained constant Galileo concluded that such a pendulum might be invaluable in the exact measurement of time and much later did develop such a clock. The starting point, and the impetus to explore further was from the sense of wonder and curiosity he experienced as a child. Wonder has been described by Thomas Aquinas as "the desire for more knowledge".

Science is so often presented to a child stripped of feeling and breadth, and reduced narrowly to a single answer. On the pathway to the school where I work there is a mango tree which teachers and children alike pass every day. None of us had ever noticed the amazing pattern of perfect circles reflected on the ground until it was pointed out by a visiting teacher. We sat together puzzling how the irregular shapes and sizes of leaves, and the gaps between could produce such perfect circles. And so began for all of us an

exploration into the play of light and shadow, and the energy of the sun. By various experiments we found that each circle of light is in fact an image of the sun.

Wonder is the opposite of cynicism. It is more than mere curiosity which fades as the novelty wears off. When curiosity “obtains sight of anything it already looks away for what is coming next,” for it never “dwells anywhere.”³⁹ It is also qualitatively different from sentimentality that reduces complexity of emotion to a cliché or stereotyped response. Wonder has the clarity and the freshness of the light that a plant needs to grow and instinctively turns to.

A child’s quest and questioning can be an expression of wonder. Sometimes the questions are to enlarge a view of the world: “Do frogs have teeth?”; “Why can fish swallow salt water and we can’t?”; “Where do flies sleep at night?”, or “Why don’t we feel giddy when the earth keeps going round?” Sometimes the questions lead us to search for what we really believe. “Can I ask God for wings?”, “Are there small people living under the earth?” or “Have you seen a ghost because I have?”

It is not only the child’s questions and the way we respond that is so significant but also the way an adult addresses questions to children which allow reflective answers that are not predetermined by the adult.

E.F. Schumacher sums up the purpose of education as “to lead people out of the dark wood of meaninglessness, purposelessness, drift and indulgence up a mountain where there can be gained a truth that makes you free.”⁴⁰ The actual experience of the journey is hidden from teacher and child alike and the vision at the top remains a mystery for each to discover.

Play, wonder and the asking of questions and finding out answers are all ways of exploring the world around. Work is also a fundamental way of relating to the society and to the physical world of materials.

Work

The role of purposeful and constructive work has increasingly been sidelined in the life of a school. Handwork is seen largely as an extracurricular activity or as a suitable subject for children with learning difficulties. Gandhi in a radical way re-introduced productive and self-supporting work as basic to all learning. He promoted ‘bread labour’ in the school for its economic and social value. He saw ‘bread labour’ as a bridge between city and village, rich and poor. He also saw it as the means of training the intellect through the practical activity of the hand. Vinoba Bhave sums up the process of craft in *Nai Talim* : “Through the craft three objectives can be reached: The all round development of the children’s innate faculties, the teaching of the various kinds of knowledge that are useful to life, and the acquirement of a skill by which children can earn their living.”⁴¹

Tagore questioned Gandhi’s stress on the economic aspect of work in school. In response to the place of manual work as outlined in the Basic Education Scheme published in 1938, he wrote: “It assumes that material utility rather than the development of personality is the end of education.”⁴² Tagore advocated craft and recognized the value of work, especially in Sriniketan, but he did not see the economic factor as primary. Tagore emphasised craft as a means to develop skills, imagination and inventiveness

through being creatively and physically engaged. He distinguished between creativity and productivity.

Elements first discovered in play, such as the capacity to construct and experiment, to explore patterns and relationships, ripen to become skills in communicating, designing, making and cultivating. While Gandhi stressed the purpose of work as service Tagore insisted on the need to discover “work wedded with joy” and was wary of advocating mechanical and monotonous work as meaningful in itself. The two aspects of work as service and joy are not necessarily contradictory but need to be integrated.

The role of work in school has an important function to encourage a responsible and useful role in adult society, as work in the home for some children fosters a sense of belonging and caring within the family. However, it becomes increasingly difficult to relate to the idea of productive craftwork in this way in the present context of massive commercialization and industrialization, where work is usually alienating because the person, as Marx says, “does not fulfil himself but denies himself.” Such work arises when the stress is on production and profit, where the person does not feel responsible or involved, and there is little variety or creativity. Boredom is the opposite of mindful engagement which gives a person self-respect.

Both Gandhi and Tagore encouraged children to work not as an unpleasant necessity but as a vital and fulfilling part of life. Maintenance of the school building and its surroundings, craft activities, tailoring and cooking may not be directly income generating activities but nevertheless are life skills. These skills play a significant role in cultivating a healthy attitude towards work both as an individual and as a responsible member of a group. Constructive and meaningful engagement in work potentially gives a constructive and purposeful meaning to life. However, this fails “the acid test” of economic self-sufficiency that Gandhi proposed but it does aim towards a growing self-reliance.

The Fruits and the Treasure

Gandhi described the person without hope as one who “will never be cheerful in heart.”⁴³ Biological growth and a person’s development, while different in many ways, do share a basic pattern of an inner dynamism and energy that cannot be moulded from outside. Tagore comments on this theme: “It is not like a lantern that can be lighted and trimmed from outside, but it is like the light that the glow-worm possesses by the exercise of its life processes.”⁴⁴

“Cheerfulness in the heart” cannot be conjured up or manufactured because it is more a state that is grown into from experiences remembered and lived. It is memories that give each one not only a uniqueness, but also a treasure to draw on throughout life. In the conclusion of Dostoyevsky’s last novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, the hero of the book, Aloysius, addresses a group of school boys on the occasion of the funeral of one of their friends:

“I am sure you will remember there is nothing higher, stronger, more wholesome and more useful in life than some good memory, especially when it goes back to the days of your childhood, to the days of your life at home. You are told a lot about education, but some beautiful, sacred memory since childhood is perhaps the best education of all. If a

man carries many such memories into life with him, he is saved for the rest of his days. And even if only one good memory is left in our hearts, it may also be the instrument of our salvation one day. ⁴⁵

The memories within us can be distorted, fixed in a stereotype, suppressed, or falsified. Dostoyevsky's discussion on the preciousness of memories might in another context seem fanciful or sentimental. But this deep-rooted optimism arises not only out of a novel that interweaves innocence and corruption, but also a life that had endured great injustice and suffering.

It is not only the reservoir of memories that contribute to the make-up of ourselves, but there is another aspect of individuality which is to do with forgetfulness. We do not usually think of a school as a place to encourage a space for forgetfulness, but by forgetfulness I do not mean carelessness or mindlessness. On the contrary, there is a kind of forgetfulness which comes about from being creatively absorbed in something, a going beyond self because, "one is involved in doing something with one's whole heart", as Calderwell Cook says.

Play and craftwork are areas that demand space to be both attentive and forgetful. Work is sometimes thought of as an infringement on our time for leisure and pleasure, but to be creatively engaged in work removes the barrier between work and leisure. Gandhi, apparently, was asked on one occasion by a journalist whether he was going to take a vacation from his busy schedule, and Gandhi replied that he considered himself to be on vacation all the time!

The creation and sharing of stories from time immemorial has provided a way of expanding and intensifying emotions without infringing on the listener's vulnerability. Idries Shah writes in his introduction to his *World Tales*: "Perhaps, above all, the tale fulfils the function not of escape, but of hope. This suspending of ordinary constraints helps people to reclaim optimism and to fuel the imagination with energy for the attainment of goals."⁴⁶ Story telling is not the way of intrusion, but an invitation to absorb and make it our own. Stories simultaneously "hide and show what is hidden".

There are many stories that tell of the search for lost or, sometimes, unknown treasure. Such a search sometimes costs the protagonist not only his possessions and sense of security, but threatens his very life. Yet the quest is irresistible, and brings its own fulfilment, and the listener often comes closer to an abiding hope. There is a Hottentot story related by Laurens van der Post that tells of a hunter who momentarily glimpses the reflection of a large, magical white bird.⁴⁷ The bird vanishes into "the forest of the night". The hunter forsakes everything familiar: family, friends, land, and work in an effort to see the marvellous bird again but his search is in vain. Weary and despondent from his endless journeying, he comes at last to a white mountain, where it is rumoured that the great bird lives. He begins the difficult climb, but realises that he no longer has the strength to continue. In utter despair he lies down to await death, and it is just at that moment of great emptiness that a white feather flutters from the sky. He grasps it with his dying hand, and dies in peace as the night falls. The story concludes that it was through this one man's travail and joy that his whole tribe found meaning and purpose in their lives. Laurens van der Post adds that in some versions of this story the bird is called "Truth".

The treasure is sometimes unrecognized, hidden like roots within our life. There is a Hasidic story that also tells of the search for treasure. A Rabbi has a dream that he will find treasure in a distant town. The Rabbi leaves his home full of expectations, and begins a long and arduous journey. After many days, he chances to meet an old man on a bridge, travelling towards the Rabbi's own town. They begin to talk, and the Rabbi learns that the old man is from the very place he is destined for. The Rabbi is more surprised to hear that his new-found friend has also had a dream, and is journeying in search of treasure. The old man describes the place of hidden treasure revealed in his dream. The Rabbi recognizes this place as his own humble home. The two men each turn the way they had come to discover again the place they thought familiar.

Balanced growth in our lives, in our schools, and in our community, requires space to create, to wonder, to absorb, to remember, to work, to rest, and to discover but which is set within the boundaries of responsibility towards the other and the earth itself. The Lord Buddha spoke 2500 years ago of the need for each person to discover his or her own particular *Dharma* and "to adhere to it, despite the opposition of the whole world".

*"Believe nothing
merely because you have been told it.
Or because it is traditional,
or because you yourself have imagined it.
Do not believe what your teacher tells you
merely out of respect for the teacher.
But whatever, after due examination and analysis,
you find to be conducive to the good, to the benefit of
the welfare of all beings;
that doctrine believe, and cling to
and take it as your guide."*⁴⁸

Here the individual's struggle towards understanding and truth is set and bound firmly within the context of "the welfare of all beings". It both accepts the unique responsibility of each to discover what is right and also that it be tempered by the good of the whole.

Conclusion

At this time of rapid change and transition there is a growing sense of uprootedness. This sense of alienation affects all aspects of life: social, economic, cultural and political, which in turn affects our relationships with each other. Ironically, as communication systems become increasingly sophisticated, actual relationships seem to be breaking down, and as professional management dominates we seem less able to manage our personal lives. Increasingly, sentimentality and consumerism serve to deaden inner life. It is important to distinguish roots that support life and freedom, and give stability from entanglements that bind with convention, unthinking habit and prejudice.

Through looking at different aspects of disconnectedness in schooling such as the person's own fragmentation, the rift from the other and from nature, the split between

wisdom and knowledge it has been possible to clarify ideas of integration and correlation. Finally, I have endeavoured to briefly outline what this might mean in practice in terms of using the immediate resources of the child's own exuberance and vitality, the capacity to play, wonder, question, work, the local surroundings and the shared storehouse of story and festival.

Gandhi speaks of an education that is "rooted in the soil". 'The soil' includes not only the earth beneath our feet, but also the planet earth that is our home and place of work, Gandhi adds with a glorious vision of the future. This 'vision' has both the freshness of "The Original Vision" of childhood, and the mature hope that comes from experience.

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II

The Place of the Individual in Gandhiji's Concept of Education

Introduction

The understanding of personhood affects the aims of education whether this is a conscious process or not. There has been increasingly a tendency to reduce the person to an object that is merely conditioned or a prey to different forces with little or no power of self-determination. Genetic, hereditary or psychological factors from within or historical, economic or social forces from without have all been claimed as decisive in a person's make-up and behaviour. The process of reductionism has run concurrent with a growing depersonalization and sense of alienation in work, human relationship and from nature itself. The individual is being increasingly defined by what he or she owns, and has achieved in terms of material success. Gandhi's understanding of individuality as the integrated and responsible person stands in stark contrast to this aggressive individualism.

This essay is in three parts. The first part looks at Gandhi's concept of the individual and the growth of each person in relationship to God through service to people. The second part explores the implications of such a view for Gandhi's concept of Basic Education. The third part explores how this could be relevant to our present situation.

Gandhi's Concept of the Individual

Organic Growth

Gandhi's well-known statement, "My life is my message" sums up his startling and particular way of philosophizing. Elsewhere he compared a philosophy without practice to a body without breath. At the heart of his world-view is the human person. Gandhi's own life became the premise and the proof of his trust in a person capable of change, choice and growth. His understanding of the individual's role in society stems from the demands towards responsibility that he consistently and untiringly made on himself. His theorizing was not worked out in the abstract, disembodied world of ideas nor was it based on detached observations of external phenomena. His own mind and actions served as a laboratory for his 'Experiments with Truth'. He writes in the introduction to his *Autobiography* :

“I claim for them nothing more than does a scientist who though he conducts his experiments with the utmost accuracy, forethought and minuteness never claims any finality about his conclusions, but keeps an open mind regarding them.”

He is both the object and the subject of his probings. Gandhi’s precision and passion for self-analysis has been described as like a man who works on himself as a jeweller works on an uncut diamond.

Gandhi’s life was an effort to realize “a perfect consistency” in thought, word and action by “awaiting upon Truth”. Gandhi clarified that for him consistency was an expression of an inward condition and not an outward appearance of inalterability. He writes :

*“I am not at all concerned with appearing to be consistent. In my search after Truth I have discarded many ideas and learnt many new things. Old as I am in age I have no feeling that I have ceased to grow inwardly or that my growth will stop at the dissolution of the flesh. What I am concerned with is my readiness to obey the call of Truth, my God, from moment to moment”*²

Gandhi describes himself as “a practical idealist”. A close friend referred to him as “a matter-of-fact mystic”. His philosophy was rooted in spirituality but was firmly incarnated, firstly, in his own person and, secondly, extending from that to the everyday world of economics, politics and education. The individual, for Gandhi, was the pivot of the practice of non-violence and the ideal of Truth. He wrote of this “inviolable connection” between Truth and Ahimsa as inseparable from each other as the means and the end, In other words, to love is to live in Truth and to be true to one’s being is to live the principle of Ahimsa.

Individuality versus Individualism

Gandhi drew a sharp distinction between the violence of “an unrestricted individualism” and the integrity of personhood that is ironically shaped through surrender of the self. Gandhi stressed the shallowness of the egotistical self, and the fullness of the Self in harmony with life, light, and joy. Gandhi writes:

*“I have been a willing slave to this most exacting Master for more than half a century... He has saved me often against myself, and left me not a vestige of independence. The greater the surrender to Him, the greater has been my joy.”*³

The process, as Gandhi describes it, of “reducing oneself to zero” involves a shedding of false identities imposed by gender, class, caste or history. Gandhi throughout his life endeavoured to discern what was of lasting value in the family, in religious tradition and surrounding culture, and what part of that infringed or limited his understanding of Truth. A good example of this inner freedom is to be seen in his response to B.S. Moonje, the Hindu Mahasabha leader, who suggested that untouchability was sanctioned by Hindu scriptures. Gandhi wrote,

*“Happily for me, my Hinduism does not bind me to every verse because it is written in Sanskrit., in spite of your liberal knowledge of the Shastras yours is a distorted kind of Hinduism. I claim in all humility to have lived Hinduism all my life.”*⁴

Such a process facilitated a creative and dynamic openness to unfamiliar ideas whereby new insights were assimilated and not merely imitated.

He gave tangible expression to his ideas through constant experimentation. It was through his encounters with the narrow casteism of his own community, the injustice of colonialism, the fanaticism of communalism, that his “indomitable will” was put to constructive purposes. The seeming contradiction of the power of selflessness is well expressed in the following passage:

“Self-actualizing people are simultaneously the most individualistic and the most altruistic and social and loving of human beings... these qualities go together, and their dichotomy is resolved in self-actualizing people.”⁵

As Gandhi himself said, “Individual freedom has its fullest play under a regime of unadulterated ahimsa.”⁶ The world of social inter-dependence is “the touchstone of reality” which enables a person to live their faith.

The Individual as “the supreme consideration”

Gandhi shares with the humanist the notion that the individual is of “supreme consideration.” The term *Sarvodaya* is basic to Gandhi’s economic, political, and educational philosophy. *Sarvodaya* has been variously translated as ‘the welfare of all’ or ‘universal happiness without exception.’ It is an all-inclusive term. Its ‘soul’ has been defined by Gandhi as *Antyodaya*, that is the upliftment of “the last, the weakest or the poorest.” The philosophy of *Sarvodaya* goes beyond Bentham’s Utilitarianism which was based on the principle of the ‘greatest good of the greatest number’ to the ‘greatest good of all’. Gandhi writes that “the votary of ahimsa” goes beyond the logic of the Utilitarian, who will ever sacrifice himself, because “He will be willing to die so that others may live”.⁷ Not a single person was to be excluded from his vision of a *Ramrajya*. He made no distinction between high and low, rich and poor, strong and weak, or even good and bad. Gandhi looked on each individual as an end in himself; not as a means or instrument to reach that end, however Utopian that goal might be.

Gandhi encompasses a humanist view of the world which accepts the person as central. However, Gandhi goes beyond a humanism which is based only on a rationalist’s (romantic) assumption that human reason alone is capable of organizing an ethical world. Nor is Gandhi persuaded that human sympathy and feeling alone endures the struggle against darkness. He might have shared Dostoyevsky’s sentiment when he wrote in the novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, “Love, in reality, is a harsh and dreadful thing compared to love in a dream...active love is labour and fortitude.”

Gandhi by recognizing and accepting his own failings and weaknesses acknowledges the frailty but not the depravity of human nature. He saw within his own limitations a limitless living power at work in the world. He wrote, “Each person is a ray or part of that power which underlies all change... that is changeless, that holds all together, that creates dissolves and re-creates.”⁸ He glimpsed that within his fragmented vision lay an awesome

reality of Truth that was “a million more times intense than the sun”. He could speak of an immanent God as one “who rules the tiniest details of my life.” And who “abides in our hearts, and is nearer to us than the nails are to the fingers.”⁹ He also recognized a transcendent force that holds everything together, “an ordered moral government of the Universe, that is not less real because it is unseen”.

The Part and the Whole

Gandhi believed that all human beings are significant parts of a whole. He compared this underlying unity to the drops of water that make an ocean possible; or the single strands of thread that spun together make woven cloth; or the separated organs that work together to enable a body to function. However, any analogy is finally inadequate to describe this balance of the part to the whole. Gandhi, writing from his own experience, feels himself to be both “part and parcel of the whole”.¹⁰ The person is distinct as a separate individual, but the strength and depth of his individuality is determined by his capacity for non-possessive relationships and detached action. Gandhi writes that when human nature “acts equally towards all and in all circumstances, it approaches the Divine”. For Gandhi God is realized through a growing recognition that “I cannot find Him apart from the rest of Humanity.”¹²

Writing of the inter-dependence of the part to the whole and the individual to the society Gandhi said,

“Willing submission to social restraint for the sake of the well-being of the whole society enriches both the individual and the society of which one is a member.”

Gandhi’s optimism enabled him to say that each person is “born to realize the God who dwells in us.” And that, collectively, the attraction to goodness is stronger than the inclination to evil. He wrote : “I believe that the sum total of the energy of mankind is

not to bring us down, but to lift us up.”¹³ The optimism that Gandhi trusted began necessarily with a belief in himself. He could both speak of himself as “a vivisector of my failings” and yet say:

*“I am an irrepressible optimist because I believe in myself. That sounds very arrogant, doesn’t it? But I say it from the depth of my humility. I believe in the supreme power of God. I believe in Truth, and therefore I have no doubt in the future of this country or the future of humanity.”*¹⁴

Gandhi makes no claim for uniqueness, or that he is a person with prophetic powers. On the contrary, he states that realization is equally possible for all:

*“Atman is the same in every one of us. All souls possess equal potentialities; only some have developed their powers, while others have them in a dormant condition/”*¹⁵

Moral Autonomy

Gandhi did not believe that the goodness of man was grounded in an instinctive sympathy, but rather in his potential for moral autonomy. Gandhi firmly rejected the

prevalent determinist view of the world. Such a mechanistic perspective tends to reduce the individual person to powerlessness. It is a theory that sees the person moulded from within, or from without. While expressing his beliefs in an essential goodness, Gandhi recognizes, at the same time, the power of outer structures to distort that essence.

“You say, you Europeans, that man is born without being good or bad, and that it is the place, the institutions, and a dozen other factors which determine the road he is going to follow. I affirm to the contrary, that man is always good and it is only bad institutions that turn him from the straight road.”¹⁶

This optimism is not simplistic or naive, in the sense that Gandhi never imagines that it is sufficient to remove outer constraints in order that human goodness flowers. He stresses the need to grow into freedom and to acquire the capacity to exercise autonomy. The potential for goodness is hidden like the undeveloped skills of a craftsman, mathematician or athlete that may lie latent within a child. Growth is only sometimes possible through struggle and effort. Gandhi acknowledges the constraints that emerge from a particular psychological make-up and temperament.

“All men are imperfect, and when imperfection is observed in someone in a larger measure than in others people are apt to blame him. But this is not fair. Man can change his temperament, can control, but cannot eradicate it. God has not given him so much liberty. If the leopard can change his spots, then only can man modify the peculiarities of his spiritual constitution.”¹⁷

Elsewhere Gandhi writes that “the downward course” is attractive because it is presented in “a beautiful garb”.¹⁸ He does not under-estimate the conflict that is involved but he writes that the person is capable of shifting beyond a life ruled by habit to live by “the exercise of the will”.¹⁹ Gandhi speaks of the seeming contradiction of the Divine Will that is responsible for the growth and movement of every blade of grass and the human capacity for free will. He recognizes the human predicament of being at the same time “less than a passenger on a crowded deck” and a person who is “the maker of his own destiny in the sense that he has freedom of choice in the manner in which he uses that freedom.” Gandhi cautions that free will is qualitatively different from controlling the results of one’s actions which are clearly beyond our means. He concluded, “We cannot command results, we can only strive.”²⁰

While Gandhi believed in the human potential for freedom he also admitted the force of external structures : “..... inspite of the greatest effort to be detached no man can altogether undo the effect of his environment and upbringing.” Yet he does

believe that the person is capable of self-rule to a significant degree and is “superior to the system he propounds”²¹ and the inertia of habit. Gandhi’s incisive analysis of economic, social and political forces that diminish the person’s autonomy and threaten life itself reveal that he in no way minimized the extent of violence and injustice but he could still claim that “It is man’s privilege to overcome adverse circumstances.”²²

Gandhi does not suggest that there is anything magical or miraculous to make the way easier or less challenging. In fact he emphasized the unpredictable nature of an unfathomable God who often “dashes the cup from our lips and under cover of free will

leaves us a margin so wholly inadequate as to provide only mirth for himself at our expense.”²³

The clarity of Truth is accessible to each one but cannot be absolutized. Gandhi writes that “the claim to infallibility would always be a most dangerous claim to make.” While Gandhi is confident that we have the means to discern right action for ourselves he excludes the use of violence to impose it on others as human understanding is always and inevitably limited:

*“Truth resides in every human heart and one has to search for it there and to be guided by truth as one sees it But no one has a right to coerce others to act according to his own view of truth.”*²⁴

Process of Reason and Discernment

Gandhi distinguishes the human being from the animal kingdom not by his ability “to use the cudgel” but by his choice towards restraint and non-violence reached through a process of reason and discernment which is each one’s sole responsibility. D.T. Suzuki discusses the necessary loneliness that this involves. “You are tried alone; alone you pass into the desert, alone you are silted by the world.”²⁵ Gandhi describes this lonely act of searching as more important than the actual achievement of the ideal: “Let us be sure of our ideal. We shall ever fail to realize it but shall never cease to strive for it.”²⁶

The process of discernment is not by rationality alone which Gandhi says is “a hideous monster when it claims for itself omnipotence”, and is then comparable to idolatry, but neither is it by irrationality.²⁷ Radhakrishnan speaks of Gandhi’s attentive-ness to the Inner Voice as “the deepest rationality of which human nature is capable. In it we think more profoundly, feel more deeply and see more truly.” The Inner Voice is the part of each human being that is both unique and yet shared.

It is on account of this ‘divine spark’ within each one that Gandhi rejects the idea of guruship. He insists that no one should follow or imitate another mindlessly like a sheep. He is a reluctant Mahatma who can joke about his own title: ‘The Mahatma I must leave to his fate. Though a non-co-operator I will gladly subscribe to a bill to make it criminal for anyone to call me a Mahatma.’²⁸ Gandhi is keen that each one retains a critical faculty. For example Gandhi tries to dissuade Mira Behn from an over-dependence or blind imitation. He writes to her:

*“You should grow along your own lines. You will therefore reject all that I had said in this, that does not appeal to your heart or head. You must retain your individuality at all costs. Resist me when you must”*²⁹

Gandhi describes this as “obedience to the law of one’s own being” which “supersedes all courts”. It is a loneliness which is rooted in humility not pride. “The power to stand alone till the end cannot be developed without extreme humility. Without this power a man is nothing worth.”³⁰ Such an obedience involves risk, sacrifice, and may even cost one’s life.

A Culture of Responsibility

Gandhi places the onus of responsibility on each person, and therefore makes each accountable for decisions and actions. He writes that we are not responsible for more than our own action, but for that we should take complete responsibility.

It is this culture of responsibility, and space for moral autonomy which is increasingly being threatened. It is in the present advance of technology, the growing sophistication of communication systems, the centralized control of production and consumption of essential items, that individual liberty and the possibility of real choices are being diminished. Gandhi's stress on taking personal responsibility and creating structures that support rather than crush an individual's autonomy is extremely relevant to the present situation.

Some of Gandhi's strongest critics, for example M.N. Roy, felt inwardly challenged and changed after witnessing Gandhi's fearless and single-handed encounter with the violence of rioters and the paralyzed panic of the citizens of Calcutta in 1946-47. Denis Dalton writes : "If there was a 'miracle' in Calcutta, then it occurred when one man's leadership restored to more than four million people the will and sense of responsibility needed to mend their strife-torn city, and ultimately to transform their lives."³¹

Dharma for Gandhi was not imposed from without and ultimately "could not be pointed out by anyone." He who recognizes his *Swadharma* "adheres to it despite the opposition of the whole world." In a traditional context the individual is in danger of being lost in a round of pre-determined obligations where the person is formed by expectations beyond himself or herself. In the present situation the individual is under a different kind of pressure, that of market forces that determine not only one's work but one's pattern of living. It seems as though one is in danger of being deliberately led from reality to unreality with false promises of instant gratification and uninterrupted pleasure. Tagore defines *Dharma* as "a great purpose taking shape in our lives/" which would be close to Gandhi's understanding of each person with a unique mission to fulfil.

The Place of the Individual in Basic Education

Gandhi's understanding of the individual as a person destined to discover self through love, service and responsibility shaped his whole philosophy and method of education. The inner process of self-realisation is only true insofar as it is put into non-violent practice. An educational system that limits or denies individuality is intrinsically violent.

Gandhi defined education as "that which liberates". Liberation for Gandhi includes not only freedom from being exploited but, equally important, freedom from exploiting others. Gandhi considered the colonial and literary oriented educational system not only as inadequate, but harmful to the person. It was divisive in society, fragmenting for the individual and culturally alienating. Basic Education sought to create a participatory form of learning, where there was consistency in inner thought, outer world and action. Inconsistency meant a kind of dysfunctioning and disconnected learning.

Integrated Learning

The framework of Basic Education was conceived and worked out in an organic way through experimentation and experience. The Wardha Scheme of Education, proposed in

1937, had its roots in years of experience. Forty years earlier Gandhi had evolved an alternative for his own children's education in South Africa, Gradually Basic Education was developed through the coming together of ideas and practical necessity. In South Africa, there was first a response to the needs of the members' children at Phoenix Settlement. Later the families of the Satyagrahis lodged at Tolstoy Farm required schooling for their children. In India, slowly, the school of the Ashram was extended to meet the needs of the surrounding villages. In addition, Basic Education formed an integral part of the Constructive Programme and went alongside political work, from its inception in Champaran in 1917.

It has been pointed out that Basic Education in many ways was totally innovative and that it did not attempt to revive or return to traditional patterns of learning. However, the central role of the teacher as a guide who in his person harmonized practical and inner knowledge was in keeping with the idea of teacher as "guru". The teacher was understood not in a professional or managerial role within the walls of the classroom, but as a person to study and work with. Basic Education envisaged the school within the context of the Ashram or the village community. The school enabled a fuller participation in a way of life and not merely a future preparation for life or learning indirectly about life.³²

Vinoba said that teacher and pupil "must unite in their persons the peasant with the philosopher."³³ The learner discovers spiritual values through interaction with the teacher at work of all kinds. Gandhi was concerned not so much with changing structures and systems but working with people to effect change. It is a relationship of mutuality between teacher and learner. He believed: "If we are to teach real peace in this world we shall have to begin with children."³⁴

"The law of the beast of the jungle" was Gandhi's definition of individualism as it leads to de-personalization. In education individualism is the way of aggressive competition, and "the survival of the slickest." It is a lop-sided and one dimensional learning that is only catering for a part of the person. In contrast, individuality is linked to self-restraint. The person moves towards fuller growth by using all his or her faculties in the service of humanity. Individuality is an integration of the whole person.

"A proper and all-round development of the mind, therefore, can take place only when it proceeds, pari passu, with the education of the physical and spiritual faculties of the child. They constitute an indivisible whole. According to this theory, therefore, it would be a gross fallacy to suppose that they can be developed piecemeal or independently of one another."^{35*}

Work is an expression of a person's identity and it is through service that the individual is linked to nature and society. Bread labour that is done "intelligently, enthusiastically and for the love of God" is basic to Basic Education, as it was to the Ashram life that Gandhi practised. Gandhi described the ashram ideal as "to live to serve". Gandhi considered craft as a natural means to challenge and draw out the latent faculties of every child. Craft by its nature potentially demands thought, imagination, and responsibility. Gandhi stressed that intellectual development was linked to physical activity, and that literary knowledge alone was stifling to growth.

Gandhi made no clear division between the learning of empirical knowledge and the knowledge of the Self. The religious search and the human search in the physical world

were inseparable. Gandhi saw no purpose in learning unless it was in some way related back to the varied needs of society.

*“All research will be useless if it is not allied to internal research which can link your hearts with those of the masses. Unless all the discoveries you make have the welfare of the poor as the end in view, all your workshops will be really no better than Satan’s workshops...”*³⁶

A person learns in order to give back more fully, not for self-aggrandizement. Vinoba speaks of education as being like walking on two legs, one step for individual change, to be followed by one step for social change. Similarly, Gandhi writes of liberalism in education that is balanced by the needs of the society.

*“The guiding principle of Ashram Education is, in my opinion, the liberty of the child. Even the youngest child should feel he is something. We should discover his special capacities and...provide the means for their full development, on condition that it will use all its knowledge for the benefit of society. We will not paralyze its intellect by loading it with books. The parents in the Ashram will live for their children, and learn from them as well as teach them. The whole of their life will be a liberal education.”*¹⁷

Education for All-Inclusiveness

Basic Education is grounded in the principles of *Sarvodaya*. It “was envisaged as all-inclusive”. It was not oriented to the elite but to the needs and potentialities of the weakest and poorest. Inclusiveness inevitably meant diversity and flexibility. Gandhi wanted universal and compulsory education. Basic education, where learning is correlated with craft, and the social and physical environment; was universally applicable in principle, for the rich and poor, the rural and the urban.

One of the factors that contributed to the collapse of Basic Education, as a national form of education, was on account of its being regarded as an inferior brand of education, fit only for the rural poor. The injustice of this was readily recognized. Instead of introducing Basic Education for all, the norm became a centralized text book education, modified to meet the needs and convenience of the new rulers. *Sarvodaya* not only endeavoured to cross borders of rich and poor, high and low, but also gender. Gandhi stressed the need for women to be educated in order to be autonomous both within the home and in the wider socio-political field. Gandhi was open but inconclusive about the actual curriculum best suited to girls. He strongly advocated schooling up to the age of sixteen, and clearly felt it was as necessary for women as for men to learn to think independently.³⁸

Gandhi further saw schooling as a way to bring together a “live Hindu-Muslim unity.” He condemned any “exclusive spirit” that claimed superiority or a monopoly of Truth. He feared the possibility of sectarian schools and thought the school had a vital role to strengthen a shared culture.

“individual culture stands for synthesis of the different cultures that have come to stay in India, that have influenced individual life, and in their turn have themselves been

influenced by the spirit of the soil. This synthesis will naturally be of the Swadeshi type where each culture is assured of its legitimate place. “³⁹

Gandhi recognized “a rock bottom unity of all religions” and an inevitably fragmented vision that each one holds. He advocated an attitude of openness to and reverence for all Faiths in order to deepen and broaden one’s own Faith. He did not advocate religious education for fear that it would be antagonizing if misunderstood, but he tried to cultivate the values of truth and non-violence that undergirded all faiths. He remarked that to reject any form of religious education would be like “letting a field be fallow, and grow weeds.” He stressed practice, lived example, and the spirit within religion that gives life. He writes : “For me, anything that promotes the practice of the virtues of Truth and Ahimsa is a means to imparting religious education.”⁴⁰

Much of recent education cultivates artificial needs and ignores the deeper purpose of education to give meaning to life and death : “Modern education tends to turn our eyes away from the spirit. The possibilities of the spirit-force or soul-force, therefore, do not appeal to us and our eyes are consequently riveted on the evanescent, transitory, material force. Surely this is the very limit of dull unimaginativeness.”⁴¹

Basic Education placed the school within the context of the ashram, or the village community, which offered a way of life and could not be separated from it. Gandhi wrote : “Education covers the entire field of life; there is nothing in life, however small, which is not the concern of education.”¹² Gandhi saw that values must be part of the whole ethos of the school touching every aspect and not a peripheral, or extra-classroom subject. Elsewhere he writes :

“All our problems have to be solved non-violently. Our arithmetic, our science, our history, will have a non-violent approach and the problems in these subjects will be coloured by nonviolence. “⁴¹

Co-operation and mutual aid were basic to Gandhi’s view of effective living. Competition serves to divide children from one another, whereas co-operation brings people together. Work provides a way of sharing and achieving.

Self-Reliance

Gandhi believed that each person is capable of growing towards self-direction. The maturation process comes from within and is not moulded by forces from without. “A character cannot be built by hands other than your own...Character building must come from within.”⁴⁴ It was Gandhi’s affirmation of each person’s ‘divine spark’ and ability to change that led him to distrust systems or structures as a means to effect lasting social transformation. Real change comes from within and it is in the domain of the individual. The ideal society can only be made up of “full blooded individuals” who have chosen such an ideal.

“If individual liberty goes then surely all is lost, for, if the individual ceases to count, what is left of society? Individual freedom alone can make a man voluntarily surrender himself completely to the service of society. If it is wrested from him, he becomes an

automaton and society is ruined. No society can possibly be built on a denial of individual freedom. It is contrary to the nature of man.”⁴⁵

A man who has true self-reliance, for Vinoba, meant freedom from dependence on others. He wrote : “A man who has true [earning is truly free and independent”. Vinoba understood self-reliance on three levels.⁴⁶ Firstly, on a practical level, i.e., “to do all your work yourselves” like the daily activities of washing and cooking, and to learn the skills of a craft in order to be economically self-sufficient. Secondly, to develop an ability to acquire new knowledge for oneself. Thirdly, to have sufficient knowledge to think independently, and form one’s own judgements. This was possible through reason and discernment.

Reason and Discernment

The practice of Ahimsa requires, according to Gandhi, “the keenest intelligence, and a wide-awake conscience”. He, therefore, saw the teacher’s primary role was to teach children the power to discriminate.

“Pupils should know only to discriminate between what should be received and what rejected....It is the duty of the teacher to teach his pupils discrimination....We are thinking, knowing beings, and we must in this period distinguish truth from untruth, sweet from bitter language, clean from unclean things, and so on..”⁴⁷

Gandhi emphasized the special role of the teacher as a model and guide, but not as a master to impose ideas. In response to a teacher’s letter informing him that he had dutifully complied with “Mahatmaji’s command for the children to spin”, Gandhi replied:

“The worst thing that can happen to boys in a school is to have to render blind obedience to everything that the teacher says. On the contrary, if teachers are to stimulate the reasoning faculty of boys and girls under their care, they must continuously tax their reason and make them think for themselves.”⁴⁸

Vinoba wanted children to “get into the habit of testing everything by the challenge of experience” and said that “to rely on outer ritual or action was mere superstition.”⁴⁹

Gandhi spoke of the Inner Voice as present within each one, but audible only to those willing to undergo “a long and fairly severe course of training”. There was nothing magical or automatic about it. Gandhi saw the power to listen had to be based on “solid rock” and needed the discipline of courage, humility, and fearlessness.

In response to a critic in 1921, who demanded to know whether impudent youngsters can claim authority to be acting on their conscience, Gandhi wrote;

“Willfulness is not conscience.. A child has no conscience....conscience is the ripe fruit of the strictest discipline. Irresponsible youngsters therefore who have never obeyed anything or anybody except their animal instincts have no conscience.... Conscience can reside only in a delicately tuned breast”⁵⁰

However, it could be pointed out that Gandhi recalls various occasions in his autobiography when, as a schoolboy, he himself showed extreme sensitivity to truth, and was prepared to act against authority.

Learning without courage was, for Gandhi, like “a waxen statue, beautiful to look at, but bound to melt at (he least touch of a hot substance.” Courage and fearlessness, for Gandhi, were aspects of self respect, but these had to be grounded in humility. Gandhi recalls his own school experience of how some boys assumed a superiority either on account of cleverness, or physical prowess. The weaker others “realizing their haughtiness segregated them and disregarded them as untouchables.” He concludes that “the first condition, therefore, for individual growth is utmost humility.”⁵¹

Relevance to the Present Situation

The failure of Basic Education to take root does not necessarily render its principles as irrelevant. The alienating, unjust and unbalanced system of education that Gandhi criticized has not significantly changed over the last hundred years. Gandhi never claimed to have found solutions to problems. He writes:

“I have not conceived my mission to be that of a knight-errant, wandering everywhere to deliver people from difficult situations. My humble occupation has been to show people how they can solve their own difficulties.-My work will be finished if I succeed in carrying conviction to the human family, that every man or woman, however weak in body, is the guardian of his or her self-respect and liberty. “⁵²

The Utopian society that Gandhi envisaged has not taken shape, and the present educational system is almost the antithesis of Gandhi’s dream of ***Nai Talim***. However, this does not diminish the underlying vision or effort to create a way of education based on non-violence and Truth. In 1946, when Gandhi was asked about his vision for an independent India, he responded:

“I may be taunted with the retort that this is all Utopian, and, therefore, not worth a single thought. If Euclid’s line, though incapable of being drawn by human agency, has an imperishable value, my picture has its own, for mankind to live. Let India live for this true picture, though never realizable in its completeness. We must have a proper picture of what we want before we can have something approaching it “⁵³

Gandhi’s ‘picture’ of the individual has far reaching consequences in education. The system of Basic Education is not a rigid structure, but as Vinoba suggests, it is “a seed thought”, to challenge afresh the true nature of freedom of the person, and to discover an education that liberates. Krishna Kumar in his talk “Listening to Gandhi” reminds us of Gandhi’s capacity for “imaginative action”, by which he means Gandhi’s readiness to respond to the needs of the immediate place and time in a flexible open way. It is just such a way of looking that is needed to re-evaluate the significance of Basic Education today.

The space for moral autonomy is increasingly being threatened by the pressure of advertising and a managerial style that understands “rationalization” to be in fact denying

people the right and dignity to work and be self-reliant. Gandhi's sustained effort to create a framework for learning, where each person is included, is highly relevant to our present situation, where so many children are being rejected, or failed, because the system is geared to provide the fewest number with greatest material good. Further, the competitive, narrow mono-system of learning is oppressive and, far from facilitating agency and autonomy, fosters indifference and powerlessness, or an aggressive assertiveness.

Basic Education was aimed at strengthening, and not ignoring the inner being. Freedom is not given, but is a potential to be realized. The kind of education a child receives can bring about awareness of choice towards freedom and responsibility. A schooling that commands conformity, and supports uncritical learning and attitudes of dependency, reduces a person's autonomy. At the present time the person is particularly vulnerable to the calculated pressure of the media which sees the person only as a potential consumer. A vital aspect of education is to make the person resistant to these dehumanizing forces by re-affirming self-worth.

In some senses, Gandhi's view of life with its stress on the conscious exercise of the moral will is a narrow and unrealistic one. Gandhi himself remarks, after seeing the bitterness of conflict in Ashram itself, that moral exhortations have a limited impact. Nevertheless, he gives little space to the world of feeling, sympathy, or imagination, which lie at the root of creativity and positive relationship. In contrast, Tagore saw education as a growing awareness of our creative potential. And it is through the creative activity of art that we participate in the world, and simultaneously become most fully ourselves. Through imagination, sympathy with others, and relationship with nature, we discover ourselves in harmony with all existence. It is typical of Gandhi's tendency to a puritanical austerity that the Ashram, for example, grew only vegetables, and no flowers! Yet it is still important to see that Gandhi gave real and practical ways to nurture the growth of the individual and to strengthen resistance to forces that limit, whether they be the media, fashion, marketing forces, fascist tendencies in politics, or fundamentalist elements in religion.

The capacity of both teacher and child to grow and learn is a process that begins from within. Techniques and material resources are secondary to the person. Simplicity often stimulates rather than hampers creativity. The primary resources are the person's varied gifts and the immediate physical and social environment.

Individuality is growth of the whole person. Gandhi's insights on all-round development have been re-formulated in recent work on the richness of multiple intelligences which restores a balance to the circumscribed view of only one particular kind of learning. Gandhi's stress was on doing rather than "idle thinking" and seeing work and study as inseparable; and responsibility and creativity as inter-connected.

It is important to explore ways of fostering co-operation rather than perpetuating competition in order to create a non-violent society. Co-operation is important both for moral and intellectual growth. Education affects a person's attitude towards taking responsibility to create a just, more caring and more sensitive society. Institutions can foster or deaden that innate sensitivity.

Exclusiveness is violent by nature while inclusiveness promotes harmony beyond the school experience. Schools can play a vital role by integrating into children's lives

experiences of acceptance of differences. Such a diversity includes those of different abilities, different communities and economic backgrounds and cultures. Diversity is potentially enriching rather than threatening to identity, and the school is in a position to affirm and respect differences or re-enforce them in a negative way.

Learning should be oriented towards fostering growth in self-reliance and self-direction in practical and mental ways. It is in helping children to think independently, critically and creatively and to give access to tools of knowledge that children are prepared for responsible citizenship. Beyond facts of information and technical skills it is essential to recognize the meaning of all learning. Gandhi writes:

*“True education is that which helps us to know the Atman, our true self, God and Truth. To acquire this knowledge some persons may feel the need for a study of literature, some for a study of physical sciences and others art But every branch of knowledge should have as its goal the knowledge of the self.”*⁵⁴

At the end of Gandhi’s life he was acutely aware of his failure to effect lasting change and to bring about the social transformation he longed for. He spoke of himself, “I know that mine today is a voice in the wilderness”.⁵⁵ Yet it was precisely at this juncture,

when others might have withdrawn in bitterness that Gandhi exercised his “miracle” at Calcutta by acting out of such a deep sense of responsibility that he was willing to risk and sacrifice his life. Lord Mountbatten described Gandhi’s achievement of overcoming the hysteria, panic and paralysis of the riot-torn city as the power of a “one man boundary force”. Gandhi’s belief in each person’s capacity for fearless self-direction for the good of the whole was the ultimate aim of Gandhi’s education. He lived this vision and died for it rather than forsake it.

Notes

- 1) Gandhi M.K., *Experiments with Truth : An Autobiography*. Introduction, Penguin Books, 1982, p. 15.
- 2) *Harijan* (Weekly), 28.4.1932, p.2.
- 3) *Harijan*, 6.5.1933, p.4.
- 4) Gandhi to B.S. Moonje, 14.5.1927, Gandhi Papers, as quoted in *The Individual and Society*, by Man Mohan Choudhury.
- 5) Maslow A.M., as quoted in *The Individual and Society*, by M.M. Choudhuri.
- 6) Young/noVa, 9.12.1926, p.432.
- 7) *Harijan*, 27-5-1939,
- 8) *Young India*, October 1928.
- 9) Gandhi M.K., *Ashram Observances in Action*, Navajivan Publishing House, 1959, p.36.
- 10) Tendulkar D.G., *Mahatma* Vol. IV., Publication Divn., Govt. of India, p.103.
- 11) Desai Mahadev, *Diary of MahadevDesai*, Navajivan, 1953, entry dated July 1 1932, p, 247.

- 12) Ibid.
- 13) *Young India*, Nov. 1931.
- 14) Gandhi M.K., *Collected Works*, Vol. 27, Publication Divn., Govt. of India, p.448.
- 15) *Navajivan*, 25.5.1924, p.806.
- 16) Gandhi M.K., *Collected Works*, Vol. 48,p.387.
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1

Viability of Small Schools

Recently the days in the village where I live were marked morning and evening by the monotonous thud of a drum. This noise was the accompaniment to the children of the nearby school practising drill. It sounded ominous and militaristic and shattered the stillness of the countryside. It seemed to me like a symbol of all that is most objectionable and joyless in the so-called normal school with its drive towards uniformity and standardization. It convinced me that despite the valid criticisms and real problems of alternative schools there is a validity in the small school offering a clear challenge to the destructive and oppressive elements in the normal education.

Small schools, being presumably outside the system and unrecognised, are liberated from the rigidities and limitations of the normal school in their structure, syllabus and size. This freedom gives the possibility to evolve a more relevant type of schooling based on the child's experience and particular environment. Thus in the school I work in we have largely dispensed with text books and have tried to develop a syllabus that is related to the children's lives, and within that loose structure to give space for expression, curiosity and critical awareness.

In our situation the focus on learning which naturally emerges is an involvement in the various fundamental processes of work that the children see around them such as farming, house building, the making of pots, weaving and the work of the blacksmith. Through the children's practical study they become aware of our interdependence on materials - wood, clay, iron etc., - and a sense of responsibility towards the materials of the earth. Our school is situated in a village environment and in the school we are very conscious of the seasons and the dependence of our lives on the sun, the wind and the rain.

The proximity of the village to Bangalore - 30 Kms - has meant that in ten years the village has undergone an enormous change, from being an agricultural based economy to an increasing dependence on the city. There is a growing tendency to sell land and seek employment in the now accessible industrial estates which fringe the outskirts of Bangalore. The children are being exposed to changes in every aspect of their lives. I feel the school has an important role to help make them more conscious of the effects of the urban-industrial tidal wave that is sweeping over us all.

Smallness is not the only criterion for determining whether a school is more creative or not, though it is surely true that large scale institutions cannot easily give space for self-discovery. There is a tendency for the large institution to function by moulding and reducing people to fit their own requirements. Smallness is one factor in developing a situation where children can learn without surrendering their autonomy and integrity. However, smallness to be meaningful must include respect for personhood, and belief in the growth of the self-awareness of an individual.

Small schools are a necessary part of the whole movement which seeks to “creatively disintegrate” large institutions, depersonalised technology and mass movements which seek to dominate every aspect of our lives - political, economic, social, physical and spiritual. Small schools can be an effort to evolve a way of life that is in harmony with itself, with community, and with the earth. Smallness allows for a flexible atmosphere, which minimizes authoritarian and hierarchical structures.

Small schools also can facilitate sharing and co-operation as against the cut-throat competition which seems an inevitable outcome of herding children together. The encouragement of individuality is very different from the obsessive preoccupation in being within the “first three” of the class. In our school we do not have many tests, but give the children the opportunity to share and answer questions on work they have done with other children. Also, much of the work is executed on a group basis, for example, wall charts, making a common book, friezes etc., where attitudes of responsibility and tolerance are a necessary part.

It is an unfortunate irony that alternative schools seem to serve the two extremes in our society - the privileged elite and the most deprived. The elite can afford to bypass the system, and mainstream schooling effectively bypasses the underprivileged.

Alternative schools have the possibility to offer something to the so-called misfits, the drop-outs, the slow learners, the handicapped children and the economically deprived. The small school can think of an education beyond the limited information-feeding, exam-oriented learning. If schooling is concerned with all aspects of the person - head, hand and heart - and the teachers believe that each child has the potential for being a whole person, then it becomes a process in which no one fails or is rejected as insufficient. Vocational training, for example, could be developed as a real option to the seemingly single path of the S.S.L.C. examination conducted by the Board set up for the purpose by the Government.

However, having listed a number of positive aspects of alternative schools, there are certain basic problems. I do not know, and that is why I was particularly interested to share my experience with others working in the field of alternative schools, whether these problems are experienced by other small schools, or whether these have arisen in the particular situation in which I am working, and somehow are peculiar to the social environment in which we live, on the outskirts of a big, and fast expanding industrial city.

One basic difficulty is the lack of parental involvement in the basic initiative which inspires our school. The children who come to our school are largely from Dalit backgrounds. One of the reasons the children come to our school is just because the parents were not sufficiently motivated to send them to the normal Government school. This lack of interest partly stems from economic factors, in the sense that even young children can be an asset at home in supplementing the family income. It also comes from

a fairly accurate evaluation of the normal schooling system, on the part of the parents, who realize that this education is not in any way helpful to their needs, and the benefits offered by this school system are negligible, either now or in the future, for the vast majority who are socially and culturally marginalized. Often it has been the children's own determination and interest in their own education that has sustained them through our school, for they have received little encouragement or motivation from their own parents.

This lack of involvement of the parents is indicative of a deeply rooted problem. Very often alternative schools have been initiated by people outside the local community's experience and history of oppression, and come from a vastly different cultural background. Parents cannot easily identify with or understand the outsider's well-formulated ideas of what education consists of and where its aim lies. It is easy to reduce parents to the role of an obstacle and to assume a position of superiority in pronouncing what is good for the children, but children are not hybrid plants to be artificially cultivated according to the latest educational theory.

Educational systems do not exist in a vacuum, but mirror the society's and family's expectations and values. Traditionally, for example, in the tribal situation to be seen in the Murias of Madhya Pradesh, the "Gotul" arose naturally out of the tribe's needs. Adolescents were given a good deal of autonomy, but they were also subjected to the strict discipline of learning to dance, perform rituals, memorise the oral history of the tribe through poems and stories. In addition, they were prepared physically for the rigours of hunting and survival. In other words, their training was ideally suited to the practical and spiritual needs of the tribe.

We still see a parallel kind of learning that exists in rural communities side by side the official school system, whereby even small children acquire practical skills and absorb useful knowledge to enable them to contribute to the family's economic survival. Most traditional crafts and agricultural practices, for example, are learned by children through an apprentice system which has proved adequate for centuries.

However, in the present situation, the traditional village is facing a rapidly changing, if not disintegrating, society. It can no longer be self-sufficient or autonomous, does not have the resources to create its own learning system which will equip the young for the needs of a modern India. Thus the villager or the tribal is forced to rely on the government school system which is, in effect, intent on only serving the small powerful minority, and which is also only oriented to the urban reality. There is a vital need for an alternative schooling which, while taking into account the changing cultural and social situation in modern India, still addresses itself to the specific conditions of the rural poor.

The urgency of this situation becomes apparent when we consider that the one-sided knowledge imparted and the values of competition and exploitation instilled into the young by the dominant schooling system are beginning to threaten the very future of the environment. Ecological destruction is an ever growing reality in much of rural India.

What do we imagine the alternative school is preparing the child for, and how far do we take into account the parents' and children's own expectations? How far do we impose our ideas because we happen to be in a position to do so? These are painful questions, and difficult to answer.

In one sense it can be argued that the alternative schools that have sprung up in the last hundred years or so, from Tolstoy's to J. Krishnamurti's, have not been based on a popular felt need. Yet all these experiments have been of significance. The beginnings of change have often been inspired from outside because poverty is not only an economic insufficiency but a powerlessness to analyse or change crippling structures.

It is a delicate balance to believe in what we are doing and yet to retain an openness to a growing consciousness on the part of others who do not want to be conditioned or fashioned by some educational idea. Theodore Roszak in his book *Person / Planet* quotes Tolstoy: "Those who assume the right to educate will educate in their own interest - at the expense of the Child's autonomy..... Nobody has the right to educate, but children have a right to be educated." These words may be equally pertinent to the most conservative as to the most radical as, essentially, education is not a process of indoctrination, but must trust in the person's own ability to determine his/her life.

However, the lack of involvement of parents in the education of their children means practically that there is very little to support the child's experience of school, with its stress on creativity and wholeness, beyond the physical boundaries of the school. The school, though relating to the child's physical environment, and often to the child's experience, is in many ways questioning the values of the existing village structures and family patterns of behaviour, e.g., ideas of individual responsibility, attitudes towards equality of sexes, or sympathy towards people of other communities or religions.

At the same time, there are certain values in the village, albeit changing and increasingly threatened by growing urbanization, that would be re-enforced by school, for example, a sense of harmony and respect for nature or a certain tolerance and caring of people of different abilities and ages.

Nevertheless, in many respects the school represents an alternative way of thinking which is in some sense alienating the child from the village, or at least can become a source of tension. The fact that the children are not supported outside the school situation has, on occasion, put the teachers almost inextricably in a parental role with an emotional dependency on the part of the child. Later on, the child, on leaving school, cannot fall back on the family or 'influence' to secure certain jobs or training and so has little choice but to rely on the contacts, encouragement and even financial aid of the school.

Our school has tended to assume that we are dealing with a group of individuals, and these children, given sufficient skills and self-confidence, will be able to carve their own meaningful niche in the larger society. However, increasingly, I feel that this view does not sufficiently encompass the political dimensions and the very real harsh social realities that children have to confront, such as caste differences, economic inequalities, sex discrimination, and family expectations. Our school, until very recently, has been an isolated experiment not touched by and not touching any other area of development in the village, and this seems to make the school rather ineffective as an agent of change and protest against the injustices and constrictions of an overtly traditional society.

Economic viability is a hazy idea, because it depends on what you are measuring or comparing and contrasting to. All criticisms of the expense or impracticability of a small school with high staff-pupil ratio seem to evaporate if one thinks, for example, of the enormous amount spent every minute on producing armaments. I feel that it is more a

question of where our priorities lie, and where and how our society chooses to spend its resources.

However, I must admit that we have had an economic problem in meeting the needs of the older children who might require more highly qualified staff. For example, it was difficult to justify employing a science teacher for four children. Partly, we ourselves are products of a particular form of education, and few of us are sufficiently equipped to be competent in all fields.

In the school I work in we have not had to face serious shortages of funds, and I think there is a danger of being consumerist even in our enthusiasm to provide for the children. I feel there must be a discretion in using funds that is in keeping with a whole view of our attitude towards using the earth's resources.

One more question which troubles me is legal viability. In a sense, small schools can exist because of the inefficiency of the government machinery to enforce compulsory attendance at school. This lack of surveillance means that people can start, for example, English medium primary schools with no concern other than as a money-making proposition. Could alternative schools work together to ensure some sort of recognition that would make our position less vulnerable?

To return to my first point, small schools are a challenge to the system, but are they often an inaudible challenge? How effective are they in changing anything within the crippling structures of normal schooling which are so proficient in rejecting or failing the vast majority of students?

I often feel so preoccupied with the daily concerns and practicalities of teaching that there is little energy or effort directed to wider concerns. I feel that we have to explore how as individuals and groups we can begin to spread our concern for the oppression of children within school walls and outside.

There are many ways of working for radical change within and without the system in people's movements, through political and legal structures, but I do believe that there is also a place for small schools which endeavour to keep in sight a vision of nothing less than wholeness. The small school exists in a creative tension which is not secure in the fixed identity of the institutions, but which is organically evolving and struggling sometimes against great odds. The small school that is concerned with people and not marks, with reflection and awareness and not mere memorization, with responsibility towards the earth's resources not irrational exploitation, is viable because we are becoming increasingly and painfully conscious that the other -the so-called normal school - is part of a force that is rapidly producing a world that itself will not be viable.

Sustainable Education

Recently I had the opportunity of visiting two acres of land developed along the lines of Permaculture. The small farm contradicted almost every theory based on the modern so-called scientific system of agriculture, yet there was an overriding impression of luxuriant, richly variant growth at every level from the ground covering to the dense foliage of the tree tops.

The initial misconception of unplanned chaos was soon dispelled by our enthusiastic guide who introduced us to the unique contribution of individual plants. In contrast to the common pattern of even rows with well-spaced trees he pointed out the unexpected clusters of trees planted in circles round a low pit of organic manure which provides maximum support and reduces the need for watering. He discussed the necessity of starting from the bottom upwards and the need to 'grow' soil that could maintain plant life with the minimum use of inputs. It became apparent that there was a highly conscious use of inputs based on an insight into traditional methods in agriculture along with a close observation of natural eco-systems. Briefly put, Permaculture stems from a particular attitude towards life that seeks to work with nature rather than against it.

Certain key concepts of Permaculture such as valuing diversity, the cultivation of resilience and self-reliance as opposed to dependency, and a sensitivity towards our responsibility not to exploit and degrade our home, the earth, led me to extend the idea into the field of education.

In many respects the modern system of agriculture which is largely based on commercial interest and which is leading to the destruction and irreversible pollution of natural eco-systems is comparable to the present crisis in education. In schools and colleges there is a stress on short-term gains that profit a few at the cost of systematically eliminating the larger, weaker sections of society. There is a 'mono-culture' re-enforced by a centralized examination system whereby the majority will inevitably fail, while a privileged minority maintain their position through direct and indirect forms of violence. The violence is expressed both in institutionalized oppression of the weak and in the present escalation of sporadic destruction of life and property, often apparently related to communal issues, but may be having a deeper root in an unchannelled frustration.

Sustainable Education through Non-violence

Contrary to the 19th century view of 'survival of the fittest' that had its basis in the theories of Darwin but was then crudely applied to justify racism, colonialism, and exploitation, it is becoming increasingly evident that a world founded on the preservation of self-interest is, in fact, suicidal. Gandhi, drawing on the ideas of the Russian anarchist Count Kropotkin, advocated 'mutual aid' and non-violence as the necessary and only realistic base for the lasting world. Non-violence and sustainability are inextricably interwoven, for violence is revealed as an illusory force destined to exhaust itself in destruction.

Gandhi repeatedly stressed that means and ends are convertible terms and cannot be viewed separately : "The means may be likened to a seed, the end to a tree, and there is the same inviolable connection."

If we are imagining a society of individuals who both have the freedom to be creative and personally fulfilled and yet are willing to make the necessary adjustment to the needs of the wider community, including the fragility of the natural world, then non-violence would be the logical 'means' to realize it.

Education through Co-operation

J.C. Kumarappa, the Gandhian economist, developed similar ideas to Permaculture in the area of industry in the 1940s. He proposed an 'economy of permanence' that was neither predatory nor parasitical in nature. The basic premise rests on the non-exploitation of human labour and a respectful use of the earth's resources where mutual aid is the prime concern.

The idea of making co-operation rather than competition the basis of schooling is a necessary shift if we agree that competition is a destructive force in society. Schools often 'weed out' the weaker pupils in order to achieve success in terms of children passing examinations. In contrast, a school based on mutual aid would endeavour to support the weak even 'unto the last', and all would be included. Children, for example, could be encouraged to share and work together on projects in an atmosphere of acceptance and respect for the other. It is a process of learning how to balance one another's skills, temperaments, strengths, and weaknesses.

Schools are usually stratified in such a way that there is little interaction between children of different ages and sometimes of different abilities. A school could model itself on the family's ability to integrate the strengths and disabilities of each member so that there is a sense of caring and responsibility towards the other. Practically, this could involve children in making things for each other such as simple reading materials. Older children could also be assigned specific tasks to do with younger or less able children to help them become proficient in particular skills.

Teachers often feel that a competitive spirit is the impetus for learning and the main motivation. It is important to encourage a real sense of achievement in acquiring skills of all kinds but this does not necessarily mean comparisons with others. Real confidence in one's own ability to master a variety of practical and academic skills and also an ability to share and impart those skills to others could be a more meaningful sense of pride than mere rivalry.

Diversity as part of Sustainable Education

Related to the idea of co-operation and an inclusive pattern of education is the recognition of the healthy richness of diversity. The present deterioration of the environment is threatening the very survival of innumerable species of plants and animals. The crisis has largely arisen from a misguided sense of superiority and a failure to acknowledge 'the web of life' and our essential connectedness with all that is.

Schools seem to be intent on cultivating vulnerable, ill-adapted hybrids and streamlining children into a mould whose only success is measured by examination marks. Can we think of a school allowing for and encouraging the diversity of gifts and varied potentials of each child, where creativity and originality are fostered, and standardized responses are not demanded, also where intelligence is not reduced to one aspect of mental ability but is broadened to include, for example, an ability to empathize with others, or the co-ordination of the body, or a sensitivity towards rhythm and sound?

Diversity includes the recognition of a wide variety of environments. A child's relationship to a particular place and his awakening to the beauty and complexity of it, which is a vital dimension of true learning, cannot be contained within the generalized, disembodied text book. Children's learning must be built initially on their direct

experience of a specific place. This provides a foundation from which to explore the rich diversity of other environments and people's varied efforts to adapt to them.

Sustainability and the use of local resources

One of the seminal ideas both in Permaculture and in Kumarappa's 'economy of permanence' is an insistence on the use of locally available materials and a limited and cautious use of non-renewable forms of energy and non-recycleable materials.

There is a tendency to treat children in schools as though they were suffering under hostile, desert conditions with little potential for growth. To carry the analogy further, inputs have to be applied indefinitely in order to cultivate a crop of plants dependent on a network of artificial support systems.

In Permaculture there is a stress on restoring the inherent fertility of the soil. This requires a conscious use of inputs that strengthens the soil's capacity to be resilient and does not create a chain of dependency.

In considering the resources immediately available, maybe, the most obvious though frequently the most crushed is the inherent vitality of the child. The very physical structure of a school building seems often designed to limit movement, and to shut out the world of nature. There is usually little possibility for children to explore or enjoy nature because space and time are not given for such activities. School is often thought of as a separate entity from life and so cuts itself off from life giving forces.

Another 'local resource' is the immediate environment, which is largely ignored. The physical environment is potentially the richest source of knowledge offering the possibility to explore, observe, listen, and sort experience, so that the past and the present and the complex web of relationships in nature of soil to plant, to air, to sun and living creatures can be appreciated.

The immediate cultural setting with its treasure of a rich oral tradition of stories, songs, and dances, and above all the language (as opposed to an unhealthy stress on English or Hindi when it is not the child's mother tongue), also contribute to sustainable sources of energy. 'Cultural setting' is not something static that necessarily implies an ancient storehouse of folklore unchangingly handed down over the centuries. At present we are becoming increasingly aware of the impact of mass media on children's lives. There is simultaneously an erosion of the variety of cultural heritages which are tending to be relegated to the indignity of being tourist attractions rather than a lived culture.

Entertainment is more and more being standardized by commercial interests and taken out of the hands of the community. It is problematic to know how to respond to the cultural experience of children when one feels it is at variance with sustainable values, but the reality of the force of mass media can neither be ignored nor capitulated to.

Sustainable Inputs

Permaculture is not against inputs but it does recognize the danger of an addiction to inputs. In education it is a delicate process of considering how far inputs support life skills which encourage self-reliance, creativity, and productive work, which will provide a means of livelihood.

Life skills cover a vast range of practical and more abstract tools to live meaningfully. Life skills might include the ability to use ‘tools’ to have an access to knowledge, or learn practical skills such as stitching or carpentry to promote self-sufficiency, or to have an awareness of the body in order that it can be kept healthy through wholesome nutrition, hygiene, and simple remedies. It might also mean the conscious building up of confidence, for example, through drama, which would enable an adult not to be vulnerable in a society that is quick to oppress the weak or ill-informed. Life skills also include a growing sense of one’s particular inner ‘centre’ and identity in order not to be swept away by destructive forces. Such an awareness might be fostered through valuing the particular expression of a child through painting, sculpting, dancing, or writing.

Apart from useful or productive skills there is a need to develop an art in deriving fulfilment from non-material resources. According to The State of the *World Report of 1991*, ‘In a fragile biosphere the ultimate fate of humanity may depend on whether we can cultivate deeper sources of fulfilment founded on a widespread ethic of limiting consumption and finding non-material enrichment....’

In this sense sustainable education is inseparable from sustainable life where the spiritual dimension and material dimension are wedded. Without this unity decay, imbalance, and sickness to the point of extinction are an ever-increasing threat to life.

In practical ways rather than verbal admonishings the school should consciously encourage simplicity and a minimum use of costly materials. Teachers should endeavour to create space and time for children to be alone and silent, to enjoy nature without damaging it etc.

Another fundamental aspect of Permaculture is to be non-exploitative towards materials, the environment and to another’s labour. In school this could be practically expressed through children being encouraged to maintain their physical surroundings and to meet some of their basic needs through gardening and simple tailoring.

Bill Mollison in his writings on Permaculture says that as a design system there is nothing new but that “it arranges what was always there in a different way”. It is part of a process of becoming conscious and revitalizing a traditional pattern re-enforced by an analysis that draws on a wider experience. Many of the values we have discussed such as co-operation, sharing, diversity, self-reliance and consciousness of our interdependence with the whole of existence could be described as traditional values and our common heritage of human wisdom. However, while it is no longer feasible to imitate traditional patterns, for the context has changed, it is our present challenge to ‘arrange what was always there in a different way’.

The Treasure House of Stories

The theme of our next meeting arose rather spontaneously out of the discussion on Tagore and Gandhi, but then what was actually implied or expected by such a topic was left for each to explore. ‘Spirituality and Education’ is not an easy subject. May be it is important at the outset to distinguish between religious structures, which have so often proved oppressive, and spirituality which could be understood as affecting every aspect of our life, including school, as it is concerned with a search for meaning, a search to

understand and reflect on the human person's capacity to love and to hate, to create and to destroy, and a growing sense of awareness of self in relation to the wider community.

I am enclosing a small essay on the relevance of stories which may, at first sight, seem unrelated to the topic, but, may be, could lead to a discussion on :

- 1) *How do we introduce children to different levels of truth and meaning?*
- 2) *How are religious truths expressed and communicated?*
- 3) *Can stories and the creative arts be a means to awaken a sensitivity towards Truth and a sympathy towards others?*
- 4) *What has been our own experience of meaningful stories?*

The reference here is to the annual meeting of an informal Alternative Schools Network from South India.

Other questions that occur to me are:

- 1) *How do we celebrate festivals in a meaningful way? Can festival be a way of learning and sharing about other religious traditions?*
- 2) *Do we give children space to be quiet and alone? Do we provide an atmosphere and the possibility for children to be creative, and to express their own experiences and concerns?*
- 3) *Do our schools isolate children from the wider concerns of society by stressing their individual growth? Can individual growth be understood as an evolving capacity to enter sympathetically into the experience of others?*
- 4) *"The message frequently given in schools has been 'vital preoccupations and the most deeply felt moments of life have no place in school, which is reserved for school matters'." (Harold Rosen, The Language of Primary School Children) Can we share our comments on this statement?*
- 5) *Do we tend to separate factual, scientific truth from other levels of truth? How can we foster a sense of wonder and reverence for life within the whole curriculum ?*
- 6) *How far does the school environment reflect our concerns with materials and nature? How far are children encouraged to cooperate in the creation of their own environment?*

There is a Sufi story told of how a poor farmer had journeyed to Delhi to beg for some financial help from the great Sufi saint

Hazrat Nizamuddin Aulia. After some days of staying at the home of the holy man, the peasant realized that he was not going to receive the money he had hoped for. Accordingly, he went to the Saint to bid him farewell, but to his surprise and confusion Hazrat Nizamuddin Aulia gave him a gift of his own well-worn slippers. The poor man, disappointed and dispirited, began the long journey back to his village taking, rather reluctantly, the holy man's slippers wrapped in his turban. He was not consoled by imagining the mocking laughter of fellow villagers which would surely greet him on his return.

On the way he met a richly dressed disciple of Hazrat Nizamuddin Aulia who halted before him, sensing the fragrance of his master about the farmer. When the rich man discovered that, indeed, the farmer was carrying something of the Holy Man, he offered to give his horse, a bag of gold, and the very silk coat he was wearing, in exchange for “the blessed slippers”.

The farmer, thinking he had come face to face with a rich but genial madman, thought himself lucky to make such a fine bargain, and gladly gave the worthless slippers for the riches. The story concludes that each felt that they had gained the greater treasure.

This story, no doubt, could be understood at many levels, but among other things it does illustrate how we often fail to recognize treasure in any other sense than material benefit, and how often we do not value what is apparently ordinary. The role of the story in school, which one could compare to the well-worn slippers of the Sufi saint, is often considered peripheral or merely entertaining. It is often seen as a diversion or distraction from the serious process of learning, and is therefore not valued.

Charles Dickens in his novel *Hard Times* satirizes an over-rational system of education which became prevalent in Europe in the 19th century, but remains much in evidence today. The novel opens with the headmaster addressing his fellow-teachers:

“Now, what I want is Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts; nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my own children, and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, Sir!...”

The story unfolds to reveal the disastrous consequences and severe limitations of such a system. This over-rational approach to learning was drawn from real life. For example, an Anglican clergyman developed a method which he termed, without humorous intent, “The Steam Engine of the Moral World”. Morality or ethics can be taught by a prescribed set of maxims and dogmas re-enforced by threats of punishment or promises of reward. Alternatively, by shifting conceptual generalizations into the concrete images of the story, and so creating a space for dialogue between the teacher, or parent, and the child, inviting the child to ally himself or herself with good forces.

The power of the fairy tale, the parable or the legend lies in its capacity to go beyond the fact and the finite. It is the language of art, poetry and the story that often transforms, through the active imagination of the listener and the teller, the thought and the thing, the ideal and the image, into something new and hitherto unknown.

In the Arabian story of *A Thousand and One Nights* the very act of listening to the story proves to be healing, for the murderous hate of the king is gradually transformed to an enduring love for Scheherazade, the teller of the stories. The stories save the life of the Story-teller, the future of the kingdom, and restores the king to sanity. Such stories that somehow reveal the innermost core of the different characters and are concerned with the complexity of human nature, address the open-ended question of “Who am I?” or “What is meaningful?” or “How am I to relate to the world around?” or “How do I contend with evil forces in the world?”

There is a Jewish story which touches on the heart of the meaning and value of the story. "Fairy Tale and Truth went together for a long journey. One day Truth said to Fairy Tale, 'How come, whenever we are seen together, people receive you with open arms and leave me outside? What could we do about this?' At that moment Fairy Tale gave its clothes to Truth, and from that day on Truth walks on earth dressed in the clothes of the Fairy Tale."

It is through the story that the child is often enabled to move towards maturity and a greater sense of responsibility, because the story is not merely abstract, disembodied moral injunctions, but it is an invitation to explore and make the story a part of himself or herself. It could be understood as a way of connecting the outer world to the inner world in a process of reflection and so brings about, albeit unconsciously, a state of integration. A response to a story often draws together the intellect, the imagination, and the emotions.

There are, of course, many kinds of stories, and many stories lack substance or depth, and serve only to entertain or impart skills with little attention to content or meaning. There are stories that are constructed to make facts of information more palatable. There is the fable, often overlaid with a clear-cut moral injunction, and there are folk tales, legends, parables, fairy tales and myths.

There is also in the Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist and Christian traditions the short and pithy story that often jolts the listener into seeing afresh. Such stories in a subtle way reveal to us our follies. One story, for example, describes how Nasruddin returns to his village from the capital. He impresses the eager listeners who gather round him by telling them that the king spoke personally to him. The villagers disperse to spread the news. Only one old man remains behind to question Nasruddin further. He asks, "And what did the king say to you?" Nasruddin replies that while he was standing in the middle of the road a royal chariot advanced towards him. The king leant out and yelled at him "Get out of my way!"

Stories may work on many levels: conscious, preconscious or unconscious, and one writer has compared the story-teller to a sower of seeds. Some seeds may fall on fertile ground and quickly spring up and take root. Other seeds may lie dormant until the time is ripe to grow, and yet others may fall on waste ground only to be re-absorbed and re-formed, for nothing is ever lost.

Certain stories have their own dynamics, and a person can only digest with the intellect what he or she is ready for. The process cannot be forced or accelerated. For example, the story for a child may be drained of all meaning if the teacher overlays or crushes the experience of the story with moral judgements and an over-rationalization. The story sometimes gently makes accessible what might otherwise be unbearable. The twelfth century Sufi poet, Rumi, pictures this in his poem 'Story Water':

*A story is like water
that you heat for your bath.
It takes messages between the fire
and your skin. It lets them meet,*

*and it cleans you!
Very few can sit down
in the middle of the fire itself
like a salamander or Abraham.
We need intermediaries.
A feeling of fullness comes
but usually it takes some bread to bring it
Beauty surrounds us,
but usually we need to be walking
in a garden to know it.
The body itself is a screen
to shield and partially reveal
the light that's blazing
inside your presence.
Water, stories, the body,
all the things we do, are mediums
that hide and show what's hidden.
Study them,
and enjoy thus being washed
with a secret we sometimes know
and then not.*

(The Essential Rumi, translation by Coleman Barks with John Moyne, Harper and Collins, 1995, p. 1 71.)

Bruno Bettelheim in his book *The Uses of Enchantment* argues that the fairy tale, far from tempting the child to withdraw from the challenge of the so-called real world, in fact, prepares the child by building the inner resources and so provides the very means to cope with the harsh reality of the world, with its confusion of good and evil.

The fairy tale invariably deals with the situation where the hero is forced to go out into the world, and discover a level of independency despite experiences of loss, rejection and weakness. The fairy tale is marked by an underlying optimism whereby the hero, in a courageous struggle against dark forces, is never defeated or crushed. The protagonist encounters aggression, selfishness, and brutality as inevitably as light and shadow, pain and joy that are part of our own lives. Yet the experience of loss, death and rejection often prove to be the turning point towards a deeper understanding and ultimately leads to a more meaningful relationship with others, and the physical world around.

The child's fear of the unknown, the dark and the dangerous, is often given shape and form in the fairy tale or myth... Bruno Bettelheim suggests that the child is actually reassured by the feeling that in some way such terrors have been lived through and that

he or she is not alone. Not only is the meeting of dark and light, good and evil, universal and local therefore shared, but very often in the story there is a friend and helper, animate or inanimate, that supports and guides and somehow re-enforces the sense of the triumph of good, despite dark forces.

The proverbial grandparent who kept the child spellbound with stories is, alas, becoming rarer and so the school may be the child's main resource from which to build a fund of stories. As parents and teachers, we can choose to share with children stories that have added to and continue to widen our own experience and sense of meaningfulness. Intuitively we may gauge what is relevant and right at particular times for particular children, and draw on our own and others' treasure house of stories, and so bring alive in our relationship with the child stories of treasure lost and found, stories of journeys that mirror our own passage through life and stories of quests that give shape to our innermost yearnings. There are stories that seem to contradict and turn upside down notions of success and power to reaffirm values of honesty, purity and humility, which are frequently highlighted through the perceptive eyes of the simpleton, the fool, and the apparently weak.

The story of Dhruva is a powerful tale for many young children, and describes how a boy moves beyond the intrigues and jealousies of the palace, and the adult world, on a search to meet Lord Vishnu for himself. Dhruva travels through the dark, labyrinthine forest fearless in the face of wild beasts, until he is finally acknowledged for his constancy, and himself becomes a sign for seekers and travellers in the form of the pole star.

A poignant reminder of the varied gifts we have, and our attitude to them, is to be found in the French medieval story of the tumbler who joins a monastery only to discover that he apparently has nothing to offer the community in the way of useful skills, and that he is despised because he lacks formal education. Finally, in secret and with great devotion and attentive-ness, he perfects his skills as an acrobat because he knows this is the way he can give truly and wholly of himself. By chance this is revealed to the whole community, and finally they recognize the tumbler's true sanctity and worth.

Each of us is marked consciously or otherwise by stones that have shaped our way of thinking and being. Mahatma Gandhi recalls the lasting impact of the stories of Shravana's devotion to his parents, and Harishchandra's adherence to Truth. Both of which he wrote of in adulthood as still "living realities to me". He writes in his autobiography of the questions he remembers asking himself as a child: "Why should not all be truthful like Harishchandra?" and adds: "To follow Truth and go through all the ordeals Harishchandra went through was the one ideal it inspired in me." For each one the story is something different and may be still in the process of being discovered; but it becomes an integral part of our identity and self.

Laurens van der Post describes in *The Heart of the Hunter* his meeting with the Bushmen in the Kalahari Desert, and their relationship to their stories. His comment relates to a story which tells of the marriage between a herdsman and "a daughter of the sky." The woman is trapped by the herdsman when she visits the earth. She agrees to the marriage but on condition that her husband will not look into the covered basket that she has brought with her. Irresistibly the man is drawn to the basket but when he opens it he finds it empty. The "daughter of the sky" hears his mocking laughter and disappears for

ever because of his folly and blindness. It is only through his loss that the hardsman begins to realise the riches of the seemingly empty basket. Laurens van der Post says:

“For the story was the greatest of his containers of first spirit; it was like the basket wherein his own lady of the starry sky stored the rare and dynamic intimations of his soul. Unlike that primitive man who lost his own lady because he lifted the lid off his basket, and declared it empty, the Bushman knew his own was filled to the brim with things without which his life would have no meaning, and his soul wither and die. He knew intuitively that without a story one had no clan or family; without a story of one’s own, no individual life; without a story of stories, no-life giving continuity with the beginning, and therefore no future. Life for him was living a story: he kept the lid of this particular basket firmly shut, out of fear that some superior stranger, lifting the lid, would steal his treasure, either by persuading him into believing that the basket was empty, or making a mockery of what he saw within it He had good reason for fear.”

(The Heart of the Hunter, Penguin, 1965, p. 156.)

There are many forces at work at present which undermine the value of the story, including readymade entertainment and consumerism, confirming the Bushman’s fears of a cynicism that destroys not only the story but a whole world-view along with it.

Festivals and stories have often been closely interwoven, but there is a danger now of the story being forgotten, and market forces taking over the festival. Festivals are the time for the community to come together and celebrate through the song, the dance, and the story, but increasingly the element of celebration and wonder is being eroded, and the people persuaded that it is in buying and lavish spending that the keeping of the festival consists. There is a story itself about the reluctant listener. A.K. Ramanujan in *Folk Tales From India* tells of an old woman who searches far and wide to find an audience for her story. Everyone she approaches claims to be busy and tells her that they cannot spare the time to listen to mere tales. At last she persuades a salt-seller to pause in her work. The salt seller herself becomes distracted but her unborn child listens attentively from within the womb. The knowledge the unborn child gains are to bring her wisdom and good fortune throughout her life.

Kapila Vatsyayan, in an essay entitled ‘**Ecology and Myth**’, has explored how myths, art and ritual were the means by which a holistic world-view of ecological balance was expressed. Underlying all these stories is the oft forgotten principle that human beings are but one part of living nature, and are totally dependent on the whole environment, animate and inanimate, that sustains the community. She reminds the reader that such veneration does not stem from an animistic primitive fear, but reflects an essential wisdom that is as relevant now as in ancient times, when myths first took shape. Having traced various myths related to each of the five elements of water, earth, air, fire and space, she concludes that the lessons to be learnt are “non-pollution, discipline, restraint, awareness of inter-dependability, and inter-relatedness.”

There is an interesting story, with many variations, told in the tribal areas of Chhota Nagpur that has far-reaching implications for the state of our environment and society today. At the Karam festival, a child asks an elder to relate the story of the Karam tree which is blessed at this time, and to explain the origin of the festival. The story recounts

how at the time of the first farmers, seven brothers left to sell their surplus at the city. The story describes their dangerous journey, their arrival at the city, the purchases they made, and their proud return to their home in the village. The story continues by relating the rage of the eldest brother. For, when he returns, the entire village is absorbed in dancing round the Karam tree, as it is the festival of plenty and the greening of the crops, and they ignore his arrival. In his anger he uproots the tree, and throws it on the rubbish heap. In the meanwhile the goods purchased from the town turn to stone, and nature itself seems to revolt at his action, for the cows yield no milk, the fruits of the tree wither, the crops are reduced to dry husk and the rivers polluted. Realizing the damage that has been caused, and in an effort to restore balance and harmony in nature, and in the community, he begins a long and perilous quest to re-discover the Karam tree. Eventually it is found, - in some versions it is described as a weeping tree, - and with care the tree is carried back to be re-planted with honour in the central courtyard - 'Akhazha' - of the village homestead, and forever after it is remembered with honour at the Karam festival. Such a story could, with older children, be a starting point for a discussion on the implications of the story for our present society. Some activities such as drama, mask-making or puppets, dance or song, related to the story could remind us of our own capacity to create and be part of the past and yet our potential to move to the new and the future.

The story, from fairy tale to fable, from legend to myth, is a way of awakening the child, at different stages of growth, to an inner world of meaning. This draws the child beyond a self-centred existence to an ever growing and widening sense of relatedness and sympathy, where dark and light, known and unknown, loss and discovery, each have a part.

Rumi speaks of two kinds of intelligence, both of which have a place. The first is acquired "as a child in school memorizes facts and concepts from books and from what the teacher says". The second is described as a "freshness in the chest". This second knowing is "a fountain heard from within you, moving out". The story is surely one way of activating and awakening this spring within, and in turn creating a more just and harmonious society without.

Playing in the Sand

"Children have their play on the seashore of the world....."

On the seashore of endless worlds is the great meeting of children..

Rabindranath Tagore in The Crescent Moon

Few children have seen the seashore and fewer still live by the sea to daily enjoy the shore's unfenced space and limitless water. The seashore offers special delights - the chance piece of misshapen driftwood, the unexpected patterns that decorate the smooth shell, the popping sea-weed, all await discovery. Sand itself has magical qualities; it streams through the fingers, sticks between the toes and can be shaped endlessly into forts, caves, burrows, and hills that irresistibly vanish before the rising tide. Sand can bury you up to your chin, but with hands and feet you can mark giants or islands in relief on the wet surface of the receptive shore.

However, "the seashore" that Tagore writes of is not the literal beach that may be beyond our reach, but the wide open world of delight that a child can explore, shape and

be surprised by. It is an uninterrupted space that is an open invitation to make, imagine and enjoy. The seashore - literally and metaphorically, -thankfully, mostly remains as common land which is not to be owned or stored, hidden out of sight. It waits, rich with impressions and possibilities.

Sand and water are materials that offer infinite opportunities to play; so also do mud, trees, and the unassuming sticks, stones and scattered seeds. Mostly, such things of nature are scarcely seen except by the curious child who is still small enough and near enough to the ground to notice and to touch with sensitive bodies. Even within the home readymade toys are often spurned in favour of cushions, mats and bed sheets that lend themselves to dreams of houses, shrines, dens, dungeons and palaces.

Going into a toy shop one is struck both by the sophistication of the toys and their artificiality. There are cars that beep, engines that wind up, dolls that moan and action-men programmed to perform unlikely feats. However, strangely, the more complex the toys are and the stronger the effort to make them “real” and life-like the less lasting they are in their appeal. They are often things that children clamour for but are quickly tired of. For a brief period the child becomes proud owner and user, but soon the novelty wears off as the possibilities are limited, and then boredom sets in. Readymade toys that are miniature imitations of things in the home and in the neighbourhood are rarely satisfying for long, because they are often more suited to view in a showcase than to be handled and played with. The small child may prefer shapeless dough to roll chapattis with to expensive plasticine, real pans and lids to mess about with than miniscule, finely finished play “pressure cookers” and highly coloured elaborate utensils. Children like and need to imitate what they experience, hear, see and touch, and in that sense play has the seriousness of work for a child. It is not mere entertainment, but active learning through doing and making.

Often, commercial forces use the media quite deliberately to target children and to arouse their expectations. The manufacturers of Barbie dolls, for example, were prepared even 20 years ago to spend an estimated 12 million dollars every year on advertising alone! Some sociologists have wondered if children in the past in fact played, or were they just absorbed into the working world of the adults as far as their physical and mental capacities allowed. Such a conclusion may stem from a mistaken idea that play is somehow dependent on toys that are bought and owned. Camara Laye in *The African Child*, which is a vivid and autobiographical account of childhood in Guinea, describes his adventures, games and exploits with a sling as he joined other boys on lookout posts above a sea of harvest fields, to scare away the birds and monkeys. He writes, “We did it without grumbling, for it was more of a pleasure than a duty.” Play and work were often interwoven so that play was a preparation for life, not for mere consumption. Further, the rich world of folk stories, dance and music, carving and decoration have their roots in play, which combine both freedom and discipline in a process of experimentation. We see the culmination of play in the arts and crafts of folk culture.

In the village where I live toys are still rare, and when they are by chance given, they are shared and so, often, do not last long. There are, nevertheless, innumerable ways of playing that are not dependent on things that are bought. For young children there is not so much need for dolls or stuffed animals, for their world is full of live things - real babies and animals to interact with. Natural materials of mud and stones, throw-away

materials such as string, tyres and wire provide ample stimulus for absorbing play. Older children, when balls are not available for cricket, are occupied with games that need little except space. Games such as *KhoKho*, *Kabaddi*, *Laghori*, and forms of hop-scotch, require no equipment. Games follow a rhythm of seasons. Spinning tops become a fashion, and, if money is not available, a crudely shaped softwood is rounded and pointed, complete with a nail to serve the purpose. At another time marbles move from pocket to pocket as they are played, and lost and won. When the tamarind fruits ripen, the seeds are split and rubbed to a smooth polish for “chowka bora”, and the “board” is drawn out on the ground.

Toys are played with most when they are simple and flexible. Such toys are suggestive and invite children to make things with, weave stories round, and imagine things from. It is through such toys and access to materials that the child reaches out to the unknown, and the still unfamiliar. Tagore writes:

“Day by day I float my paper boats, one by one by the running stream.

In big black letters I write my name on them and the name of the village where I live.

I hope that someone in some strange land will find them and know who I am.”

(‘Paper Boats’, from The **Crescent Moon**)

Many of us may remember some toy or object that became part of ourselves. The German poet Rilke, recalling his childhood, remarks on the special quality of silence that a doll has in this noisy world. A doll can give no answers, no instructions, and yet because of its vacancy is infinitely open to possibilities to being made real. The child becomes a creator, and begins to make relationships at first on his or her own unthreatened terms. There are a number of myths that describe the first human beings created like toys, or playthings of God, to which God then gave life and autonomy. Even in the apocryphal stories of the childhood of Jesus, we are told that he made birds out of clay, and then through his play and love for them, endowed them with life so that they flew away. There are myths about Krishna which also describe his play, and ability to bring things to life.

Play is not primarily for learning numbers, fitting shapes into slots, or sorting objects into sets, though these may be an important aspect of play; but it should not be viewed as an activity prescribed by adults to quicken the process of acquiring skills in numeracy or literacy in a competitive world. Play is not necessarily product-oriented, but is part of a process that is not time-bound and taut with expectations of achievement or success. Initially play is a spontaneous reaching out to learn first hand about the physical world. This maybe begins with a baby’s first surprise at the variety of possible movements of fingers and toes. Gradually the child learns not only about the limits and possibilities of materials but also imaginatively and practically the dynamics of human relationships.

The space of the seashore where children meet each other to share and explore is very different from the isolation of the virtual world of computer games and limited but expensive toys. Real play is being engaged with mind, body, and heart which is a preparation for and participation in a fuller and creative life.

Reflections on the Nature of the Child, and Child-centred Education

Jyoti Sahi

Ideas concerning education as a process have always to be grounded on a concept of the nature of the child. We tend to take for granted that we know what we are talking about when we speak of the child, but different cultures, and indeed different epochs of human history, have viewed the nature of the child from very different perspectives. For example, when we speak of the child, are we just referring to a small, immature human being? Is the child just a *tabula rasa*, or blank tablet, on which it is the task of the educator to write something? Is the relation of the teacher to the child simply the interaction of an adult with a child? In other words, do children only learn from adults? And what precisely is it that an adult teaches to the child? Is the process of teaching just a way of preparing for adulthood? And, as the child gets taught, is the learning process one which gradually eliminates childishness, so that by becoming educated we gradually stop being children?

What is essential to these questions is a distinction which is being drawn between the adult world (of the educator) and the world of the child. Here I would like to present, at the very outset, an assumption on which I am basing my reflections that a child is not just a small adult, and, consequently, the purpose of education is not just to prepare a child for the so called adult world. In fact, I would question the distinction between adult and child at the level of nature. I would suggest that we all have within us, whether adult or not, the dimension of childhood. The child is a whole person, not just something which needs to be moulded and formed into an adult person. In fact adulthood is to a certain extent a loss of the primordial wholeness of the child, and most adults need to rediscover the child within. Education as a process often is most effective between children; a child often learns most from other children. By extension, one could suggest that it is the child in the adult teacher which is most accessible to the child student. In other words, a good teacher has to be closely in touch with the child within, as much as with the child student outside.

This, of course, brings us to the basic problem as to the content of education. If we propose a kind of inherent wholeness, and indeed wisdom, in the child, what is it that the child is learning? Can the wisdom of the child be improved upon? Is the child formed, or changed, by the process of education? This, of course, brings us back to our whole understanding of the nature of the child as such, and whether this nature is amenable to being shaped in any way; or whether, in fact, such an effort to try and shape a child is an interference, and an imposition on the nature of the child.

I would like to present these thoughts within the context of the educational practice which we find in both Tagore and Gandhiji. Both come from a certain common background of a Vaishnav culture, where the nature of the child is conceived of within the framework of certain basic myths. For example, the story of Prahlad is very important to Gandhi, and I believe that underlying many of the assumptions of Tagore is a Krishna - Chaitanya tradition which was very prevalent in the Bengali culture of his day. A devotion to the child Krishna, and a celebration of his youthful exploits, remains implicit even in the otherwise rather severe Brahmo tradition to which Tagore intellectually belonged.

To understand the common ideas of Gandhiji and Tagore, I think it is necessary to begin by discussing what they perhaps understood by human values. I use this term

“human values” bearing in mind the Indian philosophical concern for the *purusharthas*. In Indian aesthetics we are told that the whole discussion of art, for example, lies within the wider framework of a concern for human values. There is no understanding here of aesthetics as a different field from ethics. Both aesthetics and ethics are focused on the question of what is good. The Greeks had tended to divide the different fields of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty into clearly separate categories, which had very distinct criteria. It is from this distinction that we get the idea of “art for art’s sake” which has been so important in the discussion on the value of art in Western culture.

Gandhi tended to say that he knew nothing about art: that he was artistically illiterate. But he would not have said the same about Truth, because for him Truth was not something distinct from the question of being Good. When Gandhiji talked about Truth, and made it central to his whole understanding of spirituality, he was not actually using the word Truth in the way that a modern scientist might do. The tendency of modern science has been to say that its concern is objective knowledge, and this has nothing to do with the way in which this knowledge is used or affects the personal lives of individuals. In other words, science is not concerned with ethics. But for Gandhiji, the Truth he was talking about was an experiential and holistic Truth, which had its basis in Being, and was therefore as much subjective as objective.

Essentially we could say that what Gandhiji hoped to achieve through his understanding of education was the leading of a child towards goodness. He was very ethical in his whole approach to schooling. Tagore was equally concerned with leading the child towards goodness, but his approach could be characterized as more aesthetic. But again, we must insist that in the Indian context ethics and aesthetics have never been put into separate compartments.

A problem with our whole education system is that it goes back in many ways to the categorizing of fields of knowledge which took place during the late Middle Ages with the speculations of the scholastics. For example, the two areas which are now being called “the arts” and “the sciences” is really quite an artificial distinction, and was only made into the present rigid system not more than a hundred years ago. We might ask: is the knowledge of healing a science, or is it an art? Medicine, until quite recently, was always understood as an art rather than a science, in that it is a caring craft. By making medicine into a science, it has in many ways lost its ethical dimension, and has just become another way of controlling the body, and even exploiting it. The nearest Gandhiji perhaps came to practicing an art was in his whole approach to healing, and caring. To see Gandhiji as just a political activist would be to miss out this very essential aspect of his nature, which goes back to his childhood concern for his sick father. This human concern which the young Gandhi discovered as an essential component of his nature was not something which he was “taught”. In fact, we could argue that all children have a fully developed ethical sense, as well as a passion for Truth, which our educational system tends to ruin, rather than develop. The reason why so many children become disillusioned, and lose an interest in learning, is that they find that what they are being taught goes against an innate sense of justice and human concern which is present in every child.

In the same way, Tagore clearly felt that art could not be “taught” to a child. A sense of the beautiful is innate in every child; it is our false education which generally ruins this

natural feeling for the beautiful. But then, having said that both a feeling for what is good, ethical as well as beautiful is part of the nature of the eternal child in all of us, we are now faced with the problem of education as a process by which children are supposed to be moulded in some way.

It is in this context that I feel that the whole place of craft in an educational process is very important as a tool for understanding. But here again, we have to understand the relationship of craft to both work and play. Craft can be understood both as a preparation for the work-a-day-world of the adult, who has to learn how to be self-sufficient, and earn a livelihood, and is also very much a part of creative, playful world of the child. I think all children do in fact enjoy learning a craft. But a craft which is just a skill, something without any pleasure, but only useful, becomes very soon dead and boring. This kind of craft becomes mechanical, and children have often been used in pre-industrialized societies as cheap labour, whose lack of skill means that they can be easily exploited. Take for example the way in which children are used in such crafts as making carpets, where their nimble fingers, and also innocence, is made use of in such a way that the world of the child is abused, rather than helped to grow. For this reason we have now become very sensitive to the whole issue of child labour, and one of the early criticisms of the place of craft in Gandhi's idea of the Basic school was that it could very easily degenerate into a form of child labour.

But that does not mean that we abandon all idea of a child learning through working. The real problem is when work loses all relationship with play, and consequently becomes uncreative. From ancient times children have participated in the work-world of their parents, and this has not been in any way a damaging process. In fact one could say that the "normal" way in which a child learns certain skills is through observing directly how an adult manages various techniques. It is these techniques which can be learnt.

The artist and poet Blake distinguishes between innocence and experience. Innocence for him is the world of the child, a world of direct experience, and joyful experimentation. Experience, on the other hand, depends on the stored traditions which are part of both a personal memory (including the experiences of one's immediate mentors, or teachers, be they parents or other adults), but also the traditions which have been handed down through the centuries, and which comprise the whole culture to which one belongs. The learning process has to do with imparting this tradition, and storing from the experience of the past. But it is a paradox that even this "tradition of the elders" cannot be learnt, unless it becomes part of a "present" and is in some way relived. And so, even to learn from the past one has to be creative in the present. That is why Tagore stresses inner freedom, which abandons the dead weight of habit, and responds to the immediate challenges of the present.

There has been some discussion about learning through art. What both Gandhiji and Tagore stressed upon was education through craft. Traditionally, there has been a distinction drawn between art and craft. Art is something inherent in each individual - a talent which each person has to discover. This art cannot be learnt, but it can be nurtured, and given freedom to grow. Craft, on the other hand, has much more to do with cultural traditions, and the development of certain technologies. These can be imparted to the young through a direct process of learning through seeing, and through participating in a

working situation. That, as I understand it, is what the *gurukul* system was oriented towards.

This kind of learning process is much more integrated. It is not as though knowledge is divided up into specific areas of specialization, but rather “applied” to a total process of making something. In the process of learning a craft, one might be learning about chemistry, physics, biology, as well as aesthetics, history, and social relevance. Everything is approached through a practical task. Some people have been discussing the relationship between the two ways of learning known to the Greeks as *episteme* and *techne*. Episteme is what the later scholastics called “theoretical” knowledge, knowledge which goes on in the mind, and which is stored in written or other types of “texts”. Techne on the other hand is a more practical form of knowing, which is not so much grasped by the mind, but involves the whole person, including the body and the soul. A traditional farmer, for example, knows about agriculture not theoretically, but through the very process of cultivating the earth. The craftsman has this kind of practical knowledge. It is a fact that such knowledge cannot be put into “theoretical” texts; however good a so called “manual” may be, we cannot really learn a craft from a book. We have to learn through doing. And this requires a learning situation in which those who are skilled work alongside those who are as yet unskilled. That is what a Basic school tries to achieve.

Recreating the Environment through Art and Learning Indigenous Skills for Education

The relation of art to education has been a subject long debated. The topic presents two questions:

1) Are there any basic principles which underlie the process of learning art? Can art be taught systematically? Or is art education simply a matter of learning certain traditional skills which are applied more or less systematically?

2) Is art, in fact, not something to be learnt, but rather applied to the process of learning about our environment? In other words, is art a faculty or talent through which every individual has the capacity to creatively approach the natural environment in which we live, in such a way that the world which we inhabit can be imaginatively recreated as a continuing process of celebrating creation? In other words, is art to be understood as a process, rather than a cultural product? We have been concerned with the whole question of an art which is related more to the creative transformation of people, and the environment in which we live, rather than an elitist product which contributes to the art market. We have been looking at the place of art in creating communities, or the celebration of creation by the community, rather than as a cultural investment in the art works of a talented few.

Popular forms of creative expression, as for example in the making of decorative patterns on the thresholds of homes in India (variously known as *Kolama*, Rangoli, or *Alpana* designs), along with mural forms which form a part of the continuing celebration of the home, through the cycle of seasonal festivals, are some examples of a “people’s art” where images and decorative symbols play the part of celebrating the human interaction with the whole of creation.

We would like to establish a centre where we explore the relationship of art to spirituality and religious studies, through a deeper understanding of how art has been a

way of learning about the natural environment in which communities have been living. In this context we will be looking at the intentional aspect of artistic creativity, its purpose in the whole process of cultural transformation and adaptation to changing environmental conditions. Art as a way of learning about the world in which we live, an interactive process of creative engagement through the aesthetic powers with which every human being is endowed will be our interest, rather than just looking at the arte-fact in itself.

But, of course, this will also bring us to reflect on the whole function of skills. Intentionality in art naturally brings us to the problem of the perfection of instruments. We could argue that human culture is co-extensive with the invention of practical tools, going back to the early shards with which stone-age peoples shaped and attempted to control their natural environment, through the inventions of the iron age, and the mastery over such technologies as were introduced by the wheel, to our own day when science and technology have profoundly changed our whole understanding both of art and education. The relation of art to technology, and the use of natural forms and materials, has been a subject which many have debated on.

As our main interest is to relate art and culture to the way in which indigenous communities have responded creatively to their natural environment, we will be concerned with traditional skills. These traditional skills will not only be in the area of crafts related to the manufacture of artefacts, but will also embrace what might be termed as patterns of thought, like ways of understanding healing, not only of the body but also of the spirit. We will also be looking at ways of understanding the environment itself, through the making of maps, and the enumeration of forms of knowledge. Here we will be concerned with what in India have been understood as the *darshanas*, or ways of seeing. *Samkhya*, for example, was perhaps derived from one of the most ancient disciplines of thought, and literally meant “enumeration”. Art has been closely associated with forms of knowledge such as we find in mathematics, or physics, not to mention chemistry, biology and astrology. To “number” is itself the origin of art, as pure number is the basis for all true proportion and measurement, which in turn has given rise to our sense of beauty, and the aesthetic wonder of the world in which we live.

In other words, we understand art as not only a way of making, but at a deeper level it is a way of knowing. As the great philosopher Ramanuja was to point out, the effective as well as affective powers of the human spirit and will are the basis not only for our feelings, but also our capacity to know. In that sense, to know is also to love.... without the involvement of our whole being, which involves our sensual and emotional powers, there can be no real interest, no engagement of the mind in the actual object of knowledge. Thought cannot exist without the affective vehicle of images, any more than the mind can continue functioning without a body. It is this holistic understanding of knowledge which lies at the basis of a realization that art is vital for education. Without art there can be no true perception, as the creative imagination is vital for all forms of vision.

The most important concern in our centre for the arts would be an understanding of the relationship between the creative imagination and spirituality. In this context, even our approach to art would be holistic, in that we are not just concerned with the visual or plastic arts, but the way in which all the arts are interrelated, all contributing to the reality of our human creativity. Thus, for example, we would be continually involved with the

way in which the visual arts are engaged with the performing arts, and the whole process of remembering which we call story-telling. The story is not only narrated through words, but perhaps more primordially, it is “told” through images, symbols, and gestures such as we find in the dance.

Marjorie Sykes

Marjorie Sykes after graduating from Cambridge University (where she studied English literature) and then taking a diploma in teaching came out to India in 1928 as a teacher in the Bentinck School for Girls at Chennai, run by the London Missionary Society for children from poorer classes.

It was from her father, himself a dedicated, innovative and resourceful teacher in the remote coal-mining villages of Yorkshire, that Marjorie got her inspiration to choose teaching as a vocation. Her choice of India was inspired by the Christian faith in the service of the lowly and the oppressed. She was at the Bentinck School for eleven years. Once in India Marjorie came to identify herself with the movement for Indian independence under Gandhiji’s leadership with its adherence to the principles of truth and non-violence. She made India her home. Having identified with the common people of India, she was, most naturally, drawn towards and felt inspired by the educational ideas and experiments of Poet Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi. She had the rare distinction of having worked with Tagore in Shantiniketan (1939-46) and having been associated with the experiment of Nai Talim (Basic education) at Sevagram (1949-59) in their most creative phases. The cause of Nai Talim remained dear to her all her life.

A non-sectarian Christian by upbringing, Marjorie came in contact with members of the Religious Society of Friends, more familiarly known Quakers, a community of seekers known for their spirit of *sarvadharmasamabhava*, tolerance and adherence to non-violence and peace. Marjorie joined the Society of Friends in 1936. In later years Marjorie came to be amongst the most loved and respected Quakers, both in India and abroad.

Marjorie was drawn into the work of Shanti Sena, a ‘Peace Army’, which was an offshoot of the Bhoodan-Gramdan movement started by Acharya Vinoba Bhave. Between 1959-64 she held training camps for small groups at her home in Kotagiri in the Nilgiri Hills in South India. During 1964 she worked with groups of peace workers of the Civil Rights Movement in North America interested in training in non-violence. In 1964 Jayaprakash Narayan enlisted Marjorie’s services in the cause of establishing peace in strife-torn Nagaland after a cease-fire had been achieved. Marjorie worked in Nagaland for 3 years.

After 1967 Marjorie took on wider responsibilities for the Quaker community in India and abroad. During 1979-88 she resided at the Friends Rural Centre in Rasulia, near Hoshangabad (M.P.), as a friend, philosopher and guide to an increasing number of individuals and groups. As a friend has put it, “Marjorie’s greatest contribution is her personal impact on those around her - what she is, the way she lives her life and the transforming power of her spirit.”

Marjorie was an accomplished writer and has numerous publications to her credit. At the behest of Rabindranath Tagore Marjorie translated three of his plays: *Chandatika*,

Natir Puja and Mukta-dhara. The plays were inspired by the teachings of the Buddha and Gandhi's call to non-violent struggle for freedom. She also wrote a biography of Tagore for children. In collaboration with Banarasidas Chaturvedi Marjorie wrote a biography of Dinabandhu C.F. Andrews, a close associate of Tagore and Gandhi. Later she edited a volume of Andrews' writings *C.F. Andrews: Representative Writings*. In association with Jehangir Patel she wrote ***Gandhi: His Gift of the Fight***, a most lively account of the personality and life-work of Gandhiji. At the time of her death she was engaged in writing a fuller account of the service rendered by the Quakers to the people of India over more than a hundred years, which has now been published under the title ***An Indian Tapestry***.

Marjorie was known for her total dedication to the work in hand, her indefatigable energy, her meticulous attention to details, her quiet efficiency, and her insistence on thrift. Marjorie lived an exemplary simple life, in *desi* style, and was very particular about conserving resources and avoiding wastage. At the same time she had a most lively personality with an inexhaustible zest for life. She was a source of inspiration and a tower of strength to many individuals all over the world. She was 'a light house for all of us' as a friend put it.

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