



## **LETTERS FROM A FOREST SCHOOL**

CHITTARANJAN DAS

*Translation* DIPTIRANJAN PATTANAİK

### **Foreword**

In the 1950s Chittaranjan Das started a Post-Basic School in a remote jungle of Orissa. Flush with the knowledge of various experiments in pedagogy in India and abroad, he wanted to implement the Gandhian ideology of education which he believed would contribute to the transformation of the Indian society after independence. He himself was educated in a nationalist educational set-up at Santiniketan, participated in freedom struggle, went to jails and read and travelled widely. He eschewed all the temptations of

making any systematic career either in the administration, university teaching or politics in free India, despite his obvious worth. He chose the life of renunciation, sadhana and discipline in the pursuit of an ideal, that of fashioning a more equitable and free country. Convinced that education is a potent tool for realising that ideal, he set up the school at Champatimunda which was supposed to disseminate knowledge to the most backward and underprivileged students of the society. That the school closed shop after four years under the pressure of babudom and red-tapism, does not in any way diminish the worth of the high idea!. Rather, it underlines the human courage, sacrifice, the quest for freedom and the power of imagination to counter the demonic hegemony that has taken hold of our body-politic and social fabric. This tale of courage and sacrifice has power to ignite more such efforts like a lamp lighting other lamps. Das penned his experience at the school first in newspaper articles and then in a book form and called it “jungle Chitthi” in Oriya. The book is a tale of the courage of his conviction.

To circulate this tale of courage wider, we took up the translation of this book into English. For we do not want this tale to be consigned to the dustbins of history. The school might have failed but the great ideas have to live long. I thank the NBT for assigning me this noble task and thank my friend Mr Shreekant Chatterjee for being the constant source of inspiration during the arduous summer months when I was busy translating this work.

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1

From last August, a Post-Basic School has been started at Champatimunda, a village eight miles west of Angul. The students who have already completed eight years of schooling in various Basic Schools at Baji Rout Chhatrabas, Ramachandrapur, Judigadia, Raja Sunakhala and Bhanjanagar have taken admission here. We have also admitted four students from different government-run high schools. There are twenty-six students in the first year out of which two are girls.

The village of Champatimunda consists of seventeen or eighteen families. After the Second World War, these families were settled here with government assistance and land grants. The government had initially planned to build a cooperative village here. However, the plan does not seem to have materialised. Each family is cultivating its own private land. All families seem to be on their own.

There is a forest at the outskirts of the village. We have received two hundred acres of land in the forest as a grant from the government of Orissa to run the Post-Basic School, out of which thirty acres have been levelled with the help of bulldozers. Now the brick-laying activity is going on. The students are assisting the labourers in these activities. *The* school for the time being is being run in a three-roomed house and a tent. During the morning hours, we lay bricks and collect firewood from the forest for the oven. In the afternoon, we study our lessons under the shade of a Mahula tree beside the house.

It is very cold here, even more than at Angul. The students do not have enough warm clothes. While returning from the forest we collect roots and stumps of dead trees. We light a bonfire in the courtyard with those stumps. Towards the last part of the night, when it is too cold to have any more sleep, the children warm themselves around this bonfire.

The natural beauty of the place fills our tough living conditions with the requisite sweetness. The hills surround us like a blue wall. We get a lot of food for thought while roaming under the open sky and clean air. At present, the forest wears a dishevelled look with lopped up trees, bushes and weeds. Some day school building will be built here, housing a library and the laboratories for science and agricultural sciences. The dream that some day an academic community will grow up here around the natural feelings of love and affection among the students, teachers and faculty-wives keeps everyone active and inspired. With this dream in our eyes, this forest, these hills, this tough living condition, everything has become a joyful educative experience. It has strengthened the fraternal feeling in our present community.

## 2

It is more than fifteen days since I sent my last letter. Our forest-community has been through some interesting experiences in between. One important experience was the enthusiasm with which we celebrated the Christmas. Of course, we did not fire crackers or spend a fortune on dinner during our celebration. True celebration requires only inner devotion and sincere veneration. From a religious point of view, the congregation of sincere hearts is the worthiest form of celebration. In the heart where the devotee's aspiration and God's benediction meet, true worship is accomplished. No outward demonstration of pomp and ceremony can be compared with that kind of worship.

Several books have been written in this world about the truth or falsity of a religion. There is no dearth of scholarship on this subject. However, no definitive answers have been found yet. Rather, these debates have increased the amount of hatred in the world. These debates have contributed to more divisiveness, and suffering accruing from wars and conflicts. We have decided not to pollute our minds by entering into those kinds of thinking. We would show appropriate respect to each individual. Hence, we would respect the religion she/he chooses to follow. We will bow our heads before whatever forum man applies or whichever ritual he follows by which he sings the praise of God or derives pleasure in doing the work of God. One-third of the earth's population accepts Jesus Christ is enough evidence for us. Twenty-fourth December, which brings happiness to millions of homes on the occasion of celebration of the Messiah, is also a sacred day for us. Though we are not Christians of faith, we have a right to celebrate Christ's birthday. One need not belong to a particular faith to share the happiness of others. By keeping the inner windows open, man can be united with larger community very easily.

Recently a Christian sister has joined our community. Therefore, our enthusiasm to celebrate Christmas was heightened further. We tried to celebrate in the manner in which it is normally done in Europe. We recited the Christian prayers every Sunday evening of December. Read the Bible. We lighted one earthen lamp on the first Sunday, two on the second, three on the third and four on the Christmas etc. On the twenty-fourth, we distributed sweetmeat prepared with groundnut and puffed-rice among children of the

village and the students of the local Basic School. Oh, what a joy! We felt as if everyone was so dear to us. Evening set in. There is a meriumodorum plant in our courtyard. There were several bunches of pink flowers in its branches. We decorated it with more flowers. We drew a cross on the ground near its roots with flowers and powered rice. Four earthen lamps were placed on four sides. We huddled around the plant. Small-lighted candles were placed on its branches. Then we prayed. We followed it up by reading out the chapter describing the birth of Jesus Christ from the Bible. Several devotional songs in Oriya and Hindi were recited after that. In the end, we heard the ‘Sermon on the Mount.’ When I prepared the Christmas celebration for the first time, some people agreed. However, there were some reservations as well. Some had noted their protests in their diary. Why should we celebrate? We are not Christians. However, this mindset disappeared after the celebration. All religions are equal. If we do not show respect to all religions, listen to the teachings of all great men, wouldn’t our religious lives be incomplete? Which teacher will not feel proud after reading such entries in the dairies of his/her students?

### 3

After a long gap, I have decided to write the third letter from the jungle. For the last few months, we were not here in the jungle. We spent two months at Puri as volunteers in charge of organizing Sarvodaya conference. We participated in all kinds of activities in the organization of the conference. Right from erection of sheds to serving food to the guests, we lent our helping hands in all the directions. During the first month we used to work during the forenoon and study in the afternoon. We played together in one hall. The Oriya students of the Sevagram Post-Basic School were our neighbours. We worked, ate and played together. Together we went to bathe in the sea and in the night sang under the canopy of stars in clear sky. We had great fun. But from the month of March our task increased and rush at the place of the conference also increased. We had to separate into several groups to shoulder specific responsibilities. Our dwelling-places were also separated. We merged ourselves completely in the ever-growing crowd. We could not maintain our daily contact. We got together only when we boarded the train to Puri after the conference.

The education in our school is not confined to the teachers or school premises. Basic Education can use the entire life and the whole society as the base of learning. This is its triumph as well as its dilemma. Whenever there is more freedom, there are more responsibilities. Students enjoying such freedom have to be suitably restrained so as to tackle all kinds of situation with a proper spirit of enquiry. And if need be she/he should be able to extricate herself/himself from any kind of situation. I was going through a few diary-entries of the students after being back to this place. I liked some of them. One entry is as follows:

“One should learn something from the work one does. In Denmark, children share the domestic chores with their parents after school hours. In our country they feel awkward to share domestic chores. They apprehend that their friends would have a poor opinion about them if they see them doing such work. They are victims of such mindset. I was also like them. I never felt like doing any manual labour when I went to my village. If I did some manual labour it was out of compulsion. I also had the same kind of

apprehension about the opinion of the friends who might see me doing some manual labour. I did not know the value of labour then. Hopefully, now I have been cured of such perverted thinking. At Puri, we have carried bamboos, wood many times. It was painful. It might have been painful for others as well. When the pain became acute, they became sceptical about the lessons from that experience. I also got carried away by their opinion. But now I realize that my mind has been cured of much corrosion because of the labour we undertook them. What better lesson one can really learn that this?"

Yet another student has christened the months at Puri as 'months of progress'. He writes, "During the month I am walking along time, my friend, I have been able to expand my mind. Who is responsible for such expansion? Every teacher will be encouraged after encountering such insights. Now at Champatimunda, everything is dry as burnt. Wells and ponds have dried up. Yet these heartfelt words of the students are as if filling up everything with new juice of life. The thread of my dreams is getting lengthened after being united with the threads of their hearts. I feel like carrying a garland studded with pearls."

#### 4

I still remember an incident at a village in the Tundra state of Finland. It was a Sunday. We had driven a deer-sledge to the village in that winter morning. There was a small school. It had only two rooms. The classes were held in one room while the lady-teacher lived in the other. She had to change six classes in that single classroom. By the time we reached there, the school was overflowing with the sound of song. It was customary for the people to go to Church every Sunday morning for community prayer. The teacher had to ensure that the parents turn up with their children at the school after the prayer at the Church. There they recited the prayer together. We liked the day's event very much. The teacher had also arranged some refreshments after the prayer. It must be like every Sunday; the children, the parents and the teacher must be enjoying themselves like this.

It augurs well for the children when the teacher and the guardians cooperate fully in the process of the child's learning. School compliments the home and the home becomes extension of the school. Such an attitude is all the more necessary in case of a Basic School. At Champatimunda, we have not been able to manage a dwelling place yet. We tried to dig a well at two places and on both occasions we hit rock bed. Where should we invite the guardians? We thought of a plan. Eleventh May happens to be the birth anniversary of Baji Rout Hostel. We decided to celebrate it as the Guardians' Day. We sent letters to twenty-five guardians. Six of them turned up that day. We put up a small cultural show. A special dinner was also arranged for the occasion. The guardians returned after witnessing the enthusiasm and joy of the children. Earlier, parents used to test the child's ability to recall the multiplication tables in order to ascertain whether the child's education was in the right direction. Now, many parents are asking questions from the books. But rote learning is not the actual demonstration of the understanding of the subject by the child. When true education takes place, it fires the imagination, changes one's way of thinking as well as outward behaviour and physical appearance. When a subject is mastered, it manifests itself mainly in the form of joy. A joy in living, in working and in living in pure reciprocity with fellow human beings. The teachers and the

parents are most satisfied when they have the evidence of this joy in a child's demeanour, work and conversation.

We completed one year recently. The children had to appear at a test. They had studied literature, mathematics, social science, geography and a few other subjects during this year. But this knowledge was of no use during the annual test. The lessons in the classroom, the words of the teacher and the life in the school, together shape the character of the student, heighten the extent and depth of his vision. Our method of testing the students was in accordance with such an attitude. The test was spread over a month. Several questions were set on various subjects like prayer, diary, weaving, social interaction and food and health habits. The students wrote their answers and whenever they liked, took help from various books, if they needed. The main aim of our examination was to find out how far the minds of the students have become receptive, after this year-long education and social interaction. The answer books of the students would be preserved and compared later with the answer books next year.

I am not sure whether the experts in education, the education-administrators would call this process an examination in the real sense of the term. The Basic Schools are still conducting two-hour examinations strictly according to time and schedule. There is no evaluation of the student's personality and attitude in such a system. We are caught up in the habit of serving old wine in new bottles. The reason is, though we have adopted new systems outwardly, our minds continue to be mired in old habits. We have dared to make half-hearted attempts to utilize the hands of the students. But we remain totally ignorant of the hearts of students. The teacher who understands the heart of the student, is able to strike at the finest chords of the heart, is actually doing the maximum justice to the life of the student.

## 5

The new session is approaching. The old one is giving way. In two months the school that was started in a forest will complete one year. It was inaugurated last August. During this one year we have admitted twenty-six students into our family. We don't know how to measure what they have learnt in the interregnum; at least they are able to call this school their own, though they hail from various places of Orissa. This is a matter of great hope. Another twenty-five students will join this year. Our family will expand, troubles will increase and so shall our joys. The strength to put up a family of learners of our liking in this jungle will also increase.

We have stressed one thing while admitting students. In each class we will set aside twenty seats for students who have completed eight years of Basic Education Schools. The other five seats are meant for students from High Schools. High School students must have passed the class eight examinations. Those who consider that the education in conventional high schools is antithetical to the training in the new trend may find fault with our policy. In the government administered Basic Education System there is a provision to prevent students in the conventional High School system from entering into Basic Education Schools. We have deliberately chosen to do otherwise despite this provision. We who believe in the Basic Education System frown upon the conventional education. But why blame the students? When both the parent and the child are gladly embracing Basic Education after leaving the conventional system, they should be

welcomed with all humility. There is something else as well. Whether the education is basic or non-basic, one should not be cramped by it. Therefore, we want that there should be a healthy exchange between the two groups. They should keep their doors open with assimilative mind. As long as we are self-confident and dedicated to our ideals, as long as the total development of the child continues to be our first and last aim, why should we remain aloof from others because of unfounded fear of contagion?

It is a matter of great regret that we have not been able to recruit enough teachers for this Forest School. One gentleman joined for brief period, but the temptation of a better job took him away. So it isn't an exaggeration to say that the entire teaching throughout the last year has been confined to a single teacher's tasteless ratings. The students have been bored by that. Their enthusiasm has waned. How could the teacher maintain his enthusiasm and concentration under such circumstances? However, we have managed the whole year with just one teacher rather than allowing the school to be a temporary bouncing pad for some clever careerist in search of greener pastures. But it won't be possible to do this thing next year. Four teachers are badly needed to teach four subjects i.e. science, agriculture, painting and music. We won't pay less than the normal rates. As a young man of this country I appeal to young men and women to come forward to transform this Forest School into a happy home of teaching and learning. Free from all kinds of parochial and ideological paralysis, we would build an institution of our own liking. We all remain friends, giving and receiving from each other. In the process, we will also contribute to our own development. How many educational institutions are there in our country today, which students consider as their own homes, build their lives there without any kind of fear, in an atmosphere of giving and receiving happiness?

Let us set up such a home with love and labour. For an entry into this home a university degree is not the most preferred qualification. Those who are still dreaming of a new life, putting their faith in the new possibilities of the society, deserve to come in here.

Let those, who believe that our countrymen will not be able to realize their human potential unless there is proper universal children's education, come here; let those who are searching for their selfhood instead of selling themselves in a marketplace of easy consumerist indulgences, come here.

## 6

At the beginning of the new session, many new brothers and sisters have joined us. We were twenty-five in number and now we are fifty. But what about the school? There is a lack of rooms, of proper facilities and of a good educational atmosphere. Six students have to be crammed into one room. Once they hang the mosquito-nets, there is no space for air to pass. And the less said about the problem of water the better. It rained fifteen days ago. The spring in the backyard was overflowing. Considering it as the divine answer to our needs, we managed all our chores with that water. Then the water level in the spring went down. There is a well which dries up every evening and just manages to seek enough water in the morning for our drinking and cooking. Even that got infested with worms forcing us to boil and strain the water before drinking it. But somehow life in this Forest School goes on. We have not received newspapers for the last ten days. But

the noise and enthusiasm of fifty human beings has kept our life quite active and interesting.

What can we give these children? In search of what gem have these children arrived at this Forest School? Our Shastras have described knowledge as humility. What kind of humility and obeisance shall we teach this family of knowledge-seekers? During our childhood obeisance was taught to us through caning. Through caning we were taught to be obedient sons and daughters of our parents and obedient students of our teachers. Even today, the torture of caning children into obedience is being continued in many schools of Orissa beneath the attention of bureaucrats and their files, though they are aware of this practice anyway. I am not leaving out the so-called Basic Schools when I say this. Where there is no direct caning, there is the alternative of torture with harsh words. At some other places, the natural efflorescence of the child is blocked by a regime of pity, kindness or an excess of indulgence. This is being perpetrated on the child everyday by every adult teacher and educational supervisor. If the children are unable to cast themselves in the mould prepared by the adults, they are dubbed as haughty. Whatever they do is considered bad by the adults. Every adult teacher with an old mind expects the student to talk without raising his voice, holding his head low, walk deferentially in front of the teacher, never talk back on anything. Only then he will be considered as good.

The Government of India had set up a commission last year to explore the shape of a possible institution to provide higher education in villages. The report of the commission has just been published. They have suggested that assessment not only of the ability of the students but also of the teachers should be conducted every year. Now a group of American educationists are building a strong movement around the claim that the education and character of the students in a school are dependent upon the ability and growth of the teacher. How is your personality, teacher? This is, according to them, the central question of any educational set-up. What we see today is totally contrary to such a position. The teacher is involved with the students only in matters related to studies, that too in a duty-bound manner. When students sing prayers early in the morning or weave thread, the teacher might still be in the bed. The moral and ethical discipline meant for the students would not be applicable to the teacher. He/she cannot play with the students for a moment as a child. But he/she would be demanding obedience and humility from the students all the time. What right does an unworthy teacher have to demand obedience and humility? There are hundreds of dictates regarding the qualification of a teacher in our scriptures, which have bestowed all the responsibilities on the head of the teacher as they have granted him/her all the rights. In Tibetan Buddhism there are ten indications to separate the true teacher from the false ones. But today the adult world is drunk with the wine of its own vainglory. Who will test the ability of the adult teacher? Even if no formal test is possible at least there should be a desire for introspection.

The other day I was going through the diary of a small child. He has written, "Why do our teachers remain with us only during study hours and daily chores? They should be with us throughout, right from the game of volleyball to our prayer-sessions." This should be a holy commandment for every inquisitive teacher with ever-increasing search for excellence like the teachings of the python to the Abadhuta is the eleventh book of the Bhagabata. Gandhi had envisaged a learning regime called 'Nayi Talim' in which education was supposed to continue from the birth of a person to his death. Similarly- our education should cover not merely six hours of the day but the entire period of twenty-



four hours. We should mainly learn, then offer to teach. First of all we should be receptive to knowledge, then only indulge in the luxury of imparting knowledge. It is not enough for the child to be an obedient son of a father or a bright student of the teacher. The child has to be moulded into a healthy, honest and cooperative citizen of the society and a worthy human being in the eyes of God. The ultimate fulfilment of any educational enterprise lies in achieving this last goal. Unless a child passes this acid test, his inner being will continue to remain empty, however competent he might be in his profession, acumen and mastery of knowledge. Let whoever wants to elicit obedience of a child by threatening his body do so, would continue to consider giving and receiving love from the child as the measure of our success of our educational enterprise.

## 7

Last year on 26th of August our school was inaugurated. The ceremony was presided over by Sri Dhiren Majumdar. Several guests from all over Orissa had bent their joyous presence in that ceremony. There were ministers, government officers, college teachers and several poets and writers. Apart from them, several teachers had shared our joy and encouraged us. There were messages of goodwill from several quarters. The function began after the recitation of the Upanishadic mantra “Tamiswaranam Paramarn Maheswaram” (God thou art ultimate). Then speeches were delivered and heard. The ceremony was over after cultural function and entertainment of the guests.

Now exactly one year after that event, we are celebrating the first birth anniversary of the school. It is true that the institution had been inaugurated last year, but we were not sure whether we would be able to find a fit place for nurturing the kind of affection that was showered upon us by our extended family of well-wishers. There were many plans and searches for right environment, but nothing was up to our satisfaction. Then we decided to make a piece of forest our home. It would be near a village but not within it. There would be facilities for communication, but we would not be hassled by civilization and its consumerist ideology. By no means would we struggle to renounce the world and seek deliverance but at least there would be some opportunity to observe the world dispassionately from a distance. These considerations determined our choice of place. After that we had to settle at a temporary house and a few tents. The activities like clearing of forest, laying of bricks and digging of a well went on simultaneously. A few shanties were constructed upon the forest-clearing. The activities of the new school were started in those shanties. At first we used to have dinner before it got dark in the evening and confine ourselves to our rooms for fear of tigers. Several times we heard the roar of tigers; saw the footprints of the tiger a hundred yards away from our habitation. Gradually our fear subsided. We got used to the place. A sense of belonging for the place grew. During moonlit nights we started playing kabbadi in the courtyard; sang songs and played flute, huddling together at a place. Even during torrential rains, children went to sleep on temporary platforms near the fields to keep an eye on our crop. The sound of their tin drums filled the night sky. Our collective joy pushed the tiger’s movements far away.

Teaching activity also had a very humble beginning. When there was not enough accommodation for children, who cares for the dearth of classrooms. Classes were held in open space after the sun went mild. If it was not raining, classes were somehow managed

on the narrow verandah. There were occasions when we would be discussing the achievements of Socrates of Greece or Kropotkin of Russia and suddenly a shower would drive us to the verandah. During normal days the teacher sits on a mound of black stone looking like the back of a hippopotamus that is surrounded by plain green field. The new students from Sambalpur call it “Budharaja” after the famous hill of that place. The students crouch around the teacher and classes are taken there. We might consider the environment romantic, but it does not alleviate our poverty. There is only one teacher and one blackboard for two classes. No doubt, it is difficult, but life goes on. Without proper logistics, we go about searching for gems of wisdom in the sea of knowledge and ignorance. It is a matter of great pride for us that we have managed to keep this spirit of quest alive. Our library is of great help in their quest. We have collected Hindi, Oriya and Bengali books along with English encyclopaedia for teachers by spending around three thousand and five hundred rupees. Of late, the students are really excited about the library. Some had difficulty in Hindi, others did not know the Bengali script even; but now they are all trying to make up. Lack of adequate number of teachers does not dishearten us anymore. Today I remember the events of the whole year that went by. All the joys and sufferings of the whole family, the affection and mutual respect among the members wipes away the tiredness of the journey, steels us with energy for a relentless pursuit. One who has set out to educate his body, mind and heart with lessons from daily living will not be confined within any limits. His aspiration for knowledge will be as vast as life, his teacher. His empathies will also be boundless. Our infinite quest will draw the narrowness of our complacent minds; our limitless empathy will dissolve the demands of our petty egos and self-centeredness. Today, the students dressed their teacher with a cloth they themselves had spawned on the wheel; put a thread around his body as the Brahmins do during their invitation ceremony. Their joy ennobled the day.

The bureaucrats of the education department of the government were repeatedly issuing warnings when we were busy playing the role of a noble child in our extended family. We don't have this file or that register, have not turned in a certain report—such accusations have become common. The old moribund Victorian bureaucrats' mind steeped in rules, regulations and files is sending its English reminders again and again, while we are absolutely innocent of all kinds of clerical sophistication. How can we meet their demands? They are trying to domesticate a wild bird that has set out to collect its food from this wide sky by putting a ring around it. They are trying to turn an ever flowing stream into a pond by putting dams around it. They want to transfer a bud drawing its breath from air and sunshine, its natural desire for efflorescence, into a flower in glass-chamber without any programme. When the old order does not understand the new, does not tolerate it, such oppression begins. I shall ask them today not to judge us by our paperwork or bookkeeping. Try to weigh us from our way of life. Measure us by the depth of our feelings. Share our joys. Test us after becoming one among us. Give up your old prejudices. Cultivate enough empathy to understand the wonders of a new beginning. Not a messenger of a court, but try to be a gardener of flower-garden.

I am not writing this letter from the place from where I usually write while watching the beauty of the forest and the sky. I am writing this from the water groves of Ersama.

Because of the heavy rains on 3rd September throughout Orissa, all the rivers of the plains were in spate and the villages were inundated with water, the crops were damaged. The people were rendered homeless and had to take shelter on the embankments. Half of Ersama has been turned into such a horrible water-grove.

For the last three weeks fifteen of us have left the Forest School at Champatimunda and come over to this area under Ersama police station. Another group of fifteen has left for Patlamundai. First of all, we collected donations for flood-relief from the villages around this place. From one or two paise to rice-grain we collected whatever people gave us. Some of us even fasted for half a day and saved some money. We handed over a sum of one hundred and seventy rupees in total to the flood-relief committee. Then we got divided into groups and went to Ersama and Pattamundai to serve the marooned people directly. We are now far away from the Forest School, but in essence this effort is an extension of the philosophy of our school. The extent of our scope for learning is as vast as our lives. It is true that there the timely bell for lessons is not rung, the customary prayer in the mornings and evenings are not sung. May be we have forgotten our usual lessons in geography, history, arithmetic or geometry. But our minds are still fresh and receptive like that of a true learner. The wider and bigger scope of learning here has expanded our inner consciousness. We have gathered enough strength to feel human grief more deeply. Every moment here is a list for our conscience and intelligence. Every moment our heart is being tested. Our ability to shoulder responsibility, our acquired knowledge to deal with people in a fair manner are put under a scanner. This kind of examination is much more important than any other examination with pen and paper. Here there are more valuable lessons to be learnt by a student than any offered within the limits of routine life. From the day of our arrival till today we have already covered almost seventy-five per cent villages of this area. Wherever dusk sets in we are camping at some Bhagabata Tungi or verandah of a house for the night. Most of the school buildings of the area have collapsed. Where the buildings are still intact, the students are not turning up. How can a student concentrate in his studies, when hunger is acute?

The entire country is visited by the flood now. But we have not yet learnt how to work and discharge our duties together in such a crisis. It seems that the officers of our country are a burden on the public. The entire area has been washed away, but the officers are reluctant to take off their shoes lest their feet get soiled. They are yet to find out how the people are living in such conditions, whether the children are able to get their daily ration of bread. They are doing whatever can be done within the safe confines of their office-chambers through their subordinates, as much as their imagination permits. There are a few middlemen who, following the footsteps of the officers have already started doing business with the relief materials, with which the calamity could be taken care of. The officials are doing as much as is necessary to maintain the records, to justify their salaries; but there is no enthusiasm to get something done. There is enough material with which the calamity can be taken care of, enough men who can be employed for the task, but there is the dearth of a dedicated will. Therefore, everything seems to be in order in this country, but in reality things are run in a very haphazard manner. I believe this is the result of the elitist education that is being imparted with much fanfare in this country. This system of education boasts of a rich curriculum, sophisticated instruments but it is rather heartless. Through hard work the learner is probably able to pass examinations with laurels, due to the neglect of the education of the heart his world view becoming

narrow. The student becomes lifeless like the adding machine of the modern civilization. His ability to feel dries up. His capacity for sharing the sorrow of others wanes. He does not dare to follow the dictates of his heart and conscience. One may put it under the carpet for the time being, but those who are in charge of planning a model educational system for the country have to come to terms with this problem one day. A day will come when the learned professors teaching in their ivory towers will become aware of the emptiness in their curricula. Otherwise they will have to confront their own intellectual bankruptcy.

The other day, I overheard the exchange between two quarrelling individuals. One of them was shouting at the other person “Why should you still continue your arrogant ways, when you had to beg like rest of us after the flood levelled down all our disparities in wealth?” The flood, in fact has put everyone, the big landholder, the small or the landless on an equal footing. Suffering teaches man to bond together to lead a life of humanity: it unites the palace and the shanty with the thread of empathy. The recent flood might have taught us as much. When we rebuild our sheds, hopefully, our hearts would be purer and there would be more space for conscience in our learning process.

## 9

We reached a village school near Ersama that morning. We should have undertaken relief work after resting a day or two at that school. We were asked to occupy one of three rooms of the school. The room was dirty. It was obvious that there had not been any dusting or cleaning for a long time.

We felt suffocated. We are managing to stay there somehow, after sprinkling some water and wiping off the dust from the floor. One day passed by. The relief work was also over in another day. We should have taken the boat to Ersama next day at noon. After cooking, we were getting ready to have our lunch. Then there was the sound of a bell. It was around ten thirty in the morning. The rays of the monsoon sun were already very hot. In one of the side buildings, the teachers and the community leaders were distributing the relief grain. Accusation and counter-accusations were creating the cacophony. On the other side of the building there was the sound of the cooking of the meal for the teachers. I could not make out the reason for the sound of the bell. When I looked out I saw young boys forming a queue. They were shoving each other like a bunch of pigs with an eagerness to somehow squeeze themselves into the queue. A couple of boys, who had left their homes a little late, were running with their bags after hearing the noise of the bell. The sight was as pathetic as funny. Suddenly an older boy shouted aloud, “peace”. Everyone was silent after that. They closed their eyes and began singing a hymn loudly. It was a cacophony of disparate sounds without proper rhyme or rhythm. It seemed as if the boys were just following a routine.

The boys toiled under the sun only out of habit. The experience was bereft of any thirst or wonder. It is significant that the teachers did not participate in that whole painful exercise. It seems as if there is a kind of division of labour in our traditional institutions of learning like the division of labour along caste ties. Teachers would not do what the students were expected to and vice versa. During the Sunday afternoons the students

would work out the sums, memorise notes on literature or study English while the teachers would play dice after lunch. When the evening set in, the students would clean the lanterns but the teachers would go out on sundry errands. The students were advised to spend all their time studying books but the teacher would not study at all. They would only teach, they would punish the students if they do not read but would never feel the pangs of conscience if they themselves do not read a book for years together. It is difficult to imagine how this kind of arrangement would contribute to any effective education.

I am tempted to look at the above incident from another viewpoint. Our Hindu Pundits sometimes make fun at the Christians because they immerse themselves in the comforts of this world and turn up at Church to pray only once a week. But how deep is our own Hindu religious experience itself? Our scriptures are full of hints about the possibilities of acquiring spiritual insight and leading spiritual life in this temporal existence. But how many of us follow those hints? As a teacher, I can say this much that in our times the three components that constitute the realm of education namely the curriculum, the school and the teacher, like the three cones of a hearth have bound into ashes the sincerity that is contingent upon any spiritual quest. Our daily living has no grace. The passion by which we could have synthesized our religion, culture and society in the depth of our experience has been snuffed out in our discarded notebooks. Today only the pomp and ceremony of few superstitions constitute our religious life. By turning the sacred duty of praying God into mere routine, we have rather cruelly stalled the natural growth of religious belief in a child.

Abiding by our dictate the child is probably just praying in a routine manner, but she is ultimately, growing dictatorial herself, during her adulthood. She is unable to follow the right track to God and self realization. From her childhood she is learning to fear God the way she is afraid of her teacher when she enters the worldly life, she is unable to come close to the God with a fearless and enthusiastic heart. She is putting the God upon a pedestal and worshipping Him. She is trying to please Him with various offerings and by observing meaningless ceremonies and pompous celebrations. She is unable to realize that God is within her, and there is a more intimate way of religious undertaking in which every aspect of life can be made sacred, the personal and social relationships can be uplifted into a pure and spiritual realm without such a realization, religion has turned into a mask. The religious life remains wrapped under various fears and prejudices. Religion fails to encourage and empower the people. Men are choosing the easier path of routine and outward show and forsaking the discipline of self-enquiry.

It has been a month since we came here to work at Ersama. We have lost touch with our studies since when we reached here in the evening a month ago wading through mud from Rahama, we had to put up in the lock-up room of the police station. The room was quite stuffy with the luggage of fifteen human beings. The place was a sample of the nature of cruelty that is meted out among others to the criminals in this country. It was a ten by three feet closed room without windows. I had a few experiences of visiting such places during the movement of nineteen forty-two. We slept on the verandah of the police station in the night. But it was tough if it rained. Nonetheless our whole set of activities

continued throughout the month in that room. That room became our school. An average parent or teacher might think that the whole month was a waste and the students suffered unnecessarily in rain and slush. The authorities overseeing administration of education might think in a similar fashion. They might even be right from a point of view which believes that education and learning the lessons of life take place only within the four walls of a room.

The authorities might want to punish us by verifying our attendance registers; but despite that we shall claim that our school is not merely a fetter made up of four walls and a teacher. Our school veritably embraces the entire universe. The effort in our school is not directed towards securing a job by pleasing a few officers. The passion for knowledge, the ability of discrimination and responsiveness to emotion with which we have set up this Forest School, should also inculcate in us the patience of a learner who enters every realm of the world with an inquisitive mind. Every one in this wide world is our guru. The human life with all its joys, sorrows, love and wonder is our teacher. We seek to know human beings of this land to enrich knowledge of history and geography. We have tried to find answers for the various human problems with all the resources of our learning. We will never back away from any opportunity to share the joys and sufferings of human beings. After the initiation in this Forest School as a student, we shall remain a student throughout our lives.

The indulgent educational system in our country churns out several white-collar officers every year. After four to six years of college education those officers turn out to be a pampered lot. They are scared of stepping into mud and slush. They are ashamed to come into public contact without excellent sartorial cover. Anyone who has come in contact with the officers in Orissa must have realized the veracity of this observation. How many Oriya officers gladly go to Koraput? Koraput is far off and the entire district is full of ominous forests, rivers and streams. Anyone associated with administration must have come across officers of the education department avoiding a posting at Koraput with such wild arguments like there are tigers in that district, the weather is inhospitable, the people of the area are not acquainted with genteel society and so on and try to remain around Cuttack and Puri throughout their lives. What to talk of Ersama. It is already a low-lying area inundated by the water of river from one side and of the sea from the other. The homeless human beings of the area are helplessly undergoing a great deal of suffering. They do not have enough food. Hungry children are not coming to school. Men are looking around for some employment or distribution of free food. Why should the educated young men go there?

We at the Forest School have not set out to become lazy officers after a lazy education. This country, this earth is ours and we shall acquire the requisite strength to rebuild this decadent world in a beautiful manner. There is strength in our arms and youthful enthusiasm in our minds. Why should we care for the comforts of the body? Why should we endure the sufferings of this country? Many young men of this country remain illiterate and waste themselves away in contemptible poverty and sickness under compulsion.

We have had the opportunity to get educated as their representatives. It is our responsibility to make the path of their lives smoother. Where is the time for us to waste on cheap lazy indulgences? Or embrace the misfortune of becoming a pampered babu by

cheating the society and deceiving our own selves? No, we must be true to our soil, to the people of the land, its culture. And in the process we shall make our own lives more meaningful. We shall not be scared of the vastness of the suffering of this land. We shall not closet ourselves in Cuttack because there are tigers at Koraput. The floods and the droughts of this year do not belong to any particular place. They are a part of our corporate fate. Some day we have to banish these misfortunes from our midst. By acquiring the skills of honest living we must help our society in becoming more honest. The educated ones might strive for personal salvation, but we shall shun such selfish ambitions. We shall be as dynamic as a drop of water on the leaf of lotus. No temptation of sloth shall ever mar our youth. Some of us have to accept voluntary destitution in order to change the condition of this poor nation; those who shall not be scared away by rain or summer, the insinuation of the scandal-mongers. Those who shall not fear the jungles or tigers or the restrictions imposed by moribund traditions, with the fear of God in their hearts they shall transcend all other kinds of fear. This ethics of destitution shall be our curriculum.

The flood in Ersama this year might be a temporary event. But thousands of our countrymen are mired in poverty and ignorance permanently. The sting of this imposed social evil is more painful than any natural calamity. We have spent a month with the suffering people, shared their sorrows, served them as far as possible and tried to console them. Within a month we have assumed several insights in order to understand the minds of the people and their problems. This month has opened our eyes to the suffering of the people and the possible methods of eradication of that suffering; it provided us the inspiration to become worthy instruments of the process of eradication of that suffering. Thus this month would remain as an important chapter in the history of our institution.

We have not gathered here in this school to train ourselves exclusively for a life of labour or for mere intellectual training. We shall be receptive to all kinds of knowledge, make ourselves fit for all walks of life. The spirit of enquiry, the thread of enthusiasm shall keep our lives integrated from the gross physical sheath to the subtle manifestation of spiritual delight. In every country there are differences of opinion. It is acute in our country which is full of diversities. We shall not enter into those debates, for we do not intend to follow any opinion blindly. We shall not be averse to anything. Sloth is our principal enemy. We want to transform this place into a springboard which shall keep us active for ever and fill us with youthful enthusiasm. The more this place expands, the wider shall be the sphere of our enquiry and devotion. The experience at Ersama has certainly widened our sphere of learning, has deepened our bonding with the people.

## 11

Now the school is full of life again after our return from Pattamundai and Ersama. During the last one month we have lived as separate groups. One group made an estimate of the amount of relief material that was required per family under the Ersama block. The other group made an assessment of the damages in Pattamundai. The twenty odd students who stayed back took care of this Forest School. By the time we returned to Champatimunda, they had changed the shape of this place. Earlier, the place which looked like a police barrack, now it had an elegant face-lift with clean and orderly

courtyard, blooming flowerbeds and luxuriant basil plants. Now the school sports the look of a farm house.

Despite the cold we leave the bed at three o'clock in the morning these days, weave thread, pray and sweep the area clean. Some of us then head straight to the brooks that skirt our campus to take bath in the ice-cold water. All our activities here are filled with this kind of enthusiasm. Our corporate life has no space for egocentric individualism.

When I come across dissensions on the importance of correlation in basic education, the picture of this place comes quickly to my mind's eye. Unfortunately many of the concepts of Basic Education have been tamed into mere slogans by the so-called learned men in a fit of misplaced enthusiasm. Therefore, the spirit behind those concepts has been lost. There is merely a mechanical reproduction of the rituals of "correlation" in the background of a harmonious home. A harmonious home has space for everyone. It has space for all the plans and procedures. Though, conscience, love and affection permeate the space of a home. There is a vibrant contact among human beings inside a home. Several social, ethical and economic problems have their natural resolution there. There is no space for compartmentalization inside a home; so there is no need for the use of the intellect to bring about "correlation" inside a home. Our school aspires to become such a harmonious home. We expect our education and learning to be correlated with the rest of the life of the home. Our weaving, planning of saplings, our cooking should enrich and ennoble our life in this extended family.

Of late, the gulf between the home and the school has widened in the child's mind. The child perceives the school as some sort of banishment from home. At school she goes through various activities under the coercive presence of the teacher or the threat of examination. All her activities like waking up in the morning, cleaning of floors, participation in prayer, vocational training, diary maintenance etc. strengthen our faith in the "correlation" method. We fondly believe that it is through this method that she gets quickly assimilated into the old trappings.

Our system fails to provide the child an environment free of fear. Various fears and obligations fracture her in such a way that she is unable to visualize an integrated way of life. "Correlation" is not merely an amalgamation of a few disparate things through a bookish manner. It is a creative synthesis. Correlation aims at integrating the mind, heart and the body of the child. It enables (he child to have an integrated approach. With this sensibility, human beings will consider each other an end not a means. It will balance the power with sense of responsibility.

With our own narrow mindset we have also delimited the scope of self-reliance in our schools. We are trying to figure out the amount of self-reliance a child has acquired by calculating how much thread a child has woven or how much money he has earned. Self-reliance in food and clothing is the basis of all education, but not its ultimate goal. Securing that kind of self-reliance can be termed as economic education, but that is not the ultimate aim of an ideal education. An ideal education should aim at cultivating a mind with discriminating intellect and free of perversion and fear. System should complement these goals. Acharya Vinoba has stressed upon these goals of education. As long as there is no freedom from perversions, as long as life is bereft of values like discipline and service or there is no independent quest for knowledge, mere material sufficiency will be meaningless. Even material self-sufficiency demands a free and



discriminating intellect. Our scriptures have recognized the importance of the material being and have compared it to the supreme Brahman. But no scripture has given us the wrong advice to accept matter as the only substance of our being. We need to stretch our sight from the material being to the being as joy.

## 12

The good news this time is that two new teachers have joined our family. This is something to celebrate because it is against the contemporary trend. Today the trend is, whoever is educated and wants to be successful heads towards the big towns. They seek jobs in the government offices by placating the high officials or by using their familial clout. The activity of the entire society today is centred around the big towns and their market-places. Be it literature, culture or civilization, everything is controlled by some kind of market-ethic that is prevalent in big cities. The mask human beings wear; the strategies they employ, the kind of education they receive are all a means to fit into that ethic. Those who are defeated in all these manoeuvres turn to teaching as a profession in our country. They consider it some kind of a curse to come to school as a teacher. They live their entire life assailed by self-pity. Their knowledge pales under the shadow of their sense of destitution. For the last one year we were looking for a suitable teacher for our school. But we got defeated each time at the market-place where success goes to be highest bidder. It is the school's good fortune that two young men joined us on their own volition in such a scenario. Today the air is full of the paces to success. Those who leave the path of success and take to the path of discipline and self-realization are termed as fools by the shrewd guardians of the establishment. Who can explain the calling which provokes someone to shun the marketplace of success and to embrace the wilderness in which they can fashion a beautiful school of life? We hail our two teacher-friends and assure them a share of our joys and sorrows, our life. This promise of togetherness will be the most important market of our welcome.

When we discuss Basic Education, we tend not to analyse the general state of education in our country. We rarely find an opportunity to consider judiciously how education has been imparted in our country for the last few years and how it has impacted our personal and social living. There are a few who are sceptical about anything new. They love to be tied down to old methods despite their harmful effects. They prefer to stick to the beaten track and are scared of any innovation. It is a kind of perversion which keeps human beings in a state of impoverishment in a world of plenty. There are a few others who decide a method to be right or wrong by counting heads. For them whatever is backed by the majority is right and the rest is wrong, unethical. The major objection of this group against Basic Education is that if it is so beneficial, then why the majority of the students are flocking to the traditional schools. How many ministers and high government officials are sending their wards to the Basic Schools, they ask. These questions have an underlying assumption i.e. if the ministers and high officials are not patronizing it, it must not be good enough. This false assumption underlies their mindset. It is true that a few higher-ups are paying lip-service to Basic Education under some compulsion, but they do not have complete faith in the new system. This kind of behaviour is a sign of their dishonesty and divided self. They have lost their conscience in the quest of a utilization skill that can be exchanged in a market-place for profit. It is true

that the majority opinion is of great importance in a democratic setup, but that cannot be the only guiding principle for deciding what is right or wrong about an educational method. Twenty years ago Hitler had garnered majority support for himself in Germany through tact and force; but can we support Hitler's ideology just because it had the backing of the majority? We have shot many a great man dead, we have burnt many scientists, spiritual leaders, geniuses because of this confusion. For this reason the wisdom and ethics, instead of becoming part of our daily living, have continued as empty rituals. We have lost the spontaneous ability of discarding the old and adopting the new. Despite much fanfare in the royal highway of the majority, truth sometimes lies in the thought of the minority. A German book titled *Der Waldgang* meaning 'the forest path' which has revolutionized the political thought of the country is based on this idea. The author by uniting several historical examples and texts on governance has exhorted human beings to think as human beings, use their conscience, ethical principles and not follow the majority blindly as the sheep do or feel ashamed to be a part of the minority.

The name of the book is apt. Our folktales often describe the adventures of the powerful—the princes, sons of ministers, generals and policemen—on the royal highway, but at the same time they also describe the journey of the lowly mongoose which treads the forest path. The comforts of the highway have not tempted the traveller of the forest path into indiscretions. Rather, the mighty and the powerful have spent their lives in the terror of imaginary dangers of the forest path. At a time when democracy has come to mean counting of majority heads, the mighty drunk with power, have found ways and means to silence the voice of the minority. Through jail, the noose of the hangman, the network of secret police and abduction the minority is being decimated. Those who believe only on the strength of brute numbers are themselves full of fear. They have no faith in any ideal. Those who step on to the royal highway to cover up their own doubts amidst the presence of plenty get terrified when they learn about the alternative path in the forest. They don't understand why one should embrace the difficulties of aligning with the minority when there is a softer option of herd-living, like that of the sheep.

We would not have chosen the forest path had we believed in the cacophony of the royal road. Just because the mighty and the powerful have adopted a particular way we would not call it the only right way. We have not chosen the travails of the forest path to get the approval of the mighty or to be sung paeans for our efforts by the troubadour-poets. The current system of education in our society recognizes only the intellectual self of human beings. We have undertaken a courageous experiment of education which recognizes whole being of man. The current system of education creates an unholy division between the privileged few and the uneducated majority of our country. We have undertaken the vow that all the children of this country will get the opportunity of education and proper nurture of their selves. By cultivating mere outward intellectual competence the contemporary education is making human beings not only in a commercial set-up whereas we are aiming for the development of both the inner and outer self of the man through our model. The conventional education perpetuates hierarchies in the society, sacrifices all human values at the altar of material pleasures and widens the gulf between human beings. We are guided by the faith that the kind of education we are experimenting shall level down hierarchies. And once that is achieved, the society will be rid of all kinds of hatred, and human beings will visualize the plentitude of their inner selves transcending myopic material pleasures through the

discipline of love, action and reverence. We say all this not to claim that we have become some sort of gods. We continue to remain human. We have all the human frailties. Our minds continue to be divided by the customs of contemporary society. But we have ventured out with great enthusiasm to transcend our conditions, to grow flowers on the mud. Revolutions begin in the human mind. We are not ashamed to declare that we do not acknowledge the contemporary culture and social system as legitimate. We invite those who think that the society is unjust to come out of the mire and introspect so that the system would change. We urge them to use their creative intelligence and conscience to free themselves from the present entanglements. We do not impose on others our path as the only right path that is available; rather believe that if there is proper dedication, there will be no conflict in our efforts even if our paths are different. If we are all searching goodness, justice, faith and truth, then howsoever strange one's method is, we the travellers of the forest path will hail their efforts.

### 13

Often many people at Ersama ask "Where are you from, children?" The students answer, "We are from Angul." Knowledgeable people express their surprise, "Has a college been established at Angul already?" The children then add a slice of humour, "We all are from the jungle school at Champalimunda." People are more confused. Then, one of us explains, "We study at the Post-Basic School there." After that comes the all comprehending tone, "O, Basic School. Then you all must be adept at all kinds of work." The questioning stops. Nobody remembers the information that the children study there. I overhear their exchange. I feel like laughing. At Ersama we have carried our own luggage, have relieved boatmen when they tire out, cooked our own food when need arose and so on. Everywhere we hear the same refrain, "They are students of Post-Basic School, they are capable of anything." Once it rained so much that the entire village was inundated. Four or five houses collapsed. The walls of the dilapidated building which was shown to us as the village minor school caved in. Water travelled down streets and into ponds. But nobody was seen anywhere-Everyone, it seems, was confined to their own house. Our group then ventured out along with the local policemen. We dug a canal to evacuate the excess water. Only then, a few villagers emerged on the streets here and there. One of them even blurted out, "They are students of Basic School, they can accomplish everything." I have heard such remarks even from the educated elites who never want to go near the downtrodden masses for fear of soiling themselves in the mud but presume that they can eradicate their suffering in their incarnation as officers with the help of pen and paper. Some educated elites of this country earnestly believe that God has arranged all the riches for a few and consigned the rest to a life of deprivation and suffering. Their ideas about education similarly remain divided. They think it is natural that a few will become officers after getting educated, they will turn up at the village occasionally to participate in various celebrations but will mainly stay at the towns while the rest will study in Basic Schools, do odd menial jobs like cleaning the floor, weaving etc. They think that education at Basic Schools does not mean much beyond clearing woods, and wiping floors. To them the real education means studying in big buildings, wearing clean clothes, appearing smart with their dresses and shoes and taking notes while the lecture is on. These two modes of education are being run at the behest of one

government. There would hardly be a government officer who might not be thinking in terms of this dual policy of education.

Our country never lacked labourers. It is this country's good fortune that there is more unemployment here than the requisite work-force in its industries. In the present society there are hundreds of servants for every officer. When the country abounds with unemployed work-force what was the need of basic education? Everywhere people seem to pray for deliverance from the sin and shame of manual labour. The farmer who thinks he has wasted his life tilling the farm, plans to educate his future generations. So that they do not have to undergo the drudgery of manual labour. In such a scenario of excess labour why does Basic Education conceive this ill-gotten idea of creating more manual labourers? Couldn't Gandhi visualize this much?

The other day I was going through a piece on Marx. The socialist party of Germany had put forth a proposal to enact a law which would prevent children from all kinds of labour. Marx firmly opposed this proposal. He opined that children would have proper education if the curriculum contained some physical labour. It was not Marx's intention that with those skilled children the production would be enhanced. He argued decisively that if children undertake productive labour along with their general education like lessons in geography, history, literature etc. they would have total human development. Today, everyone hates physical labour in our society. Those who live by manual labour hate it too. They work because of fear of starvation. But the slothful babu of our society continues to be their ideal. The rickshaw puller of our town dreams at night of being well-dressed babu and riding a rickshaw himself. The condition of our society is such that it is no more possible to have any respect for manual labour. Because in such a system no one can get any joy out of physical labour. Therefore some will continue to be engaged in physical labour, but suffer the shame of it in private while others will enjoy the fruits of their labour from a position of privilege. Our literature, culture and education will continue to be affected by this unhealthy divide. Both these halves of our contemporary society are mired by a dark ignorance. When one half is drunk in false complacency the other half is tied to an animal existence of corporal living. Both halves are tied to their respective half-truths. These half-truths have impoverished human hearts in many ways on both sides and it seems we have started getting used to it.

Gandhi had dreamt of freeing our hearts from such bondage with the help of a new education system in this country. The total opening up of human heart is the first and foremost objective of Basic Education. Years ago, during Queen Victoria's reign nobody could walk barefoot on the streets of England. Even before police could arrest him, the common public used to gherao him. The people of those times believed that getting properly dressed for an occasion was what being civilized was all about. The needs of convention overshadowed natural needs. Such a perverted mindset is dominating our society- However dirty our kitchen and home might be, we cover ourselves up with clean dresses up to our necks when we go out. We might be boiling inside, but we are supposed to wear a coat and suit in the middle of summer, otherwise the worth of our position in the society will go down. When our worth as human beings decrease, we become more and more conscious in our sick minds of the worth of our station in life. The doors, through which the healthy minds could have touched other healthy minds, clean hearts could have established rapport with each other in our society are now closed. Let us venture out to open those doors. Let us not stay away from work, from knowledge. We

shall not be scared by conventions to accomplish all that is required for the development of a total and balanced human being. We shall restore by the courage of truth and education the ties between man and man, which have been severed by falsehoods and bad training. All the educational philosophies of the world today agree that the task of social reconstruction should begin from the school. We won't run away from our responsibilities by keeping the society divided. We won't close our own doors by maintaining a gulf between those who fear labour and those who are oppressed by it. Let us overcome our false sense of shame. Let not the deplorable idea of turning the future leaders of this country into slothful beings permeate our consciousness.

Once I entered a hamlet of people belonging to Karan caste while roaming around the villages of Ersama. The houses had high verandas with long stone steps. We sat down on a verandah towards the middle of the hamlet. Several people belonging to various age groups soon surrounded us. There were half a dozen old men. To every question I asked, each one volunteered to answer trying to subdue others. Was it not a sign of long deprivation and suffering, I asked myself. Suddenly, I heard one old man scolding another in English while the latter looked on helplessly. After the barrage of abuse was over, he triumphantly looked at me as if he had just conquered a fort. I continued to sit, impassively. Then he asked me whether I could understand what all he said. I wondered whether he had told me anything then he responded, "I scolded him alright. But I spoke in English so that you can make out. How can that idiot understand English? I know from the newspaper that college students are engaged in relief work. So I reckoned you must be from one of those colleges and must know English." That day in that village I got an inkling of how deeply our perverted notion about language has corroded our national character.

Many respectable people think that there is virtually no education in Basic Schools since English is not taught there. Some students also feel diffident about it. Because of this self-deprecatory feeling that the students of the Basic Schools are not at par with other students, some teachers have started teaching English from Class VI in a few Basic Schools. At least on this point they have violated the regulations laid down in government records. From the railway booking counter to the High Court, everywhere seems as if a tussle is going on in this country between the babus and the laity. Especially after the departure of the British from this country, a fight is on between Oriya language and the English language. As the babus and officers of this country have devised ways to separate themselves from the uneducated lot through their mannerisms and apparels, similarly the people with a nodding acquaintance with the English language are trying to differentiate themselves from the Oriya-speaking masses. English language is helping immensely to keep the two sides of our society separate. The contractor is maintaining records in English as the labourer looks on, the policeman is entering the reports of crime in the diary in English, and the postmaster is signing in English. As if some extra-terrestrial rulers from afar are fixing everything in this small earth for the Oriya-speaking populace which identifies itself through its thumb-impressions. There is a huge mental gulf between the common man and the English-educated babus of this country.

A hundred and fifty years ago there was a famous writer in Denmark named Hall Beyarg. The then genteel people of Denmark mainly used French in their transactions. In a small country like Denmark its own language too had an inferior status. In his satirical plays Beyarg established Denmark's language as the medium of literature and expression

of civilization and culture. In one of his satires he has written that people should use French with their lovers, order servants in German and use Danish their own language only with dogs. In this unfortunate country of ours, human beings show less care for their fellow human beings than the care shown to the dogs in Europe. The way we ill-treat coolies, rickshaw-pullers and daily labourers is a proof of that. Our love for our own language is limited only in the area of securing jobs.

This is not a mere problem involving two languages.

This is a problem of social and mental distance. It is one of the many differences that have been created between man and man under some despicable pretext. Last year a college had invited me to give a lecture. The principal insisted that I should deliver my lecture in English for the benefit of non-Oriyas whose number in the entire college was only four or five. Ultimately I stuck obstinately to my stand and spoke in Oriya. Often we cite instances of England and France. Can anybody imagine such a thing in a college there? When students studying there write letters in English, they express their surprise by asking if there has not been a common language for Indians yet. The distance between England and France is merely twenty-two miles. There is heavy traffic between the two countries. But the two countries are using two different languages. India is eight thousand miles away from England, but educated Indians seem to have secured the right to use English in their lives indiscriminately. They might have thanked God if they did not have to have any contact with the languages of this country. Three thousand years ago there was such a sorry state in Europe. The emperor of Rome and Roman culture had pervaded the entire continent. Schools taught in Latin. Those who were lucky enough to be educated got severed from their own cultures. They spent their lives memorizing Latin language and literature. They had great pleasure in writing love-letters to each other in Latin during their leisure hours and considered it a valediction of the success of their education. We are undergoing the same kind of all-luck these days. At Ersama a few government officials spoke to the students sometimes in English. Knowing fully well that the students do not understand English, they often forgot the ground reality. The officer might have had a respectable degree in sociology or civics, memorized the duties of a proper citizen for his examination but he easily forgets the simple task of not using English with people who do not know the language.

Had it been merely a problem of language it could not have hurt our corporate social life in such a manner. Some effort and a few legislations could have solved this problem but obviously it is not so. First of all we have to change our mindset. It can be solved through an elaborate planning that will take into account all the citizens of the country. A hundred years ago Swedish language had covered the national life of Finland like a lump. The language of ten per cent of the population had overshadowed the language used by ninety per cent. That state of affairs is no more there due to a great revolution in the field of education. Every year new words are enriching the stock of Finnish language. The Finnish literature is respected everywhere in the world. But fifty years ago there was a great upheaval in the realm of culture when a local writer Alekmis Kivy wrote his novel in Finnish language. The small state of Israel has surpassed others in creating its own language. For the last two thousand years Hebrew language had almost no presence. Like the Jewish race, its language was also oppressed all over the world. The Jewish community of Europe had the shameful misfortune of adopting Yiddish, a hybrid language with traces of German hi place of their own pure language. In 1947, a new

nation, Israel was created and the Jewish community was free. From that day, the community resolved to recover its own language. Now, from all governmental transactions to the highest level of university education, Hebrew has become the *lingua franca*. Unlike us, no disease of convention has been able to deter the path of the Jew. By their own resolve they have been able to breath life into a moribund language, have gained a new life themselves.

It was around ten o'clock in the night when we reached Cuttack taking our leave from Ersama. A bout of rain on the way had half-drenched us. Many of us did not have even proper dresses. Getting down from the bus near the park we embarked our strange march-past holding our own luggage. The thought of a morsel of food was uppermost in our minds. The children were curiously glancing all around since they had returned to Cuttack after more than a month. A shopkeeper was giving final touches to his wares before closing for the day. Where from? He jokingly remarked when he saw this strange procession. I promptly answered with all the bravado of a naughty boy "from the village". This hobgoblin of the divide between the town and village is endemic in our society today. It also permeates the field of our language. When we are shouting to the world outside that our literature and our culture is the greatest, our race and our poets are the best in the earth, this hobgoblin of our perversions must be ridiculing our pompousness.

#### 14

This time I am writing this letter from a village within a dense forest. The Forest School at Champatimunda is around twenty-five miles from here. Wood is being collected from here for building houses there. The cutting of wood was started last year. One of us had come here to observe the collection. Each student is spending a week overseeing the work. This change hi the life of the school is very enjoyable. The village here is surrounded by hills on all sides. Most of the villagers are farmers. They cultivate rice, sugarcane, mustard and groundnut. Had there been better facility of water, more crops could have been produced. Let alone water for crops, how many villages of the country are getting enough water for drinking and washing? When the education system is set right and more and more dedicated people come out to construct a beautiful nation, then the suffering of the people of this country will be eradicated. The technological know-how is already under human control. Human beings can now establish beautiful habitats wherever they wish. The hills of Israel have now acquired a green hue with new trees. The snow deserts of Siberia are growing vegetables and flowers. After independence, the same ability and power is now in our hands. More and more technological know-how is being added to our existing resources. But along with technological know-how we need a scientific outlook. A few will be educated, a few will be feted, the thinking is utterly unscientific, a product of an unsocial, inhuman mindset. Because of this unscientific outlook, science and technological know-how is doing more harm than good to this country. Plans worth crores are going to dust. A lot of money is being spent, seminars on planning are being organized, but because of an unsocial educational system and our unsocial mindset, the fruit of our enterprise is not reaching everywhere.

This is supposed to be a Kandha village. But no one speaks or understands Kandha dialect here. Generations ago they probably had contact with the Kandha dialect and culture. So we can call (hem pure Kandhas like the Sauras of Ganjam district who call themselves pure sabararas. They speak Oriya; imitate dress habits and housing patters of Oriyas. To claim that they are superior to ordinary sabararas, they used this term pure sabara. The social and cultural habits of Oriyas considered the “standard”, the “norm”. Those who are approximating ‘norm’, keeping themselves aloof from ancient sabararas, are calling themselves pure sabararas. This kind of behaviour can be seen among Oriyas too. A few families in a village have more lands than the others. The children of those families are getting higher education at Cuttack or Calcutta. Their life style reflects the prosperity which wealth and bearings can acquire. We can designate them as pure Oriya for the lack of a better nomenclature. ‘We are Oriyas, but our standard is better than the rest of the Oriyas’—this kind of mindset is the mindset of the so-called pure people. The experts dealing with human culture may detect many contradictions and impurity beneath this designation of being pure. A society which belittles its own culture and blindly imitates another civilization lives a divided existence. It suffers the ill-fate of pursuing the temporary in the place of the permanent. Once we had tried to become pure Indians by imitating the European civilization. The curse of that unfortunate attempt still hovers over many of our enterprises. We have moved away from our own culture, but the European culture has still been beyond our reach. We are troubled by a certain rootlessness. Our lack of understanding of the subtle differences between civilization and culture is at the root of all those troubles. One can adopt a new civilization without much difficulty, but if one deserts one’s culture, one is bound to suffer several illnesses that will weaken one’s mind. No outward label of the so-called purity will be able to compensate the hurt and helplessness of the inner being.

I am reminded of Finland whenever I come across a forest in our country. I do not know of another country where there is as much affinity for and dependence upon the forest as in Finland. All good novels, poems and stories in Finland abound with beautiful representation of forests. Folklores and folk religions are replete with silent beauty of forests and the legends of Tapio, the deity of forests. The people of the country call the forests their ‘Virha Kulta’ meaning the ‘green gold’. While trudging along the forest I thought that our forests too can be transformed into ‘green gold’. We do not know how to take care of our forests. The government has of course appointed high level officials and lowly forest guards to nurture the forests and guard against the thieves stealing wood. The high level officials have studied intricate know-how of forest maintenance. But the knowledge is largely commercial in nature, which may have a high utility value but fails to instil dutiful commitment which is required to protect and nurture the forests. The officers have a tie not with the forests but with the state capitals of the respective states. Their enthusiasm has been sapped by calculations for promotions; their knowledge has been rotten by lack of use. Thus there is much pomp and ceremony in the network of pen, files and clerks, but the forests are increasingly becoming uglier. People’s attitude has also become reciprocally indifferent. The forests may be near their homes, but they do not consider them a worthy wealth. Once they get an opportunity, they ravage the forest like a wild elephant. The more one is capable of looting, the more respectable one becomes. They have no knowledge about forests. Consequently forests are getting denuded; the ‘green gold’ is lying like a broken toy of a naughty child.



In Finland every farmer has his own forest. Every family has as much forest land as farmland. This is their custom. Every farmer knows how to protect his own forest. He has acquired the scientific know-how of protecting the forest. Forestry schools have been established near villages. The farmers are able to receive the know-how in their own language without having to spend much. The schools teach the skills beginning from nurturing saplings to cooperative management of wood and paper factories. Sometimes I wonder about the condition of my country. I wish the students did not have to go to Dehradun for higher studies in forestry. The children could learn the skill and responsibility of maintaining a forest in schools nearer home in their own language. The children of those areas where there are forests were equipped with this knowledge. The forests themselves would serve as laboratories. All the relevant knowledge from germination of a seed to manufacturing various kinds of woodwork were available locally. And when the children grew up, they took up the responsibility of these forests. As in the school, in the larger school of life, the forest could remain the chief subject-matter of their vocation. In various transactions with the forest there could be a meeting found between their life and their culture. Now, the government is choosing as its officers the students who are trained in the forestry college at Dehradun. The student, who goes to Dehradun, comes back with a degree, mainly. He comes back with a commercial attitude of securing a job in the national bureaucratic jungle and making money, not with a mind refined by knowledge. This state could change. The people having close affinity with the forest could become students of forestry colleges. After education they could return to serve the forests. They could make themselves and their community prosperous by judicious utilization of forest resources. There could be a harmony between life and knowledge. A balance could be established in the national life.

The government is making special plans for the inhabitants of the forests of this country. More funds are being earmarked. Special schools are being set up for the tribal students. Future will tell how far the tribals are getting benefited by this kind of patronization. For centuries they were marginalized, oppressed by Aryans and Oriyas. The thinking that a mere outward change in their deportment would change their fate is presumptuous. If our planning is not more conscientious, we would drive them into a delusion of being civilized, by equipping them with a few artificial mannerisms of civilization. First of all we have to cultivate their aspirations. They must have a sense of belonging for this country, only then, they can participate with a heightened awareness, in the nation-building exercise along with the rest of the population of this country. They too have a responsibility of extracting gold from the rivers, hills and soil of this country. They have to be inculcated with this high idealism. They have to be drafted into the workforce of the national reconstruction.

## 15

I am writing this letter from a Forest School after a long gap. I remember writing the last letter from the front porch of the Kandha village three months ago. A lot has changed in the meantime. The winter then was still sharp. We used to shiver as we took a dip in the cold spring early in the morning when it was still dark. Gradually the spring dried up. We then dug small wells on the sand bed and carefully managed our water requirement. One well took care of washing our body while we used another to clean our utensils.

Water of yet another carefully preserved well was used for drinking purpose. Quite some time elapsed in this lazy manner. The wells in the sand stopped flowing. Then we turned to the permanent well in the campus. Last year in the summer this well had merely a foot of water. A black granite floor beneath the water level had made us despondent. The summer is in the offing. Can this well be adequate for our needs? With both expectation and apprehension we turned to the well. A platform with a tank was constructed for washing utensils and for bathing. The well saw us through the summer.

Now the rainy season has started. After a week's rain the whole place has acquired a green hue with new grass. The old trees have grown fresh leaves. There is no fear of shortage of water. Students have gone home for vacation. There is still a month's time before they return. Now there are only six to seven of us here. The students have made an arrangement in a manner so that all of them will spend their vacations at home by turn but the school will never be empty. The students are visiting their homes by rotation. After a month, a batch of new students will join us. Our life will be enriched by their enthusiasm and presence. There is no fear anymore. Why should anyone be afraid to stay here? Last year when we came to this house in the forest, we were scared. Every glance through the window filled us with the fear of imaginary wild beasts, as if tigers and bears were growling behind every bush to pounce upon us. On the first day we finished our prayers and took our meals even before the daylight had receded. We went to bed behind the closed doors before the darkness had set in. I suppose, then, was no more significant than an inn for us. Gradually a bond was created, the tie of love and friendship with each other slowly linked us to the soil, to the surrounding here. Fear evaporated. The children slept outside throughout this summer. The same human mind which is assailed by all kinds of fear and apprehension as long as it has not created a bond with the place gradually makes it a part of its life by weaving a network of various threads of belongingness.

A month back hills were wearing a garland of fire even before the daybreak. Now there is a celebration of the clouds and rain on the heat of summer nights. The water-bearing clouds are residing in the caves of the hills. The nature all around is wearing a green hue. Today it has been raining without respite. The stream near the house is full. Hence, there will be murmur of quick flow of water on the rocks. The normal activity has been silent of late since we are only a few here. While writing this letter in the solitude of my room, many a thought is flowing across my mind. The sound of the water making through the thatched roof helps the mind to be enthralled. The school completes two years after only two months. Two batches of students have joined us in the meantime. Their enthusiasm and efforts have transformed this place. Our history has become strange and eventful because of our quarrels, misunderstandings and sulking that is common to this age. Often the fickle minds of the students have rebelled doubting the ability of the teacher and at other times, the baton of punishment within the teacher has aggressively awakened at the wrong-doing of the students. The natural incompleteness of human minds and hearts has also ruffled the life here. The memory of all the sweet and sour events are flowing across the mind today. I detest myself when I look back upon the activities of the last two years. Perhaps I should have given some more time and opportunity to effect a change in heart before resorting to punishment. Today I feel like a soldier wounded in a battle. The memory of the battle hurts. A school is not a battlefield, nor a heartless courtroom where one punishes the guilty and frees the innocent according

to a code of rules. One can compare a school only with a flower-garden and the teacher with the gardener. Special care and effort is needed to grow flower in each plant here. A lot of love and commitment is needed for a teacher and no smell of recompense should accompany that commitment. The commitment should be natural and duty-bound. There is goodness in every man. There is enthusiasm for proper growth in every man. The teacher should have the kind of commitment which is spawned by this faith. Behind every activity of a school there should be a kind of commitment that naturally germinates in the heart when one has respect for every human being, when one has the faith that every human being is the repository of immense possibilities. When this commitment withers, education will falter, and the teacher will fail.

There is a difference between a teacher and an ideal teacher. The shortcomings which often turn a man into a beast are also there in a teacher, it is quite likely that many temptations and excitements of the world keep the teacher tempted and excited as well. But the teacher must have a profound faith in his own inner goodness. The teacher must have the desire to discover this goodness within himself and in others. Let all the desirable and undesirable events help the teacher march further in this process of discovery. Let the teacher learn along with his students; let him acquire the strength of self-correction through proper judgement. The teacher who has become static, who has come to the school with the presumptuous senility of only teaching and demonstrating to others will cause more damage to the institution. He can be called a false prophet in the seminary of life.

In the Vedic age, the rishis prayed to the gods for the benefit of the world. The *mantras* of the Veda are full of benevolent wishes for more opulent granaries, cattle, fertile fields, for us discord and envy among human beings etc.

What prayers can one have for a school? Ten years hence there would be no dearth of rooms, study materials and equipment, books and resources. But it is also not true that all the requirements of the school can be fulfilled by ensuring all these. The real prosperity can be gained by overcoming the two most important wants. Worthy teachers and worthy students are the most valuable wealth of a school. There should be no trace of presumptuousness in the teacher and there should be no laziness in the student. That school is really blessed and is a worthy home for education, which has such teachers and such students. Now the rain comes cascading down like benediction of gods on a praying earth parched in the summer. While watching this blessed celebration I just have one prayer for this small school, “O God, there should never be the dearth of worthy teachers and worthy students in this school.”

## 16

Last week there was heavy rain here. Rain and thunder shower caused widespread damage all over Orissa. Houses collapsed in many villages, a few people were struck dead by lightning and several families suffered hunger due to the lack of firewood. The catastrophe touched us too in this forest. Many a time a sudden storm has threatened to blow away our thatched roof. When the students were studying one evening there was a powerful storm. The upper part of the roof was blown away. There were big holes in the roof above our heads. The children gathered their books and mattresses in a corner to protect those from getting drenched. Rainwater seeped onto the floor. We felt miserable.

But probably to assuage the feelings of children, nature suddenly worked on its magic. Huge hailstones started descending from above. The children forgot their misery and were engaged in the game of catching the hailstones and sucking on them.

For the last seven days we had to endure torrential rain. Thatched rooms leaked rain water. For the last two years the paddy crop has failed in Angul. So there is a dearth of reed for thatching the roof. The farmers have preserved just a little for the cattle-feed. During winter this year we had built a bridge over the spring-water with rock, soil and branches of trees. When the fresh rain water came flowing in the stream the bridge was drowned. Now all work is stopped since vehicles carrying bricks and stone chips cannot cross the stream. When the children come after a month it would probably be impossible to provide them a dwelling place. Moreover, one has to think of thirty students of the new batch. Sometimes I feel” despondent. But at other times, the mind is not prepared to accept defeat. The mind is so enamoured of its own plans and dreams that it is unwilling to see any hindrances on the way. It is not prepared to weigh any kind of loss or profit, possibility or impossibility of a project which is a hallmark of a utilitarian outlook. For the last two years, it has tried like a gardener to wear a garland with fifty adolescent minds using the string of an educational institution. By leaving the fruits of action to God it has come prepared for the oblation of duty or loses faith? These children must come of age. They must be inculcated with a higher quest and higher values of life despite all their innate misgivings and vainglory. They have to be filled with the courageous desire of transforming themselves into committed and developed human beings despite their failings and weaknesses. The fire of marching ahead has to be ignited in them. Many of them have come from poor families. They are deprived of the comforts that are normally available to the so-called civilized people of our society. The families of many students might have gone without food during this unseasonal rain, houses of many might have given way. How happy were they, when they went home!

When I think of them now, only pictures of suffering flash in my mind. These children have not been brought here into the forest in order to show compassion to a few poor families. Though they are poor, they have the ability and desire for a higher mode of living and thinking. They are being nurtured here in order to demonstrate their worth and ability to the complacent section of our society who think that since they themselves are comfortable, all is and must be right in the world. The poor is at the margin of the society of this independent country. The civil society is standing on the shoulders of the poor by hoodwinking them with many enticements and show of compassion. In due course of time the poor or the ‘shudra’ will protest against this. The ‘shudra’ or the man of the margin is getting ready to shatter the illusion that has been spawned in this country in the name of independence and nationalism which has traumatized the life of millions. Some day the shudra will assert his own rights through his own worth, humility and life’s offering. There is a powerful story in the Upanishad about the ability of a ‘shudra’. The son of lowly concubine went to a teacher once with a heart flaming with desire for knowledge. The teacher vain with knowledge who was half-asleep turned him away. His lowly birth did not make him fit for the pursuit of knowledge, the teacher opined. But he was undeterred. His mother asked him to acquire knowledge by adopting this Earth as his Guru or teacher. His strong desire for knowledge and his committed effort made him famous as Rishi Mahidas. But he had not forgotten the slight of the earlier teacher in a huff. He added the honorific of lowly origin, Aitarya to his name. Aitarey Upanishad, the

fruit of his discipline and research got the approbation of all and sundry. Even the brat imines too used it as a holy scripture: It is a thrall. Eighty five per cent people of this society cannot sign their names, ninety per cent people can't ensure two square meals a day, but still praises for the nation and culture are sung in this country. The fact is here we are parading our neuroses in the name of literature, art and culture. In this Forest School we shall try to get rid of that disease. The children will give up all these neuroses before entering into social life. That is the main aim of teaching in the school. Today Basic School System is perceived as the educational system of the poor people. This perception makes our students rather diffident. But the society has relegated ninety per cent of its people to the margins and wallows in its narrow perception of culture complacently. We would rather tread the marginal path. The evil design of erecting barriers between the so-called cultural elites and the impoverished majority is still active. The privileged are bent upon not allowing the 'shudra', the marginal man, into their fold. They are tempted to widen the gulf between themselves and the shudra with the help of English language and fat salaries. Such a society needs the discipline of the man of the margin. The man of the margin will rupture the lethargy of the society. He will close the gap between man and man. Here we shall undertake that kind of discipline far away from the lowering society. God will definitely fulfil our aspirations if we have a committed effort and powerful faith. Our success or failure will be assessed by the deeds of those who go out of here with the determination of a Mahidas. Four hundred years ago, the saint poet Achyutananda had declared the 'shudra' as the highest among the four castes and had claimed himself to be a 'shudra'. Shudra means the servant, the servant of God and holds the right to serve the society. So the shudra is the most capable person in a society. Such powerful imagination around 'shudra' and 'service' has rarely been achieved in world literature. Achyutananda had shown the path of dharma by protesting against the scriptural Brahmanism and by adopting shudrahood. In our times too, knowledge and personality are like commodities for sale in a market, talent and humaneness are sacrificed at the altar of competitiveness. Man is gradually forgetting the simple virtues like love and fraternity- Those who willingly christen themselves into the cult of shudrahood will endure and help this world to survive.

Sun shines softly after several days of rains. The sight of drenched green grass lifts the mind away into some unknown realm. The wind blows unfettered. Nature here helps us to survive, inspires us to enjoy the blessings of life beyond getting and spending, helping us to resolve much of our doubts and apprehensions. The hills all around, the bright blue sky above, the blue-green visage of the far-off and nearby forest empower the willing journeyman for a long voyage. The sight of approaching rain strikes the lazy mind with a sense of wonder like flashes of lightening. The sight of white clouds resting like boats after a long journey in the port of caves in the hills fills the heart with a sense of faith and assurances. There is no dearth of food for the eyes, the mind and the heart. So why should we impoverish ourselves in a quagmire of insecurity? The market-place of competition is far away. Here, there is no fear of ill-will born out of insecurity, no delusion of despondency, no leisure for wallowing in the fear of shame or condemnation. Here, there is a gift of being fulfilled, of being alive to the core and the joy of expanding one's own self. In every ray of light and in every atom of the air here, there is lofty inspiration for entering into life as a worthy human being.

The Deputy Minister of Education, Government of India, had visited Orissa this year in his capacity as the President of All India Primary Teacher's Conference. In his brilliant speech, he highlighted at least one fact from which it is difficult to draw away one's attention. Promulgating compulsory primary education in India is the goal which has been enshrined in our Constitution which was drafted six or seven years ago. In many civilized countries where people have the fortune of self-rule, compulsory primary education is the norm. England, Denmark and every other country where democracy is the form of governance, have envisaged eight years of compulsory primary education for each child. But they are not sitting on this laurel. For example, the Government of a country like the USA is working overtime to ensure that boys and girls up to eighteen years of age get an opportunity to pursue knowledge which is useful in their future life and that they are not assailed by the fear of fending for themselves. No such effort has yet been undertaken in the unfortunate country of ours. All our plans of reconstruction of this country have mainly remained confined in the code-books of the constitution like the religion which remains tied down to the scriptures and the life which remains limited to the demands of the stomach. Much welfare measure has been confined to code-books. There is no effort or enthusiasm to actualize them in life. The principle of compulsory education to all had similarly remained in the code-books. Nobody remembered this during budget discussions. The minister probably remembered this when he met the teacher at the national conference. He raised the question in a novel manner too. The speech asked the teachers to start a movement to ensure the compulsory education for all as enshrined in the Constitution of India.

Whether the constitutional provision would really be actualized by a teacher's movement in a question we will consider later. But whether the primary teachers can organize a movement, is a question we should discuss first. In our country, those who fail to get into any other profession take up teaching in village schools. The sociology textbooks of civilized peoples claim that the teachers are the real legislators of a country since they are building the future citizens. But in our country the exactly opposite thing is being practised after independence. The profession that pays more has higher prestige in the eyes of the people. Sometimes in the past the country probably was once a country of the rishis. The king of Ayodhya used to panic when Rishi Viswamitra came on visit. The king had no right to interfere in the activities of monasteries, but those are tales of the past having no relevance whatsoever, except for being cited in speeches and debate competitions. The clever captains who run this country know this too well. Therefore the scale of values in this country has been turned upside down. The society is accepting the hegemony of those who understand the contemporary Zeitgeist and become successful in amassing wealth and power through tactical employment of business skills.

All opinions, ideals and cultural mores follow his caprices. But those who adopt teaching as their profession in rural schools out of compulsion are considered ill-fated. The society pities them who are joining the profession in search of the ideal of serving the country. The so-called successful people of the society think that they lack pragmatism. How many teachers in India are satisfied with their positions? How many have adopted the profession of teaching out of love? Ninety per cent of the teachers are applying for new jobs. If they somehow succeed in getting one, they are running away from the boundaries of the schools. Any private school in Orissa can be an example of

such a sorry state. The educated people of this country consider schools a middle passage, a stepping-stone. A high school has been established in our village since eleven years. Only one teacher from amongst the lot who joined at the time of the establishment of the school still continues there. Most of them have left the profession of teaching altogether. Of course, for primary teachers this facility of changing jobs at will is not available. Their level of education being low, they are condemned to this profession despite their disenchantment and lack of fulfilment. Their salary is low and not enough to meet the requirements of a life of an educated person. So they are also engaged in procuring income from other sources unable to depend fully on the salary of a teacher. A few of them are offering private tuitions in exchange of money, some others are doing sundry jobs like writing notes, applications etc. What kind of movement can these people organize? Those who organize a movement need to have enough strength to do it, they must have proper understanding of and considered opinion about a movement. But what kind of movement the primary teacher of our country will organize, when all his energy is taken up trying to maintain his body and soul.

In the industrial labourers' movement in our country, the lower level employees like the drivers of tram and bus, the scavengers, railway employees organize movements in this country. These movements are merely for raising salaries. As long as the hunger is not satiated, man cannot have any other kind of movement than economic ones. As long as the demands of the body are not satisfied, we are forced to have a body-centred worldview. Last year the teachers of Bengal had organized a movement to demand better salary. The relationship of a teacher with his higher bosses is no better than the relationship between the industrial labourer and owner of industries. The teacher of this country has no respect from anybody. He is treated as orderlies by the higher bosses in the government. Ideally a teacher should be controlling the entire educational administration, only the teachers should have been allowed to frame policies for themselves. The government bureaucrat should have been assisting in the job of running the administration and implementation of policies. But here in our country the method seems to be the exact opposite. Because education in this country is still under the control of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, not in the hands of Saraswati, the goddess of learning. The followers of Lakshmi are riding roughshod over the field of education.

Now there is a talk about national education. Like national income, this is a slogan to hoodwink common people. Earlier there was a propaganda that if such Industries are set up, such and such dams are built the national income will take a quantum leap. But nobody considers how much of that income will go to the hands of the poor, how many will get employment etc. Similarly by establishing certain number of colleges and universities one cannot claim that there would be growth of national education. Not even ten per cent of our students are able to come up to college level. Can the policy that ignores the fate of ninety per cent of the people and ensures higher education and consequently top jobs for only ten per cent students be included as a part of the National Education Programme? When we talk of the children of a country we do not mean only the school and college-going students. Some children of this country are forced to tend cows, take up the profession of a coolie or a shoeshine boy. No record in the higher echelons of the government keeps track of them. Those children need to get an opportunity to study and be included in our planning process. Only then can we rightly call the system, the National Education Policy. We have to change our old mindset before

we are worthy of such a policy. For the first time it was Mahatma Gandhi who had thought of including all children in the ambit of education and had provided a model for the same. In our own ludicrous thinking we have succeeded in vandalizing the entire model. We have forgotten all the radical dimensions of that model of education. We have been evading the issue by branding that model as labourer-manufacturing education. We have not demonstrated an open mind to consider the novel plans with respect and judiciousness. But some day we have to face the challenge of educating all the children of this country. We can not fool all the people for all the time.

## 18

Again there is the celebration of rain here. It has been raining throughout last night. The hue of the sky and the forest has undergone a transformation. The hills have assumed the calm joyful look of a mendicant sporting a grey apparel of floating clouds. At one movement their grave visage is visible from behind the clouds and at other moment everything is withdrawn from the view under a cover of grey. It is a strange experience for the onlooker. Before the last evening a few of us were engaged in planting seeds of vegetable. The sky was calm like an intoxicated man when we left for the garden. The cliff of Mandaragiri was like the head of a mad elephant. Suddenly black clouds reared their heads from the east. Then cold wind began to blow. In moments the entire sky was filled with black clouds. There was darkness all around. From then on, it has been raining, without a moment's respite.

This synergy with nature is the greatest attribute of the forest, the best gift of our Forest School. When we talk about the country, we the educated ones generally mean the cities of this country. When we talk of quality life we cannot think beyond vehicles, cinema-halls, newspapers and shops of the city. We have not read about any other joy in our prescribed books except the pleasures that money can buy. Therefore we call them fools who return to village after completing their education in towns. We think that those who go to forest from the town are permanently doomed. We have not come here to practice Yoga and Ayurveda like the Himalayan mendicant in his cottage. There are human beings in this forest. With usual joys and sufferings, trials and tribulations. Their daily life has become endearing. Far from the modern pleasures and gadgets for enjoyment of life, they also survive with indomitable enthusiasm. We shall try to know the answers to endless questions about life from the perspective of this citizen. Here we shall try to discover ourselves and the citizens of our country. There is no need to run away from human beings in order to have closer ties with nature. Conversely there is no need to desert the nature to forge ties with human beings. The principles of fraternizing are the same everywhere. Those who can synergize with others can do so elsewhere without much effort. If men and nature become complementary then a healthy outlook towards life can emerge. It will generate the joy of healthy living.

In this Forest School we, the students and a few teachers will get an opportunity to build our lives together. With the assurance that we can do so, far away from politics and envy, we are building our dwelling place here. We have faith in the assurance of freedom to walk our own way. In colonized country perhaps, everyone is forced to tread the same path, learn the same skills. The autocratic rulers perhaps become apprehensive if everybody does not conform to set standards. Our country has been independent since



eight years. Democracy has been adopted as the guiding principle of our policy and social life. But in several fields the old colonized mindset continues to make us tyrannical. With the heightened propaganda for democracy; our minds should grow more and more democratic, but we are growing autocratic instead. The bureaucrats, the government rules and regulations, the regime of files are becoming more marauding. The scope of freedom and equal opportunity for development is being withdrawn one by one. When everyone is getting ready to march into the sunrise of the morrow the bureaucratic hegemony is pulling everyone back like the drunkard nursing the hangover of the last evening's bacchanalia.

There is a story about a Chinese emperor. The emperor had nurtured a few fish lovingly, inside a glass jar. Once a holy man came to meet the king. He expressed his grief at the sight of the captive fish; "Oh, King! They should roam freely in the ocean. Why have you held them captive for your own pleasure! This is rank injustice." The king heeded the holy man's advice and freed the fish in the seawater. A few years passed-by. Incidentally the holy man happened to visit the seashore once again and found the fish at the same place where they were placed. They were roaming within the same space as that of the glass jar. No one had ventured beyond. They had been bewildered by the old habits and old subservience to such an extent that they had not realized the limitlessness of the sea. They had been confined to their usual limited periphery.

A similar misfortune can be witnessed in our country today. Those who have power are confined within its trappings. They have no other human sign to register their identity apart *from* the mask of power. They have no human scales to judge life and other human beings. The only human being they can imagine is their subordinate in the power hierarchy. The ideal society for them is a place where there will be a procession of subordinates carrying out their orders in pen and paper delivered from their own high perch and where nobody has the right to deviate from those orders being implemented with the help of the tools of punishment and reprimand. Our education department too is mired in such devilish mindset. That all the schools of the country will be alike, all the teachers and educational entrepreneurs will be brought under one powerful bureaucrat, there will be a uniform curriculum across the country, one examination and valuation system and so on. Such a perverse vainglory rules the roost in our department of education.

The planning for education in our country has been typecast. All the plans emerge from one office like one set of lens being prescribed for all types of eyes. There is an effort to convince the people about such an imposition with the help of fat-salaried employees and the pomp and ceremony of huge office buildings, tall files and liveried peons. By educational policy the government probably understands this much.

How many students are getting educated? How many are not getting that opportunity? Why are they deprived of it? How much knowledge the college educated teachers are able to utilize for the benefit of students? Whether there is any improvement in the students by this kind of exchange of knowledge? There seems to be no need for the consideration of these questions among the people who are directly involved in the process. The only logic that seems to be doing the round is that obey the boss. The boss knows the best. One has to merely abide by the whims of the boss. If one does that then they can retain their jobs and everyone will be satisfied. But those who dare to go beyond

the mould will have to acknowledge the authority of a few bureaucrats of the government. Where administration is run by brute power of a few and ignorance of many, the government does not mean a government of all the people, it is the government of a few. In Russia, the government means one person, in our country it means a few persons. Those few who have deserted all human values and have become machines within the government machinery. The educational administration in our country is being run by such a powerful machinery which tries to cast the education, the teachers and the students into one type. For lack of a better name we can call this deplorable type.

The government seems to have planned to mould the department of education into a cast-iron machine. The standard of education is going down in this country because of this. High decibel speeches are being delivered about proper education, but the life of students which should be its centre remains as uneducated as before. We are satisfied after providing a job passport to students as work to a labourer. The system has not yet realized that providing a self-reliant worldview, building one's character and inculcating the ability and quest for knowledge are the legitimate goals of education. Once in a while the so-called high power commissions appointed by the government while writing their reports are reminding us about these ideals, but the old mindset continues to prevail by sabotaging all new enterprises.

I am reminded today of an incident that occurred a hundred years ago in Denmark. Educator Kristen Kold will remain immortal in Denmark and its history of new education. Around 1840-45 he started his career as a humble teacher. Nobody had imagined at that time that such a revolutionary educational reform in the country would be carried out by him after a few years. At that time the Archbishop of Denmark also doubled as the Chief Educational Administrator of the country. Once an inspector supervised Kold's small rural school. The students answered all the questions the inspector asked and also came up with impressive recitations. Satisfied immensely, the inspector called for the primer. The students informed him that they did not use any such thing. The teacher stood quietly behind the students. The inspector then asked Kold. He replied that whatever study material there was, he narrated them like stories and asked the students to recite but never used any book. Such a method brought him better result and was evident before him. The inspector was not convinced. He reported the matter to the Archbishop. The Archbishop tried to reason with him, "Look, you are an enthusiastic young man, you are a competent teacher, I do not doubt your sincerity. I am convinced that you can teach your students without taking the help of a primer. But can all the teachers of the country do that? So we have to abide by general rules. Otherwise there will be a chaos in the system."

After a brief silence Kold answered, "Sir, let us consider this example. There are a hundred cobblers in a town. They do not know how to stitch a shoe well. Now a new cobbler who is adept at stitching arrives in town. And he sets about stitching good shoes. Do we then force the new cobbler to stitch badly in order to maintain the common standard of the town?"

When the Bishop answered in the negative, Kold humbly argued, "Since when you agree that at least one teacher in this country is doing his duty with more competence and enthusiasm, is it wise to force him to give up his new method and fall back upon the old, in the name of maintaining a common standard?"

The Bishop concurred, but did not accept his suggestion. After all, he was also a slave to the powers—that be. So the old regulation continued and Kold was dismissed from his services.

Kold was defeated. Power, authority and the moribund mindset triumphed. But after hundred years, one has to admit that Kold was the real victor. It is for Kold that the name of the Bishop still survives in the people's memory. Like the survival of the story of the prison for Jesus. The educational system in four North European countries—Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland—is more advanced and liberal than other countries of the world. The name of Kold will definitely figure among those to whom credit for this goes. No other country can boast of a better atmosphere and tolerance for a teacher's individual experimentation and unique demonstration of his skills and dedication. Today, the entire Europe and America is assailed by various fears. The fall out of that can be felt most acutely in the field of education. A perverse ideological war has seeped into the curriculum of America and Russia. In one country democracy and in another communism have begun to be treated like religions. Paeans to those religions are being recited and the so-called heretics are being prosecuted. The excitement of propaganda has corrupted the entire educational atmosphere. But such perversity has not yet entered into the atmosphere of those four countries of Northern Europe. There, education has remained largely a private enterprise. Enough grant is being provided by the governments for each educational institution. No interference of bureaucracy is troubling the task of a teacher.

There are more than three hundred people's colleges (Folkehøjskole) in Denmark. None of them is run by the government. There is a history of more than hundred years behind a few of them. Nobody can ignore the contribution of these colleges in forging developed social and cultural life in Denmark. Two-thirds of the young people have been trained in one of these colleges. Right from the beginning, these colleges have maintained their uniqueness. The unique worldview of the teachers of particular college has shaped it in a special manner. They have not been oppressed to fit into a centrally imposed mould. Though they bear the same name outwardly, no two people's colleges have identical curriculum, daily routine or method of education. The uniqueness of each college is easily discernible when one moves from one college to another. There is a government provision that it will give grant to any college started by a principal with at least twenty students, whatever be his ideology or opinion. The government will also provide scholarships to students. Such colleges are now being established regularly and being provided with facility to carry out new experimentations in pedagogy. There is no tense eagerness to cast them into a mould. Had they been put under government control, such miraculous growth and evolution would not have been possible.

Finland has marched ahead of all in this field. It shares a border with Russia. It has suffered great oppression by Russia during the last world war. Even being so far away geographically America is scared of Russia. So is Russia of America. How scared Finland should have been in such a case! There is a communist party in Finland and it funds its own people's college. Every year students who so desire get admitted to that institution. According to the law, Finland Government is providing requisite grant to the communist people's college. Finland remains a unique example for the world ravaged by myriad struggles and ideological discord. Xenophobia-stricken government and bureaucrats of our country have a lot to learn from the educational system of Finland.

While discussing educational system and government machinery of our country yesterday, I cited several instances from Denmark and Finland. The essence of all that talk is that education should not be centralized. There is great harm in bestowing the entire responsibility of educational administration on a single office or a solitary bureaucrat, the kind of harm which is being witnessed today. There is no limit to the vainglory of top bureaucrats. They think that everything is accomplished by the tip of their pens. Those who have the responsibility of educating children are mired in misery. The bureaucrats have vehicles, sartorial splendour, bungalows and the English language which can be used to subjugate others. But what does the teacher have? In independent India the wage the teacher receives is not enough even for the bare necessities of their family. Worse, the wage is not a matter of their right; they have to run around various offices of bureaucrats to secure their legitimate salary. They get tired responding to the various missives from the government throughout the year. Added to that, they cannot use their intelligence or conscience while responding to those missives. They have to send their reports according to the government format. True or false, they have to fill up printed formats bearing various calculations. Slight variation will cause chaos. Every teacher of our country is experiencing this state of affairs. The response to these missives is primary, the future of the students can wait. Despite the bites of conscience all teachers in our country are forced to abide by this in order to secure a place for themselves in this world.

During our childhood, the school-inspector used to visit our school at times. Our village school teacher used to fret fifteen days before the visit like the children do after listening to grandma's ghost stories. Papers were kept in order, the place was cleaned up, instruments were arranged properly, and mottoes were hung. The teacher admonished us to wear clean clothes to school on the day of the inspector's visit. The teacher also wore clean clothes himself. Ponds were ransacked for fish, potatoes and bananas were scouted for. In an independent country such activities in school may not look nice for the outside world. But it is difficult to shake off the rituals in a huff. Even today such a giver and receiver relationship prevails between the high profile bureaucrat and low-paid teacher. Our schools have become like prisons. When we served jail-terms during freedom struggle we were given cheap vegetable curry to eat on a regular basis but when jail superintendent or other high officials came for a visit, sumptuous meals were served for the inmates. It was very much like the condition of our schools today, which exist not in order to fulfil the needs of the students but to dance to the tunes of higher officials. This is the reason of the sorry state of the schools.

Those who are courageous themselves can teach courageousness to others. Those who have independent thinking that behoves a human being can only facilitate free and healthy growth of others. Those who receive proper respect can only show due respect to others. The teacher of our country today is not fearless at all. His independent thinking and conscience has been muted by various restrictions. His self-respect has been dented by various kinds of oppression. He is like a bond labourer in the educational machinery. Cruel centralization of the educational system is at the root of all this. The top bureaucrats who receive fat salaries to think about the entire system have no time to give

attention to the educational philosophy and experimentations that are being carried out around the world, so caught up are they in the prestige of their positions and salaries. They have no strength to act according to the demands of the time. A scam less indifference has swallowed them up. The bureaucrat acts mainly like a boss even on a holy ground of education. He behaves like an accountant in a petty zamindar's court and a policeman with a pair of handcuffs looking for a thief in the sacred territory devoted to sharing of knowledge.

This could not happen in a democracy, no healthy society tolerates this. Often the mind is agitated at such highhandedness in a country like ours whose motto is people's welfare. This has to change. Let not the vitality of this country be sapped by the onslaught of fear and prestige. Kold the petty rural teacher once got defeated at the hands of authority, but the tables turned after a few years. Kold's resolve endured and the system of education was transformed in the entire Denmark, Whatever the teachers and guardians of students decide, gets the nod of the government and is implemented. Local need and the future of the students is the guiding principle for running a school. The liberal decentralization of education there will continue to be a matter of envy for us for years to come. At one place the local teachers and guardians decide that students will attend classes only during winter months and help their parents in the fields during summer, and it becomes the rule for that school. Elsewhere there are classes only three days a week. At some places learning three foreign languages is compulsory, but other schools have jettisoned all foreign languages from the curriculum as unnecessary baggage. The existence of such a system in an advanced European country must come as a surprise to the planners of education at Bhubaneswar and Delhi, who are not restrained from packing even tribal students inside a seven days a week school system very much like pushing them into a dark tunnel. Our curriculum seems to aim at taking children away forcibly from their parents and their culture. In a rat-race of education for all how can there be a sober thought for special local and cultural needs?

There is a strong wind accompanied by the rain. Even within the safe haven of the forest, the roots of the house are heaving violently. Dry leaves are being blown away—What appears outwardly to be the doomsday wind could be the scene of a new creative enterprise elsewhere. May be in a covert manner, the dance of eternal life goes on. New hopes take root in the mind. May be the seeds of regeneration are lurking somewhere beneath the large scale devastation that is being wrought upon the educational system in this country. Some day this old order shall change. The vainglorious mental impoverishment of the isolated bureaucrat, the teacher who has lost his identity under the pressure of the daily grind, the fragile look of the schools and the misfortune of the students, will all be gone some day. Gradually we shall realize that democracy will dawn in this country and the human beings will attain their due worth once the field of education gets democratized and all the children receive the courageous man-making education. Wherever he is, however small his effort may be, he who is working towards that shall attain success that day. Let the children of this country build their lives with joy, let them be courageous, humble and possess a strong character—this is what we all desire. Getting deluded by years of unsocial activities, we have polluted our educational atmosphere; we have made it a commercial centre for buying and selling. We have been deriving pleasure out of playing with the lives of children. But some day our obstinacy

will give way and our delusion will be cleared. One day the nocturnal that envelopes us shall recede.

20

Necessary reform in the field of education cannot be achieved in our country if the government controls everything. For many years government will not mean a particular political party or ideology, rather the bureaucrats who run the government machinery. These bureaucrats are a strange creature. Right from the days of British rule, they have perceived career building as the only goal of human labour. This careerism tints their vision in all other spheres even today. There was such a profound change in this country nine years ago, and a great opportunity to fulfil the hopes and aspirations of this country presented itself before us. All of us agreed that Gandhi's long-standing dream was fulfilled. But the bureaucrats of this country could not feel this change. They showed the same kind of devotion to the new government and the new conventions as they did to the old. They quickly changed the tunes to suit the new flag. They also learnt the tricks of pleasing the new government ministers very fast, probably just to rightly prove Darwin's thesis that whoever adapts to the changed circumstances faster, survives and is mighty. The old bureaucracy won the struggle for survival and set about controlling the other dimensions of life. Because of this, despite the outward changes, the old moribund mindset has been hindering the growth of the corporate national life. There is still this unholy gap between the ruler and the ruled. The elite are still contemptuous of the common people. The government officers are holidaying at a time of national crisis. *Their* dress, language and mindset has kept them like foreigners in this country

While discussing bureaucracy in India, I am reminded of a small country called Israel. The Jews got an opportunity to build Israel into a beautiful country in 1947 together with us. Earlier they were scattered across more than a hundred countries around the globe. They went looking for safer havens after enemies of history savaged their civilization and culture repeatedly. After innumerable sacrifice and humiliation for two thousand years they got back their lost country. Immediately after that, they had to defend themselves from the attacks of neighbouring countries. Every young man and woman had to participate in this struggle for survival. Even the aged people are getting enough opportunity through various plans to participate in the national reconstruction programme there. There is no ugly divide between the bureaucrat and common people. We have felt this event of national regeneration of the Jews inch by inch. From the government secretariat to the primary schools, from the crop-fields of kibbutz (community village) to the university faculty buildings at Jerusalem University, a tremendous enthusiasm guides every Jew in their effort towards further development. That every Jew shall be great, shall be worthy of honour, all the children shall be trained to live courageously by honest labour, the thought and culture shall survive in the national language—these goals have kept the entire nation united. The Legislative Assembly Hall of Israel is not larger than a Deputy Magistrate's office in our country, but the kind of changes it has brought about and the problems it has been able to solve within these nine years, may not be achieved in this country in another fifty years. There are sufficient reasons for this kind of apprehension.

Let us return to the subject we had raised initially. The bureaucrats do not feel the heart of this country. So far-reaching reforms cannot be achieved through them. They have taken their responsible positions as mere instruments for fulfilling their creature comfort. As long as the old system continues, the rein will be in their hands. If a great change takes place, their position and economic security will be threatened. So they want to continue with the old system with a little polishing and a few patchworks here and there. Under the veneer of new names and policies they want to hide the old mindset. "Why hurry now. Let this continue as long as we survive. Who cares for the deluge afterwards?" This kind of mindset of the tyrant French emperor can still be discerned in the thinking of the bureaucrats of our country even after hundred of years.

The educational system in our country is in the hands of such bureaucrats, so the rot. If the keys of education are in the hands of the people who do not want a change in the attitude of the people, what change shall we expect in the state of ignorance in the country? What benefit will accrue to us if we appoint as guides for new places those people who are scared of losing their identity if they leave the old behind? But I do not mean to say that by driving away all top officials the country will become fully educated in a day. There is no need for such a typhoon in the field of education; I recommend a very small change. My suggestion is let it not be so centralized. Let not educational possibilities be sacrificed to the whims of a few bureaucrats. Let there be ample opportunities for alternative experimental models of pedagogy. Let the government support such experiments if it has faith in their honesty. We are all clamouring for reformation in educational system. We have not had clarity of vision yet about the propriety of any particular method. If there is freedom for multiple experimentations and receptiveness for mutual enrichment we may stumble upon the right path some day. Not all our needs may be met in a single path. So we cannot achieve educational welfare by motivating each other's enterprise. And if the government wants to swallow all other methods by imposing its own, then the task of educating will end in a fiasco. The ocean of Indian culture has been watered by several cultural streams. There has been no effort to swallow each other. Let that prevail in the field of education. In a process of give and take among many methods of pedagogy we shall receive many instruments as insights for the growth of education throughout the country.

No government of a country has achieved educational reform by the diktat of law. Despite all bravado the government of our country too cannot achieve this. Change everywhere has been initiated by various experimentations. Whatever change that has been accomplished in India, has been due to the enterprise of the individuals. For the last fifty years at Santiniketan and for the last eighteen years at Sevagram two unique models of education have been implemented. Two great men of Indian history have done so in their own ways keeping in view the future growth of education in the country. There has not been any conflict between the two. Apart from them there have been several small and large efforts in this country since long. During the British rule, there was a lot of oppressive pressure on these models. The educational reformers concerned have been labelled as the enemy of the country. But they have managed to survive despite several blows. Whatever betterment that has taken place in the situation is due to the experience of mainly those two experimentations mentioned earlier. There is no need to think that a particular method of pedagogy is the only one suitable for the entire world. By encouraging multiple experiments we can achieve a composite and integrated insight

about education. That can be possible if the government educational policy of this country becomes more liberal and more visionary.

21

The vacation is ending. The students shall return after a few days. They shall enrich the life in this forest. Of course the school was never completely empty. Five or six students lived here in turns throughout the vacation. This is a different kind of joy during vacations. Rice is cooked in the morning for both meals of the day and is watered. We eat potfuls of watered rice along with fried potato and onions. Everyday people come from jungles to sell mangoes. So often we feast on ripe mangoes. I had never felt the silence of the school so intimately earlier before this vacation. Generally this place is full of cacophony of the excited enthusiasm of youth. I remain wonderfully busy deciphering who started work, who is inattentive about personal hygiene, who neglects studies, which student is not pulling on well with others etc. There is a peculiar satisfaction in throwing one's weight around. The responsibility of guiding so many children is in my hands, they will go astray if I become lazy— such a presumptuousness pervades the mind then. Therefore, I do not notice the silence of this place. I do not feel the sky and the forest, the sombre meditateness of the sunrise and the sunset here, heartily. I was free of the misfortunes of a vainglorious teacher throughout this vacation. So I got a conducive environment during this vacation to connect myself deeply with meditateness of the nature here.

There is no pressure of work. We do not have to spend a lot of time for our upkeep, so we have enough leisure. Sometimes we vanish into the forest. The comfort of the limitless sky above, the fraternity of the trees large and small, no hindrance for the mind or the eyes, no external pressure to disturb our meditation—by availing the opportunity of spending some time at such a place the questing mind renews itself with new knowledge and fills itself with joy and freshness. This altogether is a different school beyond the limits of these worldly schools. In order to appreciate the expanded consciousness of the human mind, the school also extends into the sky and the forest and the mind receives profound assurance from everywhere. For this assurance and fraternity probably, the teacher of yore established schools inside the forests. Not by vandalizing the beauty of the forest by cement, bricks and barbed wire but in order to complete the forest by his own meditative existence he established the school in the forests. The students also went there for the same kind of reassurance. What strange affinity is there between man and nature that man has regularly been drawn to the expanse of nature, has found solution to many of his problems in the deep meditation amidst the calmness of nature.

Far from the life of the woods, the orator at Cuttack and Delhi perched on his magisterial seat waxes eloquent about the forest. Many platforms of urban meeting-halls reverberate with the praise of that ancient Indian culture which had given rise to an integrated and balanced human lifestyle by using the forest as its location of spiritual askesis. When the ancient soul of the culture seeking the man hidden under an exterior made ugly by unnatural perversions yearns for the woods we become more intimate with the forest. We have accepted the forest as an instrument to understand the totality of human life more keenly. When there is a clamour for constructing a new nation and a new civilization in India, we have chosen the forest as our habitat. Once a new



civilization was built in Europe by destroying the forests and the villages. A shrewd demon ran amuck in man then to trouble life in the laboratory of science and luxury. As a result life was fractured, the possibilities of its efflorescence lay like severed petals on the table of intellect. Wealth increased, earnings rose, leisure grew, scope of pleasure expanded, but the human being was shattered after losing the totality of life. Amidst the abundance of material wealth the inner being lay empty. The scholars there have realized the consequences of such a cultural crisis. They have started thinking anew about the modalities of bringing life back into a more integrated cultured space. Those who are conversant with the recent intellectual engagements in Europe can easily detect such a trend.

India is following Europe in the field of social revolutions. I would consider this India's good luck. While discovering the uncharted territories of culture and progress Europe has faltered many a time. Often the wrong moves have landed it into disasters. Those of us who follow Europe should learn from its mistakes. I remember the instances of a night in Europe while writing this. I was travelling from Germany to France during the summer vacation in 1952. It was beyond midnight. I was tired because of the long rail journey. I was also apprehensive about entering a new country. I took a direct train to Paris after changing the train at Strausburg. There was heavy rush in the train that day. My compartment was packed with French soldiers. There seemed to be an uneasy excitement in the air. Once the train took off I started interacting. The co-passengers were curious when they learnt that I am from India. We started gossiping. They all turned out to be university students donning military garb due to an urgent call by the government to perform duty at Indo-China. The people there were longing for freedom. These students were supposed to keep them quiet under the threat of French guns. During the course of conversation, their inquisitive and concerned minds were apparent beneath their combative garbs. Suddenly one of them asked me gravely, "Why are you all coming to Europe or America from India? What do you have to share with us? Hardly is the old war over; we are getting ready for another. What lesson Europe has for an Indian youth?"

I answered immediately, "Europe has committed many mistakes in the past, is committing some of them even today. There will probably be several catastrophes all around the world for those mistakes. But there are many permanent gems in this beleaguered European culture. Before Europe collapses under the weight of its own perversions, those gems have to be preserved for the future world. For this the student of India comes to Europe."

The planning for making all the people self-sufficient has started in India today. The markets are expanding. There are enough natural resources in the country. With the help of technology the production of food is going to increase gradually in this country. Some day, everyone shall be well-fed, well-clad and lead a healthy life. Let not the European fate of greed for more food, more dress and more secure life befall here. Let not the Indians suffer the European foolishness of emphasizing excessively the production and consumption of material goods. To prevent such a scenario should be the primary responsibility of the schools in this country. Let us not complicate the students' mind with the enthusiastic chorus for the mundane pleasures of life. The teachers and the schools should be careful about this. We have come to the forest to cultivate a space in our hearts for reverence and an integrated life. The meditative mornings and evenings are

helping our hearts expel all kinds of divisiveness and alienation. With (he help of the forest we are experiencing the natural bond that connects man with his fellow-men.

The calculative modern man is scared of the forest. He becomes impatient to cut it while establishing his habitat. Probably because he does not see the forest, he sees only the trees and bushes separately. To escape this vision of separateness, he builds houses, covers them with roofs and fences for its safety. The early man lived in the caves out of the fear of the forest. After long years of civilization, the coward man has continued to retain. The trace of the caves inside his dwelling place. So despite the yearnings of his heart to get connected with everything else, his way of life has mainly kept him apart. The cave of his house is providing him the empty consolation of being safe.

Two years after staying in the forest, I think our fear has vanished after coming here. In the beginning everything was scary. Tiger seemed to prowl under each bush, every step we took, we were panicky. We had not probably become intimate with the forest then. We had not been introduced to the sky and the hills here. The violent wild animals seen to have receded far away to provide us the fearless leisure for an intimate contract between the forest and ourselves. After getting to recognize the pervasive beauty here, all the violence within us seems to have receded. The violence within us is the mother of many fears in our life. This sky, the wavy spread of the newly grown leaves and the flowers in bloom help us dispel the violence within us. Some of us get up early at three o'clock in the morning to weave thread. Its pure rhythmic sound prepares our mind for the prayer at 4.30 a.m. After the prayer some of us practice singing hymns on the verandah. Everyday we watch the night recede into daybreak. Why should one who begins their day like this be afraid of anything or be violent? There are many difficulties in our habitat here. We don't have enough rooms, water or clean clothes to wear. There are not enough teachers to create the school environment. We are far away from the civilized world. Our well-wishers are losing hope when they compare us with others. But still, I claim that all of us have expanded our capacity to feel. By using our feelings we are able to discover our identities. Here in the forest we have had the insight of feeling human sufferings, joys, defeats and triumphs not as mere categories but as experiences of our own. This forest has inspired us to walk together not merely as grave teacher and obedient students but as friends caring for each other. Through the effort of becoming each other's friend, we hope to befriend the entire world by which we can fully conquer our fear. The forest has provided us the space to feel the essence of the mantras of fearlessness charted in the Vedas. The earth and the sky, the night and the day do not fear each other, then why should not I be fearless? This inspiration fills us with strength and joy.

The school that aims at an education centered around experiencing has to do away with many routines from the curriculum. Routine is necessary at places where the ability of the student is judged by churning one's intellect. How can you do away with routine where you are bent upon turning a man into a machine? Routine is also necessary in a society where the adults thrust all their acknowledged perversion on the tender mind of the child. One can see many such instances in the schools of our country, old and new. I believe that a lot of fear has been injected into the society by imposing excessive routine. As this fear becomes more pervasive, the student of our country increasingly loses their self-confidence and accepts the conventional norm of the society with indifferent obedience. The possibilities of a more harmonious society are decreasing.

Strange fears dog our society as they do our schools. By extending the purview of discipline the adult mind of the society seems to be admonishing the children. First be scared of me, then you shall get everything. Obey me, only then you can walk safely. Follow me, only then I shall acknowledge you as good and intelligent. The pedagogy and value judgement in our country no more follow the logic of life. It has shrunk under the autocratic gaze of the adult world. In our time too the school teachers used to expect such obedience from us. Whatever they made is rote, we used to remember and accept as good. If the teacher felt that brushing the hair back is not good or wearing shoes to the school was a sign of disobedience, then those activities were forbidden. If a student participated in a demonstration or a rally, the teacher nursed a grudge and failed him in the examination. Fifteen years have passed since then. But still, the child's body, mind and intellect is getting traumatized everyday in this free country by the whip of several kinds of subjugation and mechanisms of control. Beneath the surface of new beginnings there is admonition for not leaving the old ways. There is poverty and injustice all around. When all schools encourage the perpetuation of the old way of life, then should we not call it an unsocial presumption?

The new session begins after a month. Letters have come from several quarters seeking admission in the new class. The teacher in me is ashamed at the language of some of those letters. Most of the letters are from the so-called Basic Schools in the country. Perhaps the teachers have guided the students to write that way. The use of "I" seems to have been prohibited. The excessive use of the word 'obedient' gives an unnatural look to those letters. Several mendicants in our country use the third person instead of the first person to keep their ego under wrap. Instead of saying 'I ate' or 'I can enjoy', they say that 'mendicant ate' or the 'mendicant is angry'. How far the ego can be subjugated by the whitewash of the language I cannot tell, but the performance of self-belittlement does not suit a man-making education at all. One student has gone to the extent of addressing me as "My Lord, the incarnation of Dharma!" The child has never seen me, nor I, him. But he has never imagined me as anybody other than (he arbiter of the school he wants to study in. That I am a human being, and was a child once, I have younger brothers, these thoughts have never found a place in his mind. I don't know of any other country in the world where such relationship between the teacher and the student can be found. The teacher of the Forest School seeks to be a friend of the student and to have a heartfelt intimacy beyond the boundaries of curriculum and examination. Let every student in the country consider his teacher a friend or an elder brother. The teacher of the Forest School does not want to scare the student away because he is more educated. The Forest School will never balk at declaring courageously that wherever there is fear in their mind, there is the autocracy of the witched adult beneath the garb pedagogy resulting in the repression of the new and the beautiful.

Today is a holy day for our school. Two years ago on this day our school was inaugurated at Angul. We had not been intimate with the forest then. We had not realized the beautiful worth of flowers, leaves and the sky of this place. Man can discover beauty from things with which he can establish a rapport with which he can relate. Beauty does not lie in the thing, nor in the eyes of the beholder, but in this relationship, in the life's

effort at getting connected and to realize the relationship in the sincerity of one's heart. We are still reminded of the day when we entered this jungle in our new dresses. Initially we were scared. But gradually we got connected with the place with a reverential love. This reverence filled everything with beauty. Our meetings were held on the narrow verandah. We celebrated our Ganesh Puja there. Last year we observed the Republic Day function of January 26. The teachers and students of Angul's Baji Rout Chhatrabas also shared our joys on that day. Though the celebrations lacked pomp, it seemed to shower ample blessings on us. The *mantra* of 'Chareibati' from *Aitareya Brahmana* became our calling.

After one year, the students decided to observe 26 August in a more elaborate fashion. I had been away for some time, but reached one day before the occasion. The school had changed colours. The colour of the faces of the students had also changed due to joy. The courtyard was raised. A temporary roof was arranged for shade. Our programme started at daybreak. We sang the song in praise of our own school and circumambulated its periphery. Then our guests from Angul arrived. The enthusiasm of the assembled youth filled us with joy. In the afternoon, a sudden rain destroyed all the arrangements for the meeting. But we were not disheartened. After wiping the rain water off the floor of rooms we arranged the meeting. Students spoke about their experiences at the school. It is really a matter of pride for the teacher when the students accept the school to be their own. The school has a lot of shortcomings and several wants, but still the student has a sense of belongingness with the school which helps it to compensate those wants and shortcomings. At least, their presentations claimed as much, as I heard them with rapt attention and a sense of wonder.

One student's presentation runs something like this: Where there is no fear, nor tears, nor a quest for knowledge confined within the four walls of an artificial room, where the teacher knows the students merely because of their name in the register. I imagine there is some new energy. The small brook which is like a rosary of the school has become the source of inspiration for another student. The spring seems to advise us today, 'I have not balked at the huge stones on the way. You too go ahead without bothering about the catastrophes of life. Go ahead without bothering to take rest'. The mountain seems to tell, 'Do not bind your hands down. Raise your heads high, like I do'. The nature seems to say 'Be pure like me. Look at the entire world with a clear vision'. Here, everything leads us ahead like a teacher. It is our duty to implement their advice in our own lives. We shall march ahead, we shall march ahead together, this is the lesson that the school imparts to us. Another student writes, 'We have not stopped despite various obstacles in life. Love, affection and reverence have smoothed and sweetened our rough lifestyle. The writings of poets and thinkers have inspired us; have filled us with a sense of quest.'

Several thoughts crowd the mind while we are on the threshold of entering the third year of the school. What shall this institution provide? What gaps of the country and the society it can bridge? There is stiff competition for success in today's society. The attractions of Cuttack and Calcutta tempt the mind of the youth to mould themselves in a particular way. The poor wants to be rich, the rich, richer. The people of the small town aspire to go to cities; the villagers aspire to migrate to small towns. This tendency to desert, to break away has impoverished the entire society. Human needs are increasing. The more the need, the more sophisticated and educated the person appears. Those who compare the student of twenty years ago with the present crop can easily see this. But

still, we have established a school in the forest. Let alone sartorial elegance, our students do not have enough dresses to cover themselves with. They do not have warm clothing's for the winter. Except occasional feasts during special celebration, the food is at the subsistence level. Sometimes it is even difficult to ensure that bare meal. The officers and teachers in the towns would loathe calling this a school. They would cast aspersions that we are worshipping poverty here in the name of high ideals. They would blame us for turning backward when the life and times are marching forward. The people who understand Gandhism as merely eating coarse food and wearing coarse clothes would insinuate that we are Gandhians. They would blame us for consigning a few to a state of ignorance in this age of scientific developments. We have already heard such tangential remarks. Visitors of various hues have come here at different times with the curiousness of visiting some zoo, have collected information about our school, inspected every inch of our existence. We have fallen short of their expectation. While leaving, they have pitied us. Their faces have betrayed a feeling that, here the students are degraded into a class of labourers, their lives are destroyed. Some have come here after hearing very critical accounts about the school and have concluded that we are a bunch of useless people marooned inside a deserted camp. Some have looked for attendance register; some have expressed disgust at the lack of proper classrooms and other logistics. On the other hand, the government has also tried to tame us like one does a wild elephant. We are expected to dance to its tunes and keep ourselves in readiness for the visit of one of its representatives. The visitors come here with their own preconceived notions and are disappointed by our school. They want to swallow this school by demonstrating their power and imagination. They try to mould us into an accepted convention. But the Forest School goes its own way. We have not come here to make a cult of poverty. There is no need to practice such a cult when the entire country is enveloped by the ugliness of impoverishment. The human beings in our society have been kept poor through various conspiracies. This is apparent once you step out of your house. Our culture, civilization, government, education and literature seem to thrive on a prior assumption that in every society some human beings are bound to remain poor, starved, illiterate and destitute. Several people in our society are rotting like insects, accepting poverty as their fate. In such an ill-fated country we would not commit the mistake of making a cult of poverty.

The school here has not been set up to assuage anyone's feelings or for showing benevolence to anybody. Across the ages, poverty has dried up man's humane qualities. We have assembled here to deny that curse to ourselves. We won't heed the threat of the society to keep us impoverished. We are not scared to eat coarse rice or wear coarse clothes. But the Forest School will not accept that our minds will be underdeveloped or ignorant just because we are poor. Our society has not yet accepted the simple truth that every man has a right to knowledge, that every man must have the scope to develop all his positive aspirations. We are not prepared to accept the usual societal perception that man is merely a hungry stomach or a condemned naked body. There is a vast expanse of countless dreams and aspirations even in a man with a hungry stomach. Beneath the naked body lurks the human soul with ample knowledge, love and creative desire. The Forest School refuses to accompany them who do not acknowledge this. Those who till the fields, lay the roads, or work in the smithies in our society today, have also a great desire and an inalienable right to get the respect due to a human being. The Forest School through its efforts' wants to demonstrate this to the entire world. We are not ashamed

even when we are not clad properly, we walk long distances when needed, happily, we dig the earth for the plinth of our house, we carry our own luggage and if there is need carry wood and bamboo on our heads from the hill nearby. But that is not *our* entire identity.

Despite our poverty we don't keep our soul impoverished. We will not be deprived of our right to grow and efflorescence with comprehensive reasoning and feeling. This is our other identity. We will partake of the wonderful human spectacle of the world today and the human quest for a closer mutual contact. We will not close the door on any kind of knowledge and scientific progress. We will not deprive ourselves of anything due to some rabid affiliation or hatred. We will discuss literature here and produce new literature invoking man to become nobler. We will pursue the knowledge of philosophy and history and forge arguments for a new historiography and philosophy, which will provide us a fresh vision and noble inspirations. We will look for that pedagogy, science and economic which will help in the creation of a society more civilized and conducive for mankind. But there shall not be any narrowness behind this quest. We will accept each other's special proclivities and way of thinking. Today those who are getting educated according to the norms of the society, consider themselves separate from the uneducated lot of the same society. They feel ashamed to mix around with the uneducated people. Let alone share the work of the labour class, they are even ashamed to carry their own luggage. The language the common man uses becomes an anathema to them. By embracing a foreign language as the ultimate prop of their ego they have kept themselves apart from this country and its culture. Their intellect and feeling are mired by several physical, mental and social perversions. The more they propagate themselves as the representatives of their people and their society, the more they are getting distanced from it. We have come to this forest to keep our own growth separate from the hegemony of this mindset supported by the conventional educational system.

Some day all human beings will get a scope to discover their own nobility. This change cannot occur by mere rhetoric. It cannot be achieved by nostalgic jeremiads of glorious history. This change can only be ushered in through education. Not the education of halting at a comfortable retreat of life, but we have to have the education of valuing and respecting our own lives and the life of every human being. Our school will remain as a challenge for this country's government and the people. Even amidst abysmal poverty, it shall exhort in every ear the calling of mankind and its culture. The periphery of the Forest School shall not be confined with in the forest. It will be allowed to expand to all walks of life. It shall eschew all kinds of narrowness and apprehension at all times.'

## **AFTER TEN YEARS**

### **1**

Ten years have elapsed between nineteen fifty-five and sixty-five. Our independent country has grown older by ten more years and we also have become more mature. Those who were at Champatimunda ten years ago as students have grown older. Some of them are settled in life and perhaps some others are at its threshold. For some all the crises in life have been resolved and they have no botheration at all. Some others are yet to get hold of their moorings.

The trees in the forests might have grown taller. Yet I remember each one of them. I am also reminded of those blue hills which appeared to have held the sky on their heads. Ten years ago I used to write those letters looking at those woods and hills. Far away from there, I intend to write a few things about the Forest School today. I feel as if without these words the story of the Forest School remain unfinished.

Our Forest School was inaugurated on 26th August 1954, not in the jungle but at the Baji Rout Chhatrabas in Angul. Many top people had arrived after receiving the invitation for the inaugural ceremony. The then Chief Minister and Education Minister of Orissa had turned up. Two prominent litterateurs of the state Sri Kalindi Charan Panigrahi and Dr. Mayadhar Mansingh had also arrived. Sri Dhiren Majumdar, one of the senior leaders of the Bhoodan and Basic School Movement had come to preside over the function. Saint Binoba's letter of good wish for the school had also reached.

Speeches were delivered that day for three hours. Every one emphasized on the principles of proper education and ways of life and expressed their goodwill for the school. But each one had advised us to abide by their unique point of view. The leader of the Bhoodan Movement had explained the utility of Sarvodaya philosophy; the Minister assured us the goodwill of the government and the funding; and the poets and writers dreamt up the recession of Orissa's darkness through our school. Before the conclusion of the meeting the responsibility of proposing a vote of thanks fell on me.

I believe in principles, and have a principle for my own life; I am not bound my any 'ism'. I have a great admiration for my country, my nation, language, literature and ideals. But I refrain from contaminating this love and admiration with the poison of any radical 'ism'. While proposing a vote of thanks this dimension of any personality was very apparent. I said something like this: We shall of course remain grateful for the goodwill, the message and the assurances of our elders today. Their exhortations will remain a perpetual source of inspiration to find a path for our school. But we shall never accept a particular way as the only legitimate one. We shall not close our doors by holding one ideal method in the confines of our room. We shall learn from everywhere, but we will not be imprisoned anywhere. We shall hold the entire life as our school, we shall hold our receptacles in ever-readiness. Only this will be the common ideal in our school.

I am not sure how many heard what I said in the din and bustle of ceremony. But even today I am not prepared to agree that Basic Education would mean acceptance of one particular method as the only one. There is no place for the slavery or acquiescence in any honest pedagogy. I was very careful about this during my four-year stay at Champatimunda. However great a man be, I kept a distance from him if I found a trace of desire in him to impose himself on others. I have suffered a lot for this tendency, but I have never tried to paint things in either white or black brush having been nurtured by such a resolve of a teacher. For my own part, I can only say that I have continued to live as a teacher and a human being only for this resolve.

At the outset, I confess that I have become a teacher for the love of this vocation. After covering half of the distance of life I cannot say what else I could have become, I have taught at Champatimunda for four years. I have put in more than four years as a teacher in this institution at the suburb of Agra. Apart from this I have taught at a few places in the country and abroad at leisure, to kids at the school level and adults at the university

level. I feel tempted to confess something out of my own experience today: that, man does not seek money alone, but satisfaction from his job. He seeks fulfilment through his job. I have never had elsewhere more satisfaction from my life as a teacher than Champatimunda. I never had a wider scope for my interests and aspirations as a teacher. I have read several books about ideal methods of pedagogy, discussed the subject with the experts. But within those four years as a teacher at the Forest School, the innermost possibilities of my being had had a natural efflorescence. The debate is still going on about the efficacy or lack of it, of the Basic School system. I have never had any desire to surrender myself to any particular camp. But from my own experience I can vouch that the scope and leisure for the total development of the qualities of a teacher that is available within the Basic School system is not available elsewhere. I am not sure what method will be adopted by the India of the future. Perhaps the debate about the comparative efficacy of various systems of education shall continue as long as mankind is alive. Perhaps it will never be possible in India to adopt a particular system universally. But I have no doubt that the insights of the Basic School system would form an integral part of the educational system going to be implemented in India and the world of the future.

In the next few pages I shall discuss some of the facets of the Forest School at Champatimunda. There is a tendency in man to glorify the past, to multiply the worth of lost goods. I have never considered Champatimunda a lost cause. The four-year experience there has served as pillars of strength for my life. Champatimunda is not a lost cause; it still is a goldmine for me. When all atrocities will end in this country, when there will be a reconstruction around human values, when man shall go seeking truth and happiness, discarding the weakness for false appearances and masks, I think Champatimunda will be remembered in Orissa then.

Despite many difficulties, studying was the chief vocation at Champatimunda. We never felt ashamed to study under a tree due to the lack of rooms. The library compensated for the dearth of the teachers. We accepted the library as our teacher like in the case of Eklavya, turned away by Dronacharya. We had decided in the presence of the higher officials of Orissa Education Ministry that the students would read here for four years after completing class eight to qualify for the higher secondary certificate. Of course they would not have to sit in any examination along with the other students of the state. The Education Department of the state would constitute a committee to evaluate their performance from time to time. We might not use the same textbooks but our standard and proficiency would be of the level of a higher secondary student in the traditional school system.

After three years, the first batch of students were prepared for the final examination. The student strength at Champatimunda had crossed eighty by that time. Then the lightning of misfortune struck us. The same education policy prevailed, but the top bureaucrat of the State Education Department had changed. The new incumbent insisted that before qualifying for the Higher Secondary level, the students needed to pass matriculation examination. We debated on the issue till midnight one day at the Angul Dak Bungalow. To save ourselves from total disaster I finally proposed that we would teach the conventional matriculation texts to the fresh batch of students from next year, but those who had been already trained in a different system for the last three years with the knowledge and approval of the government should be spared the trouble of appearing



at matriculation examination and should be allowed to face the Higher Secondary test. Or else, three years of their lives would be wasted. But nobody heeded us. When we returned helplessly another high ranking official of the State Education Department and our well-wisher who accompanied us sadly prophesied that that day was the end of the Basic Schools in Orissa! I was not in a position to hear anything then. It was as if the habitat we were slowly building up at Champatimunda through four years of toil, planning and imagination, had broken down to fragments in front of my eyes.

The students of Champatimunda deserted severally. A few of them enrolled in various high schools. Some lost a year and some others two or three years. Today after seven years, I realize that none of them has discredited themselves in their chosen field; none of them has failed to make a mark within the conventional education system. None of them has withdrawn into inaction after blaming his fate. Though we are separated from each other due to various compulsions of life, the bond of heart keeps us tied together. Though slightly different from the general high schools, we had also examinations at Champatimunda. We were on the verge of developing a systematic curriculum. In a new pedagogical experiment, the schools are established first and a curriculum is developed with the passage of time. The curriculum gets ratified after the test of implementation. In traditional High School Board the curriculum is developed first and the teachers are expected to fit it into the schools like a tailor fits a dress to the body. In a few subsequent pages I shall try to give an idea about the examination system at Champatimunda. Our teachers did not always evaluate the answer scripts of the students. According to our convenience we used to send the answer scripts to our lecturer friends at Angul Training College and Ravenshaw College for evaluation.

On a few occasions, Sri Artaballav Mohanty, the eminent litterateur of Orissa evaluated the papers of our students. Once he came down all the way from Cuttack to Champatimunda to see the students whose papers he had evaluated. At that old age, his youthful spirit might have inspired many young people. The Forest School was two miles away from the motorable road. The path that led to the school was very tough. He surprised us by walking all the way under hot midday sun. When asked, he answered that he had come to meet the students. What other approval did we need for our students after that?

Before the admission during the first year I had taken a general test of the students who had come to enrol. The purpose was to test the students more than their knowledge-base. Here is a sample of the question paper of that test.

### Prayer

1. Why there is a special role for prayer in our pedagogical strategy?
2. What kind of prayer from the following you like the most and why:
  - a. Mass prayer
  - b. Personal prayer
  - c. Mass silent prayer
  - d. Personal silent prayer

3. There is a mantra 'Om Tatsat Srinarayan Tu' in our prayer. Is there any special significance of this? Is there a special relationship between this mantra and the purpose of our educational method?

4. Have you ever prayed under compulsion? Did you derive any satisfaction from that?

5. Have you ever fixed a norm for prayer when you are away from the institution? If not, what could be the reason of the lapse?

6. Vinobaji has termed prayer as a bath for the soul. What is its significance? Have you ever felt the need for such a bath?

7. There should be a conducive atmosphere within your mind and surroundings for prayer. How far have you cooperated for or resisted against the creation of such an atmosphere?

### Health

1. The health and cleanliness of the mind depends heavily on the health and cleanliness of the body.

2. How often have you fallen ill during the last year? How many times you think it was due to your own negligence?

3. Diseases can be cured by taking medicines. But it cannot be said that one falls ill if one does not take medicines. What do you think of them who consider their responsibility over after taking medicines?

4. Had you been more disciplined about your personal hygiene, you would have been saved from more diseases and you would have been more active and smart. Provide your arguments in support of or against this statement.

5. How far do you think the rules of taking regular bath, massaging the body with oil, combing the hair and using mosquito-net at bed-time are conducive to a healthy living? Should we have these rules in our school?

6. Yogashastras advise the purification of the body before attempting the purification of consciousness. Healthy thought and feeling has a direct relationship with healthy and fit body for yoga. What is your opinion about it?

7. Your habits of hygiene should not be controlled by your likes. It is not enough to fulfil the wants of the body according to your taste. Good health should be the guiding principle of all our habits and satisfaction of needs. Write down your comments on this.

### Work

1. The students are turned into daily labourers in the Basic Schools. How far do you subscribe to the veracity of the rumour?

2. In conventional schools, stress is not being laid on physical labour. They only lay stress on examination. But why labour is an important ingredient of education in our school?

3. Work and study or study through work—which of this you favour and why?
4. What do you understand by self-reliance? Is there any difference between self-reliance without cooperation and cooperative self-reliance?
5. The daily labourer gets wage for his work. But we work and do not get paid. Why this happens? Do we get any other compensation for our labour in lieu of wages?
6. Try to draw a picture of the changed manner and nature of our pedagogy if work is completely banished from our curriculum.
7. Do you like to work? Do you work with others only to maintain the discipline? How are you benefited from work?
8. The Russian psychologists are putting the children back on track through work when they become naughty and their character and nature becomes unsocial and disorderly. How far do you think this method will succeed?
9. If the system of labour practiced in the Basic Schools is changed, do you think we will be more benefited?
10. a) Do you feel awkward while working?  
b) Do your palms sweat? Do you stammer while speaking in public or when you converse with an elder? Do you feel your fingers getting out of control?  
c) Does your head bend down increasingly?  
d) Do the fingers touch your mouth or the back of the head?  
e) Do you feel like biting nails?  
f) Do you feel perspiration on the face?

If you come across such symptoms, what do you think is the reason for the same?

The students used to come to our Forest School after completing Class VII at any conventional school or other Basic School. In Class IX all the subjects were compulsory. Apart from Mathematics, Oriya language and literature, English, General Science and Social Science tests were taken at the end of the session as also on two other subjects titled 'Education' and 'Modern World'. One should remember here that on the last two subjects. I had narrated the story of Antoine de Saint Exupery's insightful tale *The Little Prince* in Oriya in the class. There was no other discussion about the book in the class. Each student had to submit a 20-25 page write up on the book. The students had written why they liked or disliked the book and which episode touched them the most.

I have recently collected copies of the question papers of three Annul Examinations at the end of the ninth class. I feel, in the fitness of things, I should place them for the perusal of the readers.

### Oriya Literature-1956 (Class IX)

1. What do we understand by National Literature? Why and how far does Gopabandhu Das, Nilakantha Das or Sachi Routray qualify to be called the National Oriya Poet.
2. Why is Sarala Das's *Mahabharata* so enchanting for the Oriyas? Between the Sanskrit *Mahabhamta* and Sarala *Mahabharata*, which one has more literary value for Orissa and why?

3. What do you mean by a good drama? Between the mythological drama and social drama, which one appeals to you more and why?

4. We had performed the play *Ramer Sutnati* this year. Why did you like or dislike it? What special strength or weakness you have detected in this play?

5. Write notes on:

Bouddhagona and Doha, Artha Koili, Shakespeare, Maxim Gorky, Gopinath Mohanty.

### The Modern World-1956 (Class IX)

1. Last month democratic form of government was established in Pakistan. But still what differences do you think are there between democracy in India and democracy in Pakistan?

2. Both the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. claim that there is a democratic form of government in their countries. We also call ourselves a democracy. Is there no common definition of democracy, then? Clarify your thought on this.

3. Why is the visit of the two important Russians to our country in December as guests being termed as a contribution to world peace? How was India benefited by that? What reaction the visit had in England and the U.S.?

4. Why was the State Reorganization Commission constituted? Around what basic principle the Commission recognized the boundary of the states? Should there be a limit to the segregation between one language community and another?

5. The claims of Orissa before the Reorganization Commission were not honoured. Which of the following individuals and organizers according to you were responsible for that: Pandit Nehru, Congress Party, Fazal AH, the weak national movement in Orissa claiming the separate provinces and the wrong leadership lacking foresight?

6. How far the change in the Russian attitude be termed as the most important world event after the Second World War? Did the suspicion and terror in the world increase or decrease by this?

7. Which of the two ideals nationalism and internationalism is more beneficial for the world? Is there some fundamental differences between these two ideals? Explain by citing instances from history.

8. Write short notes on:

Second Five Year Plan, The City of Bombay, The Land Reform, The National Academy of Letters, Bhakra Nangal.

### Literature-1957 (Class IX)

1. What do you understand by a good poem? Can the worth of a poem be judged on the basis of the personal opinion of an individual reader? Or is there a literary criterion to judge a poem?

2. How far do you agree with the opinion that the literary taste of the student is gradually waning because of the way literature is being taught in the schools and colleges

in India? What special skills a teacher must have in order to teach literature? What type of test should be conducted in the subject of literature?

3. Give your opinion on the best Oriya a) travelogue, b) novel, and c) play you have read. Your account should be within fifteen to twenty sentences for each genre.

4. Have you gone through any poem or play by an author belonging to a language other than Oriya? Make a critical appraisal of such a book within twenty-five to thirty sentences.

5. Write notes on:

Debendra Satyarthi, the Highest Award in Literature, World Literature, Detective Novels, the Weaknesses of Oriya Literature.

### Social Science-1957 (Class IX)

1. Why did we study the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Gita while studying Indian History? How far did it help us to know the history? What place can it be accorded in the world history?

2. How would you rate the relative importance of the tribal, Aryan and Dravidian civilization? How far according to you these civilizations have contributed or acted as a hindrance to the construction of Indian culture?

3. Write notes on:

Aitareya Upanishad, Astanga Yoga, Sadadarshana, Purana, Gitadharma.

4. Write an essay based on your experience on the topic 'My One Year in Post-Basic Education'.

5. Write in at least ten sentences your opinion on each of your classmates.

### Education-1957 (Class IX)

1. What image did you carry in your imagination about the school when you came here? How close to your imagination have you come within one year? How much the welfare of a school depends on the teacher's giving and receiving of the students?

2. Our curriculum includes mental and physical training and physical labour. It also includes weaving and prayer. Why do you think these things have been included in the curriculum? Assess yourself as a student on the basis of how far you have accepted or rejected these things.

3. Why has it been suggested in the textbooks of education that body should be under the control of the mind and the mind should be under the control of the soul? How far your soul and mind are under the control of your body? How has that helped or hindered the development of your life?

4. Why have we decided to start a school here when there are so many schools in Orissa already? Do you think there is a special purpose behind this effort? With what name would you christen the school which would be in accordance with this special purpose?

5. Why are the minds of the children of this country full of fear? Whom out of the following would you hold responsible for this—poverty, family, teacher, educational system, religion?

### The Modern World-1957 (Class IX)

1. In what way is India losing out for not joining any military bloc of nations? Do you support the view that the backbone of the war-ravaged Germany would have been broken had it not joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation? Which block would you recommend India to join?

2. Had you been eligible, which party you would have voted for during the last election and why? What main problems the party that assumes the government of the country should address first?

3. Russia and America want to divide the world now into two camps. What methods each are adopting to pursue this goal? What major differences are there between profession and practice of the policies of these two governments?

4. The recent gifting away of the villages in Koraput has thrown a new challenge to the entire world. Do you believe that many problems in the world can be solved by creating an ideal society in Koraput? Are there any other non-violent methods to establish peace and goodwill in the world?

5. Write notes on: Anthony Eden, Olympic Games, Algeria, Second Five Year Plan, Donation of Property.

### Social Science-1958 (Class IX)

1. What do you understand by 'society'? What differences are there between human and animal societies? Why is the knowledge about society being termed 'science' today?

2. Religion has created and is still creating a lot of hatred and discord between man and man. Why is it so? What differences are there between religion and superstition? How far the Indian Upanishads can be adopted as the religious scripture of every man in the world?

3. The aborigines, the Dravidians and the Aryans have together contributed to the creation of the Indian civilization and culture. How? Then why are there differences among them now?

### Education-1958 (Class IX)

1. More than getting freedom, its proper use is important in education. Have you ever thought that getting freedom is the only aim of education? If so, discuss the nature of freedom in the life of a student from your experience.

2. Why does human mind change with the advancement of age? How far what a child will be when she grows up can be anticipated from her childhood? Give your opinion on the subject assessing your own life.

3. The real education the child has takes place outside the classroom. What do you think about the previous proposition? How far can the teaching in the classroom be termed as a performance? By stressing on the teaching in the classroom what good or harm we do to ourselves?

4. What should a student fear the most? Why don't we follow good habits or study well without the presence of a threat? By asking you to forsake fear what harm is being perpetrated on you here?

5. What do you really understand by Basic Education? Why do you like or dislike this method of education? How far can you happily adopt the special practices and programmes of this method? What have you gained or lost by following this path?

6. We will not get a degree or job after finishing education in this school. What shall we do then? How far the programmes here are making you idle? Do you think you have found or lost the way after studying here for one year?

### The Modern World-1958 (Class IX)

1. Why is there an agitation in India on the issue of language? Give a short account of this agitation. Do you have any solution for the language problem? How have countries like the U.S.A., Russia and Switzerland solved this problem?

2. Dramatic changes are taking place now in both the East and the West Pakistan. Give an account of those changes and trace their reason. How far Pakistan can be termed a democratic state?

3. Why is there a civil war going on in Indonesia? How far do you think will this affect peaceful development in Asia?

4. Why is there a suggestion for holding a summit? Who has called for this? What issues will be discussed there? Is there a special proposal of India regarding this? Do you think the faith reposed in the UNO by the people will increase or decrease because of the summit?

5. Write short notes on:

The Communist Government in Kerala, Democracy and the Opposition Party, Sputnik, Siddhartha Ray, the Dove of Peace.

The students of the Forest School used to appear at examinations. But there was no system of invigilation during the examinations. The questions were dictated to the students assembled in one hall. Then they chose their own place to sit down and write the answers. Some sat down on the verandah, some sought the shade of the trees, yet some others went near the spring. The questions for Class X were similar to that of the Class IX cited above. I am now providing a sample of the question papers for Class X that are available with me.

### Literature-1957 (Class X)

1. We used to have Ramlila and Krishnalila in our country in the past. Then came the theatre. Now it is the turn of the cinema. Comment on this development of the tradition of

providing aesthetic enjoyment to the society. Why do you like watching or reading a play?

2. Why was the 'Nagin' song so popular in Orissa? Why is it being appreciated by our readers more than the *Kamkabita* of Gopabandhu and Fakir Mohan's *Mamul* Assess the level of literary taste of Orissa based on this discourse.

3. *Kabira Guna* is a small book by Vinoba. But it is a source of great inspiration for the minds of the readers about both the ancient and modern literatures. Support or oppose this opinion by providing your own arguments.

4. What are the main features to be discussed while dealing with the early Oriya literature? What inspiration we can draw from the ancient literature during these modern times?

5. Why is it important to translate major literary texts of India and the world into Oriya? How vast the reach of modern Oriya literature should be?

6. Write notes on:

Pali language and literature, the pen made of bird fur, Sukanta Bhattacharya, Biographical literature.

### Social Science-1957 (Class X)

1. Discuss briefly the historical reasons for which Buddhism gradually lost its identity in Hinduism. How far can Buddhism be treated as a separate religion from Hinduism.

2. How has Islamic culture benefited Indian culture? Discuss elaborately how the medieval Bhakti cult synthesized the essence of Islam and Hindu religions.

3. Though Akbar was illiterate, he had understood the essence of Indian culture, for which he could build a strong India.

4. Write notes on:

Caliph, Dara Sikoh, Boddhisatrwa, Shershah, Shivaji.

### Education-1957 (Class X)

1. The Basic Education has adopted transformation of the contemporary society as its main task. How far are the ideals and programmes of the Basic Education designed to bring about such a transformation? Explain how far you have equipped yourself in this direction during your last two years training.

2. How far can the transformation brought about by Bhoodan and Gramdan throughout the country be accepted as a tool of education? Provide a well thought out model for the same.

3. What do you think of the necessity of pedagogy in a free environment? What do you understand by freedom? What is its significance for a student? How far can the teachers and the student's misuse that freedom if they wanted to?

4. There is a lot of instrumentalisation of education now, which has also threatened to infiltrate into even the Basic Education system. What fundamental mistakes in our educational planning allow such instrumentalisation?



5. Write an essay on 'The Future of Education in India' basing your discussion on the contemporary state of education in the country.

6. Write notes on:

Self-reliance in thought, Vinoba as a teacher, the daily routine of our school, anti-democratic education in a democratic-rule, the natural and unnatural use of English education in India.

### The Modern World-1957 (Class X)

1. How far do you think 1957 is an important year for India and the world? Do you think we have arrived at a cross-road from where either we change the ways of the world completely or allow the entire mankind to perish?

2. A battle was fought at Sinai to bring peace to the world and there was a lot of commotion in the UNO. But the problem of middle-east was not solved nor were the sufferings of Israel mitigated. Give a comment on these statements along with relevant historical information,

3. As England and France were exposed in the Middle-East, so was Russia in Hungary. All isms got defeated in 1956 and the voice of the people won. How far do you agree with this statement?

4. Kashmir problem has become like a sore in India's body-politic. Why did it degenerate so far? Do you have a solution to the problems of Kashmir?

5. How far can you term the voting in India as a disaster for democracy? How are the following reasons responsible for such an impasse—illiteracy in the country, the power-hungry leadership, social inequality, lack of proper vision for a future India.

6. Write notes on:

Koraput, Baghdad Alliance, Nikita Khrushchev, Ghana, Nehru.

### Education-1958 (Class X)

1. What do you think is the main difference between an educated and an uneducated person? What is your opinion on the statement that the contemporary education is merely making us fit for a particular social machine rather than educating us properly?

2. Why is it that as the number of schools and colleges is increasing all over the world, the problems of the world are getting more and more complex? Had human beings been more at peace if they had not been educated? What kind of schools need to be established to bring about peace in the world?

3. Many are of the opinion that Russia is making such rapid scientific progress because its students are doing well in science. What do you think of the opinion? The dictatorial rule in Russia has driven the human mind and social life into a state of dependency. Then how far can the educational system in that country be termed as scientific?

4. How far, in your opinion can the root of several crises in our country be traced to the crisis of education? Why has there been no fundamental change in the educational system of the country even ten years after independence?

5. Whatever we read at school during childhood, most of it we forget after leaving the school. Why is it so? What all we remember of our childhood experiences and how far they help to shape our life? What changes would you recommend in our educational system keeping the above observations in mind?

6. Why is the Basic Education withering away in this country? Why even the best ideas of this system gradually fail to attract our students. As a bright student what kind of an educational system do you want for this country.

### The Modern World-1958 (Class X)

1. Discuss briefly the political situation of Orissa after the last General Election. Does the prevalent situation help or hinder the growth of a democratic mindset in Orissa? How far are the newspapers of the state helping or harming the cause?

2. What is planning? Which country has provided leadership to the entire world in this field? What advantages or disadvantages are there in India for the success of planning? How far can this year's central budget make us hopeful about our planning? Give your opinion along with the relevant facts and figures.

3. Two composite states have already been created in the Middle-East and there is discussion about a third. Discuss the political and economic significance of this phenomenon. How far this change will impact the fate of the Middle-East, especially, Israel?

4. Name the two greatest political problems of Africa. Give a brief account of the freedom movement centered on Algeria in various colonized states of Africa. To solve which problems in Asia and Africa, the Afro-Asian Summit is working towards?

5. Write brief notes on:

Nuclear-free zone, Cyprus, World Parliament, Doctor Lohia, Kalinga Award.

In Class XI, i.e. in the third year of the Forest School, a few changes were made in the curriculum of the earlier year. Towards the middle of the session in the tenth class, the students used to study a new subject titled 'The History of Literature'. After one year and a half i.e. towards the end of class eleven, teaching of this subject was completed. Apart from the compulsory subjects the student had to read two optional subjects. Initially, we started the new curriculum with the following five subjects, namely, literature, history, education, science and philosophy. The optional subjects were offered according to the abilities of the particular teacher to teach a subject. First of all I shall offer the sample of the question papers for compulsory subjects and then the question papers for optional subjects.

### The History of Literature-1957 (Class XI)

1. Why hasn't there been a critical history of Oriya literature yet? What are the major obstacles for writing such a work? What strategy you will adopt if you wrote such a history and why?

2. The proper assessment of the Panchasakhas cannot be done only on the then cultural background of Orissa. How far can you defend this opinion? The Saint literary tradition of the Middle Ages brought about a new synthesis in Indian culture. How far can the Panchasakhas of Orissa be considered the representatives of such a synthesis? Clarify your point of view through a comparative analysis.

3. What are the major characteristics of the literature of Upendra Bhanja and his age? What are the similarities and the differences between this literature and the Ritikala of the Hindi literature?

4. The imagination of beauty in the age of Bhanja had largely been confined to the body. Do you support such an aesthetics? How far has the then literature been successful in ascribing the human physical desires unto the love story of this god? Is that literature being appreciated today and why?

5. With what inspirations did the nationalist phase in Oriya literature start? How far has this literature been influenced by European and other regional Indian literatures?

6. There are a lot of differences between the points of view of Radhanath and Madhusudan though they belonged to the same age. Give an elaborate analysis of the reasons.

7. What are the major inspirations behind the modern literature? What are the differences between the modern Oriya literature and the literatures of other ages? How far do you agree with the view that bad taste has infiltrated into the modern literature?

### Social Science-1957 (Class XI)

1. What is history? Why should we read history? What benefit can we get by knowing about events that occurred in India and the world thousands of years ago?

2. Earlier, kingdoms were run by the whims of the kings. The king was the centre of the administration and the society. What will be the fate of a king of the older times if he is asked to take control of the contemporary society? Write your answer by citing the example of Mohammad Tughlaq.

3. The scholars studying the history of the world are of the opinion that the human civilization and culture is marching forward. Some others say that mankind is heading towards a catastrophe. What is your opinion? What are the historical differences between progress and change?

4. Earlier, power used to be concentrated in the hands of one person. Now power has been distributed among many. Democratization of knowledge and science is the main reason for this. If the scope of acquiring knowledge and fruits of scientific developments is narrowed, the society is bound to be headed towards dictatorial rule though it has manifestly adopted a democratic set-up of governance for itself. Elaborate upon these statements citing India's example.

5. The kings of the past were tyrants. However, the ancient stone-craft and temple architecture have been possible due to these kings. Do you agree then with the statement that the developments in art and architecture can only be possible under dictatorial rule? How far would you support the tyranny that was perpetrated in the past?

6. The history of India is largely an account of struggle and synthesis. The trend still continues. Explain this phenomenon by drawing upon the lives of Harsha-bardhan, Kabir, Akbar and Aurangzeb.

### Literature (Optional)-1957 (Class XI)

1. Everyone experiences life, but why not all of them become poets or write literature? What is the relationship between the personal life and literary life of a human being? What are the main sources of inspirations for a human being to become a litterateur?

2. Compare the modern Oriya literature with the modern Hindi literature. After independence in which areas Hindi literature has progressed and Oriya literature has fallen behind? Trace the reasons for the same.

3. What are the modes of evaluating a play? How far your perceptions about drama as a literary genre have changed after reading and discussing *Macbeth*? Which Oriya play do you enjoy the most and why?

4. Can we term the modern novel as the prose-epic of modern life? Which elements of the epic we encounter in the best novels? Cite examples from the novels— from India and abroad—you have read to support your opinion. Which can be termed as problem novels?

5. Can we term travel-accounts as literature? Why is the interest in them increasing in modern literature? Can you include the travel accounts of Megasthenes and Huen-Tsang in literature? Make a comparative study between an Oriya and Bengali travelogue.

6. Why does a language undergo changes from age to age? Why has not the Oriya language changed as much as the Bengali during the last three hundred years? Between the spoken and the written language which one according to you should lead the other? Why is the language of the novel closer to the spoken language?

7. The age of nationalism in the world has been a source of profound inspiration for the creation of literature. But still it has widened the gulf between man and man in several instances. How? How far can you hold the nationalist literature responsible for the contemporary destruction and pessimism? Can you provide a blue print for bolstering friendship and tolerance between man and man through the medium of literature?

8. What is scientific literature? How far there is a need for such a literature for popularizing science? Discuss the science fiction on the theme of 'man beyond the world'.

9. The modern literature is moving more and more away from the life of the common people and making it more complicated by destroying its holism and naturalness. How far do you support this view? What are the causes responsible for such trend? Why is popular literature withering away gradually during the modern time? How far the Janasahitya series of Orissa can fill in the vacuum of popular literature?

10. Write notes on any five:

The representation of Jesus in literature, comparative literature, prose-poem in Oriya, Dravidian language, Brahmananda Sahodara University and literature.

### Education (OptionaD-1957 (Class XI))

1. Why does not the contemporary society recognize the Basic Education? What dangers the Basic Education system poses for destabilizing the foundation of the contemporary social arrangement? Indicate what fundamental changes are required in our society and government in order to adopt the Basic Education system sincerely.

2. Here we frame many rules ourselves, but do not follow them permanently. Perhaps we somehow follow the rules imposed on us by teachers in the school. Why is it so? How far should the framing and obeying of rules in a school be left to the free will of the students?

3. There is no limit to knowledge, but the education system in our country, through various strategies, is trying to confine the student within various limits. How far do you agree with this statement? Is the inquisitiveness of the student getting destroyed by this oppressive conformity to limits? Instead of transforming the life, is the student considering conformity to the contemporary way of luring his ultimate duty?

4. There is no scope for unique growth during student life. Therefore, the student, during adulthood, considers it his duty to move away from necessary responsibilities, or regressing into a delusion of childhood out of the fear of responsibility. Justify this statement by drawing instances from life and society.

5. What should be the proper explanation of freedom in an educational lexicon? How far the proper freedom is used or abused in our schools and family? What are the evil consequences of the abuse of that freedom?

6. How should a student accept the truth that every individual should build his own life? How should the attitude towards and methods of education provided in the family and the schools change for that purpose?

7. Why should there be an intention for integrated development of head, hand and heart in each educational strategy? Looked at from this point of view, what shortcomings are there in the modern educational systems? How far these shortcomings are a hindrance in the path of building a healthy human life-style? From the three aims of education mentioned above which should be emphasized the most and why?

8. Education should not merely be a transmitter of the culture of an age; it should inculcate a new culture. Otherwise, education will be infiltrated by many superstitions and hatred. How far do you support this view? By making education merely conducive to the spirit of the age what harms do you think our society has perpetrated on the mankind and the world?

9. Even when religions and science are giving mankind a call to build a global family, the educational system has tied man down to various narrow attitudes. Do you agree with this view? What changes are required in the curriculum and our attitude in order to turn every student into a healthy global citizen?

10. Write notes on:

Education in Plato's Ideal Republic, Pestalozzi, Keeping a journal and prayer from the point of view of pedagogy, Correlation, UNESCO.

### History (Optional)-1957 (Class XI)

1. The savagery of city-life is growing during the modern times at the cost of the village communities of the past and man is getting more and more alienated despite living in a society. How far Spangler has been successful in proving this thesis while discussing the European history?

2. How far do you agree with Toynbee's views after discussing his book *Civilization and the Western World*? Discuss the concept of nationalism in the background of the history of the last three hundred years.

3. Are there any differences between civilization and culture? Discuss the views on Spangler and Toynbee on this. How far a culture can adopt another culture and civilization? Explain by citing instances from history.

4. According to Toynbee the history of the world is full of many challenges and responses to them. This interaction is behind the rise and fall of civilizations. How far do you support this view?

5. From which points of view mainly, the world history and the world religions should be studied? How far do you think that the amount of hatred will decrease in the world if the history is interpreted properly? What do you mean by historical point of view?

### Science (Optional)-1957 (Class XI - supplementary questions)

1. What is science? When did science begin? How did man live when there was no science?

2. There is expansion of science in the world; but why is the respect for a scientific life waning gradually? Who or what is responsible for this?

3. What is the difference between the scientific and the unscientific outlook? How far do you support the view that the main aim of teaching science should be to inculcate a scientific outlook?

4. Earlier religions used to say that god is there in every human being, so all human beings are equal, but the society was still full of inequalities. With the growth of the scientific outlook, we are progressing towards the creation of an equitable society. The modern science is going to realize what the religions had preached. What is your personal view on this?

5. Write notes on:

Earth is the centre of the creation, Fleming as a scientist, the flying saucer, the history of science is mainly the history of using energy, Einstein.

### Philosophy (Optional)-1957 (Class XI)

1. What is the relationship between philosophy and 'Drush' in Sanskrit language? Is there any difference between Indian philosophy and the philosophy of the Western world?

2. European philosophy during the time of Bacon and Descartes had extricated itself from the bondage of religion. But it has come closer to religion with the outlook and realization of twentieth century science. Justify this statement.

3. Science and philosophy look at life and the world from two different perspectives, search for truth in two different methods. Explain the above statement. Is there any difference between the imagination of Upanishadic science and the science of our times?

4. What is the essence of Vedanta philosophy? How far this philosophy divides the world into two categories of Brahman and Maya? What ways have been indicated in this philosophy for realizing Brahman?

5. Write a critique on Rabindranam's 'human dharma'. How far this dharma is based upon the essence of "Bharata Dharma"?

6. Why is it said that synthesis is the essential characteristic of Indian Philosophy? Which Indian attitude has helped us the most to retain this synthetic world-view as our goal? Has this attitude influenced Indian society and family?

### The History of Literature-1958 (Class XI)

1. Why should a history of any literature be written? How does this help us to know the past or trace the lineage of the national culture? How far those who are writing the history of Oriya literature are fulfilling their duty in this regard?

2. What, according to you, are the main characteristics of Panchasakha literature? How far the Panchasakha literature is a proof that Saguna and Nirguna, Jnanan and Bhakti and the world and the heaven can be synthesized by the aesthetic treatment in literature?

Why is it not possible to express such profound ideas so easily during the contemporary times?

3. Vaishnavism has preached the main principles of Bhakti. In Orissa it was transformed into lust through the Riti Literature. Explain your own point of view regarding this opinion by citing instances from the literature of various poets.

4. The kind of genius Bhanja has shown while using rhythm, alliteration and metre in poetry has not generally been seen in any other Indian poet. By overly emphasizing upon these formal accomplishments, do you think Bhanja's literature has lost some other positive qualities of literature?

5. Nationalism is merely a support system for the modern life, not its ultimate destination. Explain the statement which economic, social and political events according to you were responsible for the nationalist phase of European literature?

### Education (OptionaD-1958 (Class XI)

1. Should providing employment be the main aim of any educational system? Would you still be interested to receive education although you would not be able to get a job after your studies in exchange of your educational qualification? Give reasons for your answer.

2. The Basic Education is turning our children into daily labourers. How far this aspersion is right or wrong according to you? What did the earlier education consisting of desks, benches and teachers turn the students into?

3. In the schools of our country, the adult of our society is perpetrating cruel oppression upon the child. The natural development of the child's inherent qualities is being stifled by the fear of failure in examination and the temptation of job in the future. Provide your opinion on this phenomenon.

4. What do you mean by self-reliance? Do you think that the Basic Education has moved far away from its goal by overly emphasizing merely upon the self-reliance in food and clothing?

5. Give a well thought-out model of an ideal school in a village.

6. Can we call the educational system in our country a nationalistic and humanistic education as long as all the children of the country have not received the facility for studying? Colleges are mushrooming in this country for the higher education of a few while the majority is consigned to illiteracy. What social benefit or loss according to you takes place due to this?

7. To keep the child-mind of the human beings alive should be the aim of any educational system. But the minds of the children of our country today are getting old in various ways. Whom do you hold more responsible for this and why?

One point needs to be clarified here regarding the optional subjects. There was no time limit for answering the questions set on these subjects. The students used to come together to take down the questions set on these subjects. The students used to come together to take down the questions one day. After three or four days as agreed upon by all they used to submit their answer sheets to the teachers. I have only three sets of question papers of Class XII with me now. They are as follows:

### Literature (Optional) (Class XII)

1. Make a comparative study of the ancient and the modern literature. Does an age create a literature or vice versa? Many are of the opinion that literature changes according to the change in time. But still how far do you think that there are some permanent literary values applicable to all ages?

2. What do you mean by good literature? How far would you support the hatred and cruelty that has been allowed in this world in the name of destroying the so-called bad literature? Keeping this history of cruelty in mind, discuss the limits to a literature's freedom and who should set the limit.

3. How far do you think that an age of crisis has dawned on the entire world in the field of modern literature? How far do you agree with the view that the crisis in modern literature is merely a reaction to a greater crisis engulfing the modern life?



4. Assess the place of Epicureanism in literature. How far pleasure can be accepted as a value in life and literature? Is there still a need for literature in human life mined in suffering and apprehension?

5. How far a poem or a poet can be compared with another poem or a poet? How far they can be placed in the hierarchy of merit? What principles we should abide by while making a comparative assessment between poems or poets?

6. How far can Indian Sahitya Akademi inspire the creation of good literature in the country? Has any great literature been produced in Russia after forty years of state nurturance and support? Give your own opinion on the modality of relationship between the state and the literature keeping the above problem in mind.

7. With the creation of more and more new and powerful literature, more inspiration would be available for the development of man and human culture. Give a detailed analysis of this statement with a glance at the contemporary state of Oriya literature.

8. What are your duties towards Oriya literature and culture as an Oriya youth? What are your responsibilities towards literature and humanity as a modern man? How can you bring about a synthesis in your life between your identity as an Oriya and as a modern enlightened man?

9. There is a comprehensive outlook towards love and beauty in Rabindranath's play Chitrangada. Make a detailed analysis of the statement citing relevant instances.

10. Write short notes on:

Oriya language after independence, the coming age of Oriya literature, university and culture, Sarvodaya and literature.

### Education (Optional-1958 (Class XII))

1. The children of our country will go astray if they watch the film Jagriti. Do you agree? What according to you are the main differences between a good child and a wicked child?

2. Those who have money can only receive education. Those who are educated will get jobs. On what kind of social philosophy, according to you has this educational system been established? How far is this social philosophy dehumanizing mankind?

3. The Basic Education is merely an effort to eradicate the misfortune that envelopes the field of education in our country? How far do you support this statement? For which difficulties the Basic Education is unable to progress along its desired goal?

4. The government of this country is founded on the principles that are exactly opposite of the philosophy on which the Basic Education is based. Therefore, in the hands of the government the Basic Education has become a vulgar imitation of the old mis-education. Give a detailed account of your opinion on this.

5. What, of the following, do you mainly understand by education: to become worthy of job, to pass examination after rote learning, to follow the rules of the society or something else?

6. What kind of education should be prescribed for the tribal population of our country? By making them run after us, we shall perhaps make them bankrupt, the way we lost ourselves following the English, what is your view on this?

7. Is there any difference between educating and showing compassion? The education in our country rests mainly on compassion. What calamity befalls on our society due to this?

### **Philosophy (Optional)-1958 (Class XII)**

1. What do the common people understand by mind? How have the philosophers analyzed the mind from the ancient times to the present? What opinions do the philosophers provide on mind and body?

2. The mind has been imagined in a novel manner in Freud's psychoanalysis. This imagination has also influenced the modern literature a lot. Give your detailed analysis on the subject.

3. Give a detailed philosophical analysis of Pragmatism. How far do you think Pragmatism has impacted the modern educational thought?

4. How have different religions imagined God mainly? What do the philosophers understand by 'God'? Give your own opinion on the subject after making a comparative study of both points of view.

5. Have religion and philosophy separate views on good deeds and evil? How far the question of 'ought' in social terms be compared with the philosophical analysis of 'ought'? Between the individual and the society, who should lead the other?

6. What do you understand by aesthetic perception? How far do you support the view that 'disinterestedness' is the primary requirement for aesthetic perception? Is there any relationship between the Anandamaya Kosha and Rasa in Vedanta and the philosophy of aesthetics?

In Class XII each student was asked to write a dissertation on a subject of his choice along with the written examination. The students were asked to study a few interdisciplinary books that covered their optional subjects. I am providing a list of the books they were asked to study in the process.

### **Literature**

Tinu—Rabindranath Sahityadarsha (Prabasa Jiban Choudhuri), Sahitya (Rabindranath), Kavya Parikrama (Ajit Chakrabarti), Atmaprichaya (Rabindranath)

Durgacharan—Smrutira Rekha (Bibhuti Bandyopadyaya), Aranyaka (Bibhuti Bandyopadyaya), Yatri (Rabindranath), Sagara Yatri (I do not feel it necessary to provide the names of Oriya authors) Nilambara—Paraja, Sibbhai, Amritara Santana, Sarbari Dasarathi (A)—Bandira Aramakatha, Kara Kabita, Abasara Chinta

Chaitanya—Oriya Sahityare Nandakishor, Nandakishor Granthabali

Aamoda—Lok Kathaein Series, Lok Sanskriti Anka, Loka Sahitya (Rabindranath)

Chand Suraj Ke Biran (Debendra Satyarthi) Ananda—Aristotle’s Poetics (Bengali Translation)

Oriya Natyakala, Nataka Bichara, Shakespeare (Bengali)

Harihar—Kahanikala, Gorky Ki Shrestha Kahaniyan, Manasarobar (Prem Chand), Prem Me Bhagaban (Tolstoy)

Ratnakar—Mamu, Prayaschitta, Chha Mana Atha Guntha, Yugashrasta Fakirmohan, Fakirmohan Atma Charita

Trinath—Kalindi Charan, the poet

Krushnachandra—Bharatare Bhasha O’ Bhasha Samasya

(Suniti Kumar Chattopadhyaya), Bharatiya Arya Bhasha

Aur Hindi, Oriya Bhashara Hihasha, Bhasha Bigyana Basudeva—Sahitya Sandesh (The chapters on the Novel), Upanyasa Kala

Banshidhara—Sahitya Bichara

Nityananda—Adhunika Oriya Kabita

### **History**

Ananda—Itihasa (Rabindranath)

Bharata—Sivaji (Jadunath Sarkar)

Gobinda—Hseun Tsang’s Bharata - Bibarana, Bharata O’

China, China Itihaser Dhara Kishore—Prachina Bharata

Trinatha—Priyadarshi Ashoka, Dharmabijayin Ashoka Baidyanath—British Bharatara Arthanilika Itihasha

### **Philosophy**

Tinu—Sadhana (Rabindranath), Sanskrit Sangaina

(Kshitimohan Sen)

Chaitanya—Sri Aurobindo O’ Bharatiya Darshana Banshidhara—Baigyanika Advaitabada, Dharma Aur Bigyana

### **Education**

Amoda—Naitalimra Mulasidhanta

Durgacharan—Sustha Byakti O’ Rugna Samaja

Krushnachandra—Agye Sikshyabigyana Pare Sikshya Sankrara

Dasarathi (A)—Santiniketanara Sikshyadarsha

Ratnakar—Bhayara Apasarana - Sikshyara Prathama Swatasiddha

Gobinda—Dharmasikshya

Gopinatha—Jugapojogi Sikshya

Nityananda—Kishora Bayasara Sikshyagata Samasya  
Bharata—Prachina O' Adhunika Sikshya  
Dasarathi (B)—Prachalita Sikshyara Manobaigyanika Alochana  
Basudeva—Prachalita Samaja O Maulika Sikshya  
Baidyanatha—Those who allow freedom, deserve freedom  
Kishore—Chhatrara Samajika Bikasha.

It is not that every student at the Forest School was brilliant at studies. There was also no expectation here that everyone should be extremely brilliant in studies. Why should the studies in the school be the only field where one had to demonstrate one's best inherent capabilities in life?

I have only one aim in citing above the question papers of various years. There is no dearth of enthusiasm in the children of our society and country. Our schools would accomplish a lot if they were able to create a healthy interest in the child to study. In the Forest School, the students used to work in the field, manoeuvred the ploughshare, tended cows and prepare their daily food. But still, their interest in studies never waned. They used to find required time to devote to their studies despite remaining busy in various activities. I have never accepted the Basic School as the solution for all problems. But often the enthusiasm of the students at the Forest School has surprised me. The students have often inspired me and filled my tired body and mind with new energy.

I do not want to get a good name by relating all this. I have learnt from the experience of a few leaders of Orissa who were humiliated because of their attempt to advertise their names without making any significant contribution. The Forest School could not provide enough food to the children; there were not enough teachers to satisfy the inquisitiveness of the students. They were far from the pleasures and comforts of student life. But how could the school achieve whatever it did in four years? Firstly, fear was banished from school. No one, neither the teacher nor the student tried to project themselves as ideal human beings. Secondly, human beings were not treated as animals or servants—Everyone got the respect worthy of a human being, irrespective of age, caste or gender. If anyone committed a mistake they had to be responsible for it but there was no accompanying guilt which one had to suffer. Thirdly, the entire teaching was done in the Oriya language and no one had to carry the oppressive burden of any foreign language.

No teacher at the Forest School has ever wanted to plant the unfortunate thought in the minds of the students that Oriya is inferior to other languages of the world. The students never had an inferiority complex *vis-à-vis* the English language. I have learnt from my own experience at the Forest School that it is possible to communicate the profoundest ideas of Philosophy, Educational Science and Literature through Oriya language to receptive students. I have taught Macbeth in Oriya, explained I.A. Richards's Principles of Literary Criticism, Toynbee's The World and the West, Nell's Heart not Heads in School without faltering anywhere.

But, still, the enthusiasm in the minds of the students for learning other language, which I have encountered at the Forest School, has surprised me. I have seen the same kind of interest in our students for other languages as the interest of a German student to

learn English or vice versa. The activities of the Forest School were not confined only to studies and physical labour; there were also a lot of extracurricular activities. Every month a hand-written magazine titled Bikasha was published. Once every week we had a debating session.

### 3

The student of the usual Basic Schools maintained their diaries. The teachers periodically corrected the entries in the diary. Often during exhibitions those diaries were displayed. But in the Forest School there was no tradition of discussion on diaries the students wrote for the convention of submitting them to the teacher. If anybody wanted, they could go and deposit their diaries to the teachers. Apart from the diaries, some students maintained their personal journals in which they recorded their inherent thoughts and desires and if they so wanted they could go and discuss them with the teacher individually. Nobody except the student and the teacher concerned had any access to those secret journals or the nature of discussion on them.

Every three months, each student received a letter from the teachers. This contained an assessment of the students' academic growth and the nature of transformation of his total life within that period. The content of that letter was kept a secret only to be shared by the student concerned and the teachers, lest the student felt small in front of others. I have a few copies of those assessment reports with me which I would like to share so that the readers have an idea of what the Forest School expected from its students and how it wanted to guide them.

#### Class IX (Three months after joining the school)

##### *Haladhara*

1. Your effort is alright. So also is your enthusiasm to discipline your daily life. But you seem to be weak in Hindi and you are neglecting Bengali. You have not maintained a record of the books you have borrowed from the library. You have creativity but it needs to be more developed.

2. It does not behove a student to neglect the body. The mind also becomes sick if the body is taken ill.

3. Don't you have enough faith in yourself? Therefore you often seem irresponsible.

##### *Sashibhusan*

1. You have succeeded in regularizing your practice and effort.

2. You could study more deeply. There is inherent strength but it does not get reflected in the mind. So you are lagging behind. So you seem to suspect yourself and the rest of the world. Are you trying to cover up your shortcomings by boastfulness?

3. Mechanical slogging is not the true purpose of life. True life is enjoying every moment of your work, studies and leisure. Is there a dearth of this enjoyment in your life? You can make your life more enjoyable by expanding your interests and thinking.

4. You have a book of lyrics but why is your voice silent? The body is powerful, but why don't you use it in games? Yonder lies the beautiful nature waiting for you, but

why are your eyes closed? Education is not merely gathering information; it is also a sharing of hearts.

### *Jadunath*

1. The activity of collecting news has stopped after coming here. You have not taken care to practice handwriting. You have not shown interest to borrow any other book than Oriya from the library. The Bengali language has remained all untouchable for you. From the happiness in your mind and your intelligence it is apparent that you can develop a lot of qualities in yourself with a little more focus and discipline.

2. Your body should be subservient to your mind. You should use your body like chariot in the path of progress. But sometimes the disabilities of your body seem to stifle your enthusiasm. The more the body is devoted to progress, the more it will be considered, beautiful.

3. Nobody can eradicate poverty from this world by remaining unhappy. There is a certain delusion behind the thinking that one is poorer than the others. Be prepared to eradicate this poverty by becoming more knowledgeable and more powerful. This will be your only revenge.

### *Prahlada*

1. You are lazy within, so you are becoming a loudmouth. Probably due to your tender age you have not acquired the seriousness of building your life. You have not got issued a single book from the library. Hindi and Bengali languages are like untouchables for you. You lack creativity absolutely. If you do not mend your habits your life may go astray.

2. Those who try to cheat the world cheat themselves thoroughly. Sometimes there are glimpses of your intellect and enthusiasm but it is extinguished because of lack of consistent effort.

### *Goloka (A)*

1. You have begun your life here in a very odd manner and therefore you have remained complacent with those oddities. Except a few Oriya short stories and plays you seem to have no contact with the library. There is no interest for knowledge outside the curriculum. You are cruelly wasting your time and energy. You are blind to your own abilities.

2. If you have a temperament for cheating, you end up cheating yourself, preventing your own growth. The company of your friends should enable you to march ahead, not to forget yourself.

3. When everyone is expecting a lot from you, you seem to be hiding yourself. Probably you have not understood the meaning of your joining this school. Therefore you are deriving a lot of pleasure by neglecting your own life.

### *Jayanarayan*

1. The perversions that were repressed within you are mainly getting manifested after coming here. There is no proof in your activities of the fact that you are involved in any programme of the school apart from attending classes. You are wasting your time under the intoxication of making friends. You have no contact with the library. Your creativity

is gradually waning and violence is increasing. You are yet to provide the proof that you are a student of the school. Your notebooks and records are not in order.

### *Jitendra*

1. All your efforts and interests are confined within the classroom. You are still a captive of your old perceptions about the life of a student. You do not have enough contact with the library. You are yet to recognize the importance of studies. Though you have intelligence and talent you are yet to wake up and develop them. If you wake up you will be able to recognize your abilities. You have creativity, but it is dwindling because of indiscipline.

2. There is an inferiority complex about your own body. Therefore you are unable to derive any pleasure from physical labour of any kind.

3. You are not that weak as you think yourself to be. If you regularize your habits and concentrate your mind, you will be aware of your strengths. Fear of labour does not behove a student.

4. What would you make of a person who does not paint even though he/she possess the colour box and the brush?

### *Rajeswar*

1. You have not done anything outside the classroom yet. So you cannot be called a student of this school.

2. Those who become insane in anger belittle themselves. One's speech is an index of one's nature.

3. Employ your body in more work, only then the shame of the body will go. One should treat all the students here like one's brothers and sisters without nurturing any evil thought in one's mind.

### *Maheswar*

1. Your work and your speech indicate that you are very dull. Your mind has not grown adequately. Your handwriting betrays a very immature thinking. Till now you have merely idled away your time. You have assumed the curriculum in the classroom to be the be-all and end-all of education. Your reading has not gone beyond a few Oriya short story books. Your mind is fickle. You have not had a proper entry into student life.

2. The students and the teachers in this school will not remain as two separate groups. You will also approach the teacher without any fear as they come to you with warmth. The teachers are here only for you, so it does not behove on your part to be scared of them.

### *Tapi*

1. You have not yet felt that studying and building life is the main purpose of education. You seem to have some sense of inferiority. Lack of dedication seems to characterize your life.

2. Everyone should learn the art of mixing with everybody. With the advancement in age you should give up the feeling of shame. Otherwise education will not empower you.

### *Kanhu (Behera)*

1. You are extremely shameful and introverted. Perhaps that is the reason why you are not writing your diary.
2. Why is your body so weak? If you happily employ your body in various activities, this weakness will go away. With the increase of strength in the body, the mind will also be brightened.

### *Gyanendra*

1. You don't read anything outside the class. You don't have any acquaintance with either Bengali or Hindi language. You lack creativity.
2. You don't have the ability to bear even the minor hiccups of life, so you end up in a mess by misunderstanding the ways of this world. You get very worried by small things and in order to hide that feeling you behave in an obstinate manner.
3. You should always be cheerful. Why are you lagging behind thinking overly about your own shortcomings? Study harder, keep your mind calm and have faith in yourself. You can accomplish many things in the world.

### *Benudhara*

1. Here you have transformed yourself a lot. The mind is more active, yet calmer. You should now cultivate a powerful desire to forge ahead.
2. You should not feel ashamed to make your presence felt in a large gathering. Why do you consider yourself an outsider within a congregation of human beings? This kind of thinking is blocking a lot of your energy within.
3. Your handwriting is very immature. It shows that you have not found a proper direction in life.

### *Kanhu (Das)*

1. In the life of a student it is criminal to be complacent with very little. Expand your aspirations. Prove your worth by accepting heavy responsibilities happily. Those who accept living at an ordinary level as an ideal, regress beneath ordinariness in actual life.

### *Chaitanya*

1. Your handwriting is very poor. It is evident that you are actually not what you project onto the outside world. From the outward show of restlessness your fearfulness can be easily detected.

### *Gobinda (Sahu)*

1. You have a lot of talent and energy, but due to some sense of inferiority it is not being utilized. You have not yet acquired the strength to marshal your mind for your own benefit. So you are not at peace. If you can control your mind and regularize the habits of the body, you can develop more.
2. Why are you scared to sing in an uninhibited manner? If your face shows the signs of being happy without, you should also be happy within. What consolation you are drawing by depriving yourself of the joyfulness of the world?

### *Kishore*



1. There is a lot of joy in the mind. You have an excellent gift of creativity. A sense of wonder pervades your personality.

2. If you sleep for a long period, the body becomes lethargic and the mind becomes dull. Where did you pick up this habit?

3. Mix with everyone, learns from everyone. Then you will feel happier.

#### *Kuntala*

1. God does not fondle them who fondle themselves. When will you learn to be dear to God?

2. Concentrate your mind. Have faith in God. Love everyone including the nature. Increase your creativity.

3. Have you realized how much you could learn if you were prepared?

#### *Laxmi*

1. You don't understand the value of life, so you are often neglecting it. When would you learn to use your talent to work? Many sisters of your society are looking forward to you. How are you getting prepared to fraternize them?

2. The library is waiting for you. How long are you going to evade it?

3. The faith in yourself increases if you have faith in God.

#### *Ramjit*

1. You have not settled down at this school yet. Your mind is still roving. Those who come to acquire knowledge have to give up several other temptations.

2. Have you lost the enthusiasm for work after coming here? Work is a therapy for the patient who is scared of work.

After three months, the second set of notes were sent to the students. I am citing just a few of them.

#### *Haladhara*

1. You still have not given up fear. You have not acquired the courage to discuss your problems with others. The more you look back, the more the shame will prevent you from opening up. Look ahead now, and make a vow to do something worthwhile with your life.

#### *Sashibhusan*

1. How can you know about the people of the world if you do not befriend the newspaper? Your reading should be faster. The deeper you delve into the library, the more gems you will gather.

2. Have you ever made up your mind to participate in a debate? It seems you have not given up the sense of shame. You are getting entangled in too many problems probably because of that. Otherwise you would not have time to look hither and thither, carried as you would be with the pace of your own growth.

#### *Jadunath*

1. Do you sometimes feel like cheating? Do you get irritated for a trifle? Search for the reason. If you increase your tolerance these things will not trouble you.

### *Gobind Singh*

1. Ferret out gems from the library. You have to increase your personal writings. Along with that you have to internalize a few daily habits like going to bed early, getting up from bed early, reticence and an early bath. The mind is the source of infinite energy. The more one uses it the more powerful one becomes.

2. Crying is not always the sign of a healthy mind. One has to be in self-possession for acquiring the enlightenment of knowledge. Why do you cry for a trifle? What do you want to demonstrate to the world by that? You can discuss with the teachers frankly if there is something which weakens the mind. Thereby you will be saved from many uncertainties that crowd your mind.

3. Do you consider weaving thread a vocation for the poor? Do you weave thread in order to cover up the guilt of poverty that might be there in your mind?

### *Tapi*

1. You are ashamed of your body. You can be cured of this if you use your body happily in various activities and studies. On the contrary you are becoming more lazy. You love the company of those who are older than you in order to hide this sense of shame. These things retard your progress.

### *Kanhu (Behera)*

1. Musk will not be a small help in opening up your mind and heart. You have already a great talent for music.

Persevere in that regularly.

2. Do not be complacent after achieving a little. God will give as much as a human being is prepared to receive. God is hot miserly, but it is necessary that human beings do not become miserly either in giving or receiving.

### *Rajendra*

1. You should have the courage to speak up wherever you are asked to. Nobody possesses this courage by birth. It is acquired through practice and dedication. You start practicing and you will be happier.

### *Gyanendra*

1. There is timidity within, therefore you are angry without, you have not mastered the skills of conversation. There is no perceptible improvement in handwriting. Your mind and behaviour appears to be at the same level as your handwriting.

2. Earlier you used to cry for a trifle. Now you have begun laughing without sufficient cause. This could be as harmful as the earlier habit. First of all we need discrimination, conscience and affection. After that both crying and laughing habits will fall into place.

### *Chaitanya*

1. Do you try to act as an adult? Therefore, sometimes your behaviour crosses all limits. You have a penchant for hoodwinking others and you use sweet talk as an instrument for that purpose. But you demonstrate no ability in either work or talk. You should not cultivate the wicked attitude of pleasing others; rather you should gather courage to march on your own path smoothly.

*Govind (Sahu)*

1. You have intelligence; but a fickle mind. You are happy in a limited sphere.
2. Could you not practice music or painting? These are very essential for opening up the doors of your life.

*Laxmi*

1. The teachers are like your elder brothers. It is the duty of every sister to acquire knowledge from them happily.
2. To be merely calm and innocent are not the ideals of life. You should also demonstrate your strength. Like the ocean you should be calm on the surface and powerful within.

There were many opportunities at the Forest School to test the depth of and enhance the knowledge of the students, but more importantly, the cultivation of the student's personality was our goal. The teacher was not merely an agent who was supposed to transmit the curricula, he was also an individual. The school tried its best to enforce the educational philosophy that the teacher as an individual should have a dialogue with the efflorescent personality of the student and encounter him on the stage of life. Now I take this opportunity to record a few comments offered to the students of the third batch of the school.

*Bhabanishankar*

1. I hope you have been cured of your wrong notion that Chittabhai does not like the students of Sambalpur. Chittabhai never dislikes a student. He does not pull on well only with people who are not students. Whichever district or continent you may come from, as long as you are performing the duties of a student, you will continue to be a jewel for the school. But if you fail to perform the duties of a student you will lose the right to stay here.

*Ramesh*

1. Till now you were studying probably out of your fear for your father or the teacher, or worse still you were performing a duty mechanically. In this school, you have to study and perform your duties in order to develop your life. So you should give up all kinds of unreasonable fear.
2. Never be content with a little. The more a human being aspires, the more energy he is able to generate from within himself.

*Ramakanta*

1. I guess your mind has not developed as much as it should at your age and class. You are suffering the same kind of diseases that generally the truants suffer from. I had not encountered such obstinacy in a student earlier. Should I conclude that your identity today consists of timidity on the surface and violence within?

2. You are ill most of the times. I feel you enjoy the life of a patient. Whatever little time you have remained healthy you have wasted it in idleness. It is a matter of shame that you should accept the school as a refuge. Therefore, do not misuse the freedom you have been granted here.

*Balakrishna*

1. Everyone has a protected childhood. The child feels humiliated if someone tells something harshly. This mindset should change as one grows. Nobody tells you anything here to humiliate you. Whatever is said is said with the purpose of making you more active and perseverant. So instead of boiling your mind with those harsh words, make your mind more resilient.

2. Why do you worry so much about what opinion others have about you or say about you? The more you feel responsible for building your own life the less will you be worried about these worthless thoughts.

### *Hemasagar*

1. Hope you have realized that this is a different kind of school than the one you read at earlier. You studied there in order to pass a particular examination under the threat of a teacher. Here you have to study without any fear in order to be successful in all kinds of examinations in life. The more you change your mind and heart for this new discipline the happier you will become here in this school.

### *Sarata*

1. Your handwriting is extremely poor. It shows your thinking is not mature. Why do you love to remain a child despite growing in age?

### *Ghasiram*

1. Your time is in your hands. If you want to harm yourself you can waste your time. If you want your own growth you can properly utilize the life. It does not behave your age to study under the coercion of fear. Learn to acquire knowledge happily for your own development and for becoming a good human being in the society.

2. Physical work does not mean bonded labour. This is merely a necessity for making the body more supple and purging the mind of all perversions. So for your own benefit you should engage in physical labour more diligently.

### *Madana*

1. Why do you think that everyone is withdrawing their affection for you? With the advancement in age human beings should grow their faith in themselves. You are yet to grow that faith. So despite all efforts you have remained a hostage to various fears and apprehensions. Those who love you, wish you well. Certain firmness is required to ensure your well-being. As long as you consider yourself small, you will continue to be assailed by helplessness.

### *Lambodara*

1. You are still studying out of fear this year the same way as you did last year. By that you are unable to realize the strength within yourself. There is no one here to frighten you. The school will only help you to become a powerful person in life. Self-discipline is the greatest discipline. So hereafter you take the responsibility of disciplining your time and energy.

### *Haribandhu*

1. You have a lot of talent and a lot of idleness as well. Tom by this conflict you are unable to utilize your time properly. You are just wasting your time day after day. In

other schools they probably used to force you to study. Here you should learn to lead your life according to your own comfort.

2. Don't try to please others or be an instrument for the enjoyment of others. The worth of your life is much more than this. Learn to use all your time and energy for self-development.

### *Shyatna*

1. Why are you belittling your mind by assuming that your body is ugly? Your body is not everything you have. With the proper development of your mind and heart your attitude towards your body will also change. Don't be so fussy about just your outward self.

2. Your handwriting is very poor. It indicates an unsatisfied mind. You always compare yourself with others and belittle yourself. He who properly respects himself, will not be bothered by the opinion of others.

### *Keshaba*

1. Man does not become great by just bragging about it. By becoming more disciplined in one's little deeds, man lays the foundation for his greatness.

2. Your writing is not improving at all. There is a discipline in writing too. You are so enamoured with lofty ideas that there is no more energy left for articulating them in language. You have to hold your thoughts in a leash.

### *Bhaskara*

1. Your happy deportment has been a source of joy here for all. But still, instead of being swept away like a piece of straw in a current, you should learn to utilize the time properly for your own development.

2. There is still fear in your mind for the teachers. The more the faith in yourself and God grows, the less will be the fear.

### *Sitanath*

1. There is a coward lurking in your mind. Therefore you love to evade all your responsibilities in life. This is a very dangerous attitude in a student.

2. Your idleness is blocking your progress. Though you are growing in age you continue to be a slave of idleness. Your body also seems to have become a victim of idleness.

3. There is no discipline in your studies, thoughts or speech. You have not learnt to consider your life a permanent wealth. I shall only call this violence against the self. You continue to harm yourself under various pretexts. How can a school help a student if the student behaves like an outsider remaining within it.

### *Nabaghana*

1. What you consider freedom is not the real freedom. That is mere emptiness. No student accepts mere emptiness as a matter of pride. You should think along these lines.

### *Urvashi*

1. The brother does not see only the body of the sister or vice versa. If the eyes remain confined merely to the body, the level of aspiration also remains low and there is always

the danger of going astray. The strength to protest or express one's point of view wanes. Ultimately it leads to many misfortunes.

2. Everyone in this school is your brother. So as long as your behaviour towards everyone remains nice and simple, no one can lead you on a wrong path. A woman also has all the right to build her own life. You have to prepare yourself in this school to prove this in your life.

Many of the students of the Forest School are now working at various places in Orissa in various capacities. They can only say whether these quarterly personal notes helped or harmed them. Who knows how far the discipline and assurance of the Forest School is helping them tide over the poverty and sufferings of the world and gather the blessings of life? Have they melted into the rush of this impoverished society with masks of success or are still struggling to live like human beings? Are they trying in any way to expand the possibilities of a more beautiful life in whatever field they are working?

#### 4

During the four year life-span of the Forest School many visitors had turned up there and had helped us in many ways like friends and well-wishers. Among the Indian friends Dr. Diban Chandra Baddhwa spent around six months with us. Dr. Baddhwa is a Professor of Economics at Indore in Madhya Pradesh. He has taught our students and has participated in all their activities. Once I had gone to a Juanga settlement in Keonjhar for ten days in a social survey assignment with at least twenty-five students of the school. In this trip we had to trek across a hundred mile of mountainous and jungle path on foot. Dr. Baddhwa also went along in this journey as our companion.

Once he decided to prepare a report on the Forest School. He set about the task with around ten students. First of all he explained the students the method and reasons of the preparation of a questionnaire for a particular survey and how to derive conclusions from the answers to the questions asked. Then each student was provided with a questionnaire and their answers were studied after scientific classification. Then he wrote a report on the basis of this study. This report is being narrated below. The readers will have a glimpse of the strengths and weaknesses of the Forest School from this:

### Introduction

#### *Place of Establishment*

The Champatimunda Post-Basic School is situated eight miles away from Angul which is almost at the centre of Orissa. The school possesses in total seventy five acres of land. Out of that, twenty acres are under cultivation now. Buildings that have already come up and are under construction and occupy five acres of land. The rest of the plot has a forest cover.

#### *History*

The school was temporarily started at the Baji Rout Chhatrabas in Angul on August 26, 1954. That year a seventy-five acre forest land was made available for the permanent establishment of the school. First of all, around thirty acres of land was cleared by a tractor and a bulldozer. The first settlement and agricultural work of the school started

there. In the month of July 1955 the school shifted from Angul to this place permanently. The teaching started in eleven rooms constructed hastily with clay and bamboo. Gradually the school expanded with the help of Government grant and public donations.

### *Purpose*

The main purpose of this school is to plan and implement Post-Basic Education through a proper institution. Realizing the evil consequences of the conventional education being imported in the country, Mahatma Gandhi had put forward the Basic Education system before the country. The school has a firm belief that a more healthy society can be founded on the hearts of the students through a curriculum which promotes faith and cooperation and transforms the life into a centre of meditation. However, at the same time, it has also not forgotten the duty of education, i.e., create a conducive atmosphere for the natural and independent growth of every individual. This can be possible only in an atmosphere of mutual cooperation between the students and the teachers.

### *Curriculum*

The school started in 1954 with only Class IX. Every subsequent year a new class was added and after four years it is now a full-fledged school. The compulsory subjects in Classes IX and X are English, Oriya, Hindi, Mathematics, Science, Geography and Social Studies. In higher classes of XI and XII, English and Oriya are compulsory subjects. History, Literature, Mathematics, Philosophy and Education are optional subjects. Every student has to offer two optional subjects. There has not been satisfactory progress in science due to the lack of a proper science teacher. Here a lot of importance is attached to use the library. More than the teaching in the class, the ability of the students is judged from their ability to be acquainted with the books in the library. The library has around two thousand and four hundred books in English, Oriya, Bengali and Hindi. The student has to learn various languages in order to be able to use the books in the library. Two students in turns act as librarians for a period of three months. The school has so far spent Rs. 7,250/- for buying books for the library.

### *Student Intake*

Generally a student who has passed Class VIII from any Basic School is admitted to Class IX here. Sometimes students who have passed Class VIII from a High School are also admitted to Class IX.

### *Vacation*

Generally the school has a long vacation once a year. Had there been short holidays all the students would not have been able to go home. Because there are students here from very far off places of Orissa, there is only one two-month vacation in a year. But still a few students continue to stay in the school during this summer vacation. They take care of the school's garden, field and the buildings. During the rest of the year the normal activities of the school continue.

### *Financial State*

This school has been dependent on Government grants and public donations from the very beginning. Government grants have been made available for the library, laboratory, and agricultural enterprise. But for the construction of houses and digging well, the

school has totally depended upon public donations. Till now the Government grant worth Rs.18, 000/- and public donation worth Rs.36, 000/- have been spent for the school. The school does not have any fixed income in its hand. So it has to depend on outside support completely to work out all its projects.

A short report on various activities of the school:

### *Agriculture*

The school has around twenty acres of agricultural field. Earlier it was forest land, and now it has been cleared for agricultural purposes. So it is not yet fully fit for agricultural activity is dependent upon rainfall. During the rainy season paddy and a few other crops are grown here. One could cultivate cotton-seed here but due to various other factors this has not been possible. A small spring flows near the school. A few winter crops are raised with the help of the water from the spring. The trees that have been planted in the school premises were kept alive by the water from the well.

The students are virtually in charge of all the agricultural activities in the school. Of course a few labourers are employed to till the land after the first rainfall since the students go home on summer vacation during that period. Two hours of physical labour has been accepted as a general rule in the school. The students guard during the night-time too when there is standing crop in the field since there is always the fear of the crop being destroyed by the wild animals.

The domestic waste is turned into manure in pits dug for that purpose, which is then carried to the field. Sometimes manure is also purchased from nearby villages. Due to paucity of funds, the field is deprived of the benefit of chemical fertilizers. The produce from the garden and field is not sold in the market. The food department of the school purchases all the produce and the money accrued from the sale is again utilized in agricultural activity.

### *Vocation*

Due to paucity of funds and space, weaving thread has been the only vocation in the school. There are six looms here, but only three are operational since there is no space for the rest of them. The students make their own clothes from the thread they weave. If all the looms are busy they go to nearby villages to cut their clothes. Two students are permanently in charge of the looms. The money earned by the weaving of the clothes is utilized in the upkeep of the looms.

### *Cattle Shed*

The school has two bullocks and two buffaloes. They are employed in tilling the field transporting materials for the construction of houses and food materials for the school from the weekly market on Sundays. The revenue collected from the work of the bullocks and the buffaloes are not enough for the upkeep of the cattle shed. So the rest of the expenses are borne by the school itself. A permanent cattle shed has not been constructed yet. The cattle are housed in a temporary cattle shed constructed by the students. One representative is chosen from among the students every month to take care of the cattle. They are called Minister of Animal Husbandry. The minister chooses two assistants for himself. They take care of all the activities related to the cattle. If need be, they take the help of other students. Every student takes turn in tending the cattle. This duty turns out to be once in a month for every student.



### *Health and Hygiene*

As had been mentioned earlier, there are eleven rooms in which the school had been started temporarily. The size of the rooms is twelve feet by twelve feet in length and breadth. Each room housed around six students. One room was set aside for the girls. Gradually the strength of the students increased and new rooms were constructed. The new constructions had tiled roofs and a few had cement floors. The size of these new rooms was fourteen feet by fourteen feet. There are no separate classrooms. So most of the classes are conducted in the hostel itself.

There are two wells in the school. The entire water requirement of the school is met by these two wells. The nearby spring holds water for four to five months in a year. During this period all the activities like washing clothes, taking bath etc. are done hi spring water. After it dries up the school has to depend entirely on the water of the wells. One well is very shallow. Due to granite stone under its surface it was not possible to dig deeper. Water begins to recede in this well from the month of January. It dries up by evening and then by the morning it slowly gathers water up to two feet. Till the rainy season the school manages its water requirement in this manner.

The students of this school are from very poor families. They cannot afford even the minimum human requirement for a healthy living. They have not learnt healthy food habits yet. Their store-room is infested with rats. Their provisions are brought from the weekly market at Angul and from nearby villages. Some vegetables are also produced in the school garden. In a thatched room the food of around ninety people is cooked. The students take turn in cooking. The kitchen is so small that it is difficult to keep it clean. There is no separate dinning hall. They dine at a narrow verandah three times daily. Therefore, the verandah has an unclean look. There is no arrangement for common drinking water.

Due to the unhealthy atmosphere here the students often fall ill. In the first two years many suffered from malaria. Now the situation is better. However, many students suffer from skin ailments now. The skin ailments are probably due to the unhealthy atmosphere here. Had the atmosphere been more hygienic and the habits of the students more regular, they would not be suffering from such illness so often.

There is no proper arrangement for the treatment of the sick. Every month one student is elected as the Minister of Health. Two others assist him. They take care of the sick students. Some medicines and instruments are stored in the school. If someone is seriously ill, they are admitted to the Government Hospital at Angul. They are first brought to the highway by a bullock-cart and then they catch a bus to Angul. On the way, they have to cross a river. So during the rainy season the school virtually remains cut off from the rest of the world. If bus is not available, the patient has to be carried all the way to Angul on the bullock-cart itself. When someone is admitted to the hospital, a few volunteers remain to assist. The school bears all the expenses of treatment.

### *The Teachers*

In 1954 the school was started with only one teacher. For the first three years the entire teaching load of the school has been managed, so to say, by this teacher. A few other teachers have joined, but have left for other jobs in a few months. Despite all efforts none have come here to work here on a permanent basis. It is a fact that the teachers who

join here have to participate in all the activities of the students; they cannot confine their roles to just teaching inside the classroom. Probably because of this special expectation of the school from its teachers that it has made it unattractive for the prospective teachers. However, there is a welcome change in this situation this year. Now the school boasts of four teachers. One of them was the Head Master of a High School in Orissa who has resigned his post to join here. The third teacher is a direct recruit from the Teacher's Training School itself. The fourth teacher is a lady who has a degree in Hindi from an institution outside Orissa. She teaches Hindi to students and takes care of the girl students here.

### *Daily Routine*

The activities of the school are conducted according to a fixed routine. The routine is sometimes modified according to the need or change in the weather. The ministry elected by the students prepares the routine for a month. Here is a sample of the routine.

4.15 am—Wake up bell

4.30 am—Morning Prayer

4.45 am-6.00 am—Daily ablution and cleaning activities

6.00 am-7.00 am—Breakfast

7.00 am-9.0L) am—Agricultural and other manual labour

9.30 am-11.30 am—Studies in the classroom

11.45 am-Lunch

3.00 pm-5.00 pm—Studies in the classroom

5.00 pm-6.00 pm—Games

6.15 pm—Dinner

7.30 pm—Evening prayer

8.00 pm-10.00 pm—Self Study

10.00 pm—Bell for going to bed

### *Survey Report*

A detailed questionnaire was prepared to survey the social and economic background of the students. The school clerk and a few students had made carbon copies of the questionnaire. Before the actual survey all the students were asked to assemble at one place. They were explained why such surveys were conducted and why it was necessary for the students to cooperate. The students assembled once again the next day with their answers of the questionnaire. The teachers of the school were also present at that time. The tabulation of the answers took almost four days. Four students of Class XII assisted in the tabulation process. To check the veracity of the answers personal interviews with a few students were also conducted. One teacher assisted in the interview process. The interviews clarified the written entries of the students. No student was coerced or pressurized into responding in a particular way during the whole process. So it can be assumed that the answers the students gave were without any fear or favour. An attempt has been made to arrive at a few conclusions based on the responses of the students.

The total student strength of the school is seventy-seven out of which seventy-three participated in the survey. The rest four had gone home during that period. These seventy-three students are from various districts of Orissa i.e., Balasore-11, Sambalpur-17, Mayurbhanj-2, Puri-5, Dhenkanal-13, Cuttack-18, Ganjam-6, Phulbani-1.

*The caste composition:* Non-Tribals-64, Tribals-4, Scheduled Caste-5.

*The age of the students:* The oldest student is twenty-two years old while the youngest is fifteen. This information might not be entirely correct since only thirty-five of them know their correct dates of birth and others are guessing their age. For parents of fourteen students are still alive. Eleven of them do not know the names of their grandparents. All of them have come from Hindu families. Oriya is the mother tongue of seventy students while Santali, Ho and Saura each have one representative.

#### *Previous Educational Background*

Sixty-seven students have come after completing Class VIII from the Basic Schools. Six students have come from the conventional High Schools. From among the sixty-seven students of the Basic Schools sixteen are from Angul Baji Rout Chhatrabas. Before coming here, fifteen students were receiving Government grants; eight were receiving assistance from Rural Development Department of the Government while four students were receiving merit scholarships. One student received assistance of a teacher of his former school.

#### *Language Ability*

Each student knows Hindi, Bengali and English apart from their mother tongue. Everyone knows reading and writing Hindi but they can only read Bengali and understand the language. Acquaintance with English has begun after coming to this school. But a few of them had learnt English before coming here. One of the students can understand and speak Telugu.

#### *Creativity*

Almost every student has a penchant for writing. Fifty-nine students have contributed articles to the school hand-written magazine. The essay of one of the students has come out in a weekly while a monthly journal has published an article of another student.

Twenty-three students have participated in meetings and discussion before coming here. Thirty-nine students have participated in games and sports out of which seven have won prizes in various competitions.

Twenty-three students have membership in youth clubs, student fraternities or village libraries. None of the students is a member of any political party.

Two students have the experience of earning money as hired labourer in someone else's farm. Three students have earned money in business and one in weaving clothes.

Except seventeen students all have experience of community life or hostels.

#### *Work Experience*

Sixty-two students are capable of hard manual labour. A few others have expressed their inability due to their weak health. Only one student has confessed that he does not like any kind of physical work because he feels weak.

Everyone knows carpentry, masonry, weaving cloth etc. Two or three students know painting. Some of them know singing, dancing and playing on musical instruments. Four or five of them know book-binding. Thirty-nine students have participated in some kind of movement or the other and have collected money for common funds.

### *Travel*

Twenty-three students have travelled outside Orissa. Most of them have got this opportunity while attending Sarvodaya conclaves. Five of the students have visited other districts than their own. Rest of the students have not gone beyond their own districts.

### *Leisure*

Forty-six students love watching a cinema and five of them enjoy theatre. Seven students are interested in music while six appreciate dance. Thirty-five students use their leisure time writing literature. Every one of them is keen about reading books. The students have also mentioned weaving, tailoring, reading books, playing games, playing on the flute and tending the sick as some of the hobbies.

### *Special interest in Subjects*

The students have also mentioned their special preference for a particular subject. Twenty-four students have special preference for literature and seven students prefer science while a few others have mentioned philosophy, education and psychology as their preferred field of study. Thirty three students are interested to acquire a degree after completing their education. Thirty-seven are not interested in any degree at all. These students have not offered any opinion.

Sixty-three students have come to this school of their own volition. Ten students have been sent by their parents. Sixty-five students do not have any other means to pursue education. Fifty-two students will go back home if government assistance is withdrawn. One student can seek the help of a benefactor for continuing here. Two students will be forced to go back to a High School while one student has shown determination to continue his studies somehow. Others do not have an idea as to what they would do if assistance is withdrawn.

Fifty-six students are interested to join teaching profession in future while two want to join politics. Two students want to go abroad while five others might seek government jobs. One student wants to be a painter, two writers while two students want to do business.

### *Diseases*

One student suffers from diabetes; fourteen suffer from various skin diseases, one from kidney disorders while three students are affected by gout. Three students complain of weak vision. Two students are unable to treat their diseases for the lack of funds.

Almost everyone has suffered from fever during the last five years. Apart from this, four have had typhoid attacks, five chicken pox, seventeen students have suffered from some form of skin diseases during this period. Almost everyone except two have gained weight during these five years while two students have gained considerable weight up to forty and forty-five pounds.

### *Intoxicants*

Twenty students have the habit of chewing pan. At least one student spends one rupee in a month while others spend up to twenty-five paise for this,

### *Economic Condition*

All the students are from villages. All of them depend on agriculture. Some of the parents have supplementary vocations like politics, teaching or social service.

The maximum land a students' household owns is fifteen acres while the minimum is one acre. Many families manage their expenses for six months from the produce of the land, while the families of five students earn enough to last them throughout the year. Many have supplementary income from shops, threshing paddy, weaving palm-leaf carpets, gardening, weaving cloth etc. Some of them are also forced to work as labour on hire.

Fourteen students do not receive any money from their families. Others receive between one rupee and five rupees. Only one student receives fifteen rupees every month.

The families of forty-six students are in debt. They have borrowed from either the government or the village money-lender. The borrowings have been done in order to meet the expenses mainly of marriages, court-cases or any such important events. A majority thinks that the parents will be able to pay off the loans from the savings on their own earnings. Four students hope that the loans will be paid off when they start earning.

### *Opinion regarding the Survey*

From the information provided by the students it is apparent that their economic condition is very poor. Let alone the tribals, even the majority non-tribal students have not come from well-to-do families. There are a few students here whose parents are engaged in Bhoodan movement or any such constructive work. Since they have faith in Basic Education System, they have sent their wards here. Most of the students might not have been able to meet the expenses had they pursued their studies in a different school. They are here because the government grants twenty rupees a month to each student. This itself demonstrates that the country has not yet granted proper recognition to the Basic School System. And it is clear from the circumstances that the Basic Schools are running because of poor students only and not for rich people.

Many people of the country do not have a positive opinion about the Basic Education System. One of the reasons may be the Basic Schools expect a lot of manual labour from the students and adequate attention is not paid to the special taste and inclination of a student. The students are made captive forcibly under a rigid system of routine. The main aim of the schools continues to be economic self-sufficiency at any cost. To achieve this aim these schools are forcing the students to undergo hard physical labour. There is a tendency in these schools to advocate that learning a vocation and undergoing a strict work-routine is less harmful than spending all the time with a teacher inside the classroom. There is of course some truth in this argument. Everyone will admit that education through vocation is one of the important pillars of Basic Education. But when the vocation instead of becoming a means becomes an end itself, the fundamental purpose of education is thwarted and the aim of Basic Education too goes haywire.

We hope that the Basic Education will hold the total development of a student as its ultimate end. To achieve this total development the student should be granted all the freedom. All hurdles from the path should be removed so that the students pursue their

forward journey in a path and a direction properly chosen by them. There is an effort, as far as possible, in this school to maintain a balance between physical labour and intellectual labour. Moreover, nothing is imposed on the students here. I am pretty assured really by this fact. A few students have also responded that excessive freedom is being granted to them in this school. They have protested that such excessive freedom should not be granted in any school because there is always the fear that this freedom might be abused. I explained to them that because somebody might destroy the branches of a tree did not mean that one should not plant trees for the use of a traveller seeking shade. I admit that there is danger in such excessive freedom. But I have no doubt that the students feel proud of it because the school has granted them such freedom. The following questions were asked in the questionnaire. "Give your opinion about your former school," and "Give your opinion about this school." It is not possible to record all responses here. So I am citing a few of them.

About their earlier school a student had written, "I was there as if in a cage made up of textbooks. I have not done there anything except getting promoted from one class to another." About the present school one student writes, "I really love this school a lot because the school provides ample opportunity to build one's life according to one's will." "There has been a lot of change in my life after coming here. Had teaching and studying been done in a similar manner in each school, the students would have been inspired a lot to devote themselves for the betterment of the country." Further, "No student is forced here to conform to a particular mould. Everyone gets an opportunity to develop oneself freely according to his own inclinations. This is the most important feature of this school." Another student writes, "This school has opened the door of knowledge in front of me. Whether I shall enter or not depends entirely on me. This school has ignited a passion for knowledge in me. This school does not operate like a machine. I shall rather call this a laboratory where an experimentation is being done on human mind. This school is an extended family. No other school can be compared with this. It is unique in its own way. Here, every individual has a right to be free. This school is getting grants from the government, but it is not under any control. The bureaucratic red-tape is unable to hinder the activities of this school. We live here like an extended family whose roots have spread into the larger society of the country." Yet another student is of the opinion that "This school is a family and each one is an independent member. All the responsibilities of the school have been bestowed on the students. Therefore, along with intellectual growth we are getting enough opportunity to develop our moral and physical well-being. The curriculum has been designed here to suit the needs of the students."

The students love this institution a lot, but there are some problems and lacunae which often trouble them. The primary problem is the lack of teachers. Every student feels this lack, especially the absence of a science teacher. Apart from that, it is extremely difficult to run four classes with three teachers. Often one teacher has to teach two classes simultaneously. Once I was surprised to see a teacher teaching a class at 3 a.m. in the morning. Sometimes if a teacher has gone out on an errand the students of Class XII have to take the classes of lower-class students.

Apart from the lack of teachers, the school is undergoing a lot of financial crisis. The government is merely funding the recurrent expenses. The school is dependent entirely on public donation for the expenses in the construction of houses, agriculture, cattle shed

etc. Around fifteen or sixteen rupees are spent per month towards the meals of each student. These expenses are borne through the government assistance to the students. The rest of the grant money is spent on other requirements like kerosene, soap and occasional medical expenses. Around five or six students are not receiving any government grant because they have directly come from the High Schools and not from any Basic School. All their expenses are met from their scholarship money. Some students are from such miserable background that they do not receive even a single rupee from their homes throughout the year. The school has to arrange their passage money during their trip home in summer vacation. Sometimes the school has to provide clothes, books and notes to a few students.

Water and space are the other two most important problems. The students are living in eleven thatched rooms. Each room houses, on average, four students. The roof has started leaking causing enough troubles for the students during rainy season. Even though there are a lot of rats in the rooms, the students have to sleep on mats on the floor. One of the rooms is used as a store-room. However, the food and other stuffs are deposited in the open, since there are no almirahs or other furniture to keep them covered. So often the rats feast on the food material. If one has a look at the kitchen and dining place, one is surprised how the students manage to cook and eat during the rain. Water problem is even worse. There are two wells, but those are unable to supply water throughout the year. Even during winter these wells dry up after water is drawn for two hours in the morning. One has to wait for around three hours for the well to fill up. The less said about the difficulties during the summer, the better. Let alone bathing and cleaning utensils, not enough water is available even for draining.

When I asked a student why he does not go away to another school despite so much of difficulties in this school, he answered, "This school is poor only from an economic point of view, but it is not at all poor in terms of its aspirations and contemplation." The students are also worried about the future of the school. About sixty per cent of the students opine that it is very important that such a school should somehow continue to survive. I am recording here a few opinions in this regard:

"I think that the government should assist this school in the same manner as it does in case of other conventional schools. But there should be no control of the government files on the management and educational system." "Though the government is indifferent, this school will of course survive. As long as its youthful energy and aspirations are alive, this school will survive." "I pray to God that such a school should continue till eternity. If a few such institutions are not there in this country, the students will never be able to speak and think fearlessly."

Despite all the problems, the students and the teachers are staying here like a family and share each other's joys and sufferings. All possible efforts are being made for the all round development of all the students. Here are a few observations of the students on their teachers:

"I will rate the teachers here higher than any other teacher I have come across in my life. They have always taken care to ensure that all of us develop a higher vision of life without coerced by any pressure of sentiment or guilt. The teachers in this school are just like our elder brothers. We are able to express ourselves freely and discuss our problems

without any fear. Further, our teachers here are just like any other student. Those, whose process of learning has not stopped yet, can only inspire others in the path of learning.”

I had asked the Headmaster once with what aim this school was established hi the first place. He briefly replied, “My arm is that our students, when they go out from here, will never bow their heads and tolerate the unjust society like other so-called nice and good human beings.” He meant that through proper education, a lot of inequity and perversion nurtured by our society can be cured. With this belief, this school was established and effort is being made to achieve this. After this conversation with him I felt that here he has started an experiment in pedagogical methodology. I asked whether the school is still at a stage. He said, “Because of the deplorable condition which the school is in now, one has to think even before taking it as an experiment.” I realized that before thinking whether the experiment would be a success or not, here they are concerned about whether they would be given enough scope to continue this experiment.

The experiment that is being carried out in this school is a difficult one. No single person can accomplish this task. It needs the patience, regular effort and sincerity of several people. It also needs the effort of a group of competent and inspired teachers. It is not for its high ideas; this kind of experiment should be provided enough scope and encouragement in India for its utility. There are a lot of unemployed people in the country already. Still our schools and colleges are churning out clerks who do not want to do any manual labour. We will be able to get out of this vicious circle through the kind of pedagogy this school is attempting at. With this kind of education only, the inherent strength and personality of our youth will develop fully.

Earlier, the government of Orissa used to observe Basic Education Week once every year. The practice may be going on even now. We had observed this week at the Forest School in January 1958. During this week the teachers and the students had formed a few study-circles to discuss the Basic Education System from various points of view (A few study-circles consisted of students only). Every study-circle had prepared a report based on the week-long discussions. At the valedictory congregation all those reports were read out. Subsequently, all such reports were published in a local daily. I would like to place those reports for the benefit of the readers.

### Report of the First Study-circle

#### *Freedom in Education*

1. Only a free person can be properly responsible. A person who is not free is assailed by many violent passions. Enough freedom should be granted to the human beings lest they become violently passionate. Today human beings are shying away from their responsibilities in various social fronts. We can save them from this instinctive disease by granting them enough freedom. It is difficult to predict the future of a human being. If they are free they would be capable of discovering their own path and would follow it. But if we place obstacles on their path, their progress would be hampered. We would be capable of granting the human beings enough freedom if we had unflinching faith in them. The possibility of creative education depends on the development of the inherent strength lying hidden in every human being. We should have a wide space for freedom in



our schools for this development. We should protect the schools from the mistake of the imposition of the adult whim on the students.

The ancient scriptures of India have narrated the role of the teachers comparing them with the great Gods, Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara. Probably having been inspired by this, the adult teachers of our country are always violently inclined to impose their own will and thoughts on the students. The helpless students are forced to accept that thought as the only truth. But they are not doing this with joy and enthusiasm. So their life is impinged by a lot of apprehensions and artificiality. For example, suppose a student asks a question to their teacher to clear a doubt and the teacher does not know its proper answer. The teacher often shies away from expressing their ignorance. Or sometimes they are trying to quench the students' thirst for knowledge by wrong answers. When the student comes to know the real answer later, their faith in the teacher is completely destroyed. To prevent such evil consequence, the teacher has to give up all vainglory. The mindset that the teacher will always disburse knowledge and the student will always receive with outstretched palm has to be abandoned. They should also be prepared to receive from the student. Only then the student shall have complete faith in the teacher and a proper cooperation between the student and the teacher can be established.

2. The primary goal of education is actually the education of the whole man. Contemporary educational psychology asserts that despite various facets of an individual's life there is still an integral human personality. But unfortunately due to various reasons the modern man seems to have lost sight of this integration and wholeness. Therefore, he has divided his own life into various narrow and disjointed parts. The goal of modern education should primarily be to protect against this disintegration.

3. The experiment with the Basic Education System has a special place in the history of modern education. It has provided a conducive atmosphere to the students to enable them to develop their inherent faculties independently. The students have to make their lives like an open book which the teacher can read easily. The teacher has to help in all possible ways so as the student can build his own path of life according to his necessities. By shouldering his responsibility within the atmosphere of the school, the student is expected to prepare themselves for greater responsibilities in the larger society.

## Second Study-circle

### *Education and Self-reliance*

1. In educational enterprise, manual labour has always had a very important role. Many educationists throughout the world have advocated inclusion of manual labour in educational curriculum. But no one more than Gandhi has drawn our attention to this so intently. Gandhi believed that only by integrating knowledge and work within education only, we can ensure a balanced growth in the student. He has also highlighted the importance of the concept of self-reliance in education. He has very clearly stated that in a poor country like India we have to have an eye on self-reliance while considering the issue of education. Many have the wrong notion that the students will be reduced to the status of daily labourers if work is put together with schooling. But Gandhi thought exactly the opposite when he put forward the concept of self-reliance. He firmly believed

that if education adopts the concept of self-reliance, the student will enter into the society as a fully developed human being. He considered economic self-reliance. Self-reliance is therefore not a vocation but a prop for the undertaking of the development of the whole man. Self-reliance should not be misconstrued as a mere anodyne for our economic poverty. The schools should have the proper scope to enable their students to realize this.

2. While recognizing the importance Gandhi attached to the training of self-reliance we must admit that no school in India has remained properly self-reliant. Let alone the Basic Schools where very young children study, even many Post-Basic Schools have not achieved complete self-reliance. After finishing their education in these schools, many students enter into the society with a lot of hopelessness and misgivings. Had education with manual labour really been the medium of the all-round human development, why should the students consider themselves unfit? Why do they consider their schools a refuge for the unfit? Instead of having greater faith in the system why do the students think that it would have been better had they not come to these schools at all?

Many of these schools are competing with one another to increase their income by cleverly using the student labour-force. We think that the school which hopes to earn an income by selling the labour of its students has not understood the proper meaning of self-reliance. In many schools, production is being given more emphasis than exchange of knowledge. Therefore, there is a feeling among the students that since they belong to poor parents they are forced to attend the Basic Schools.

3. To bring about self-reliance in education we should keep the following in our mind.
- a) Self-reliance should not be mistaken with increase in economic production.
  - b) The student has to be accepted primarily as a receptacle of knowledge.
  - c) The school should create a conducive atmosphere so that each student participates in all the activities of the school with enthusiasm. The student should never suspect that he is being used as an instrument for someone else's purpose.
  - d) The student should not be coerced into either work or studies.
  - e) More production should not be the yardstick of self-reliance. Rather independent development of each student should be the proper yardstick.
  - f) The school should have an environment which does not allow a misunderstanding of the concept of self-reliance.
  - g) Such self-reliance should be an integral part of education.

### **Third Study-circle**

#### *Correlation in Education*

1. History is mainly the history of human progress. And education, more than any other instrument in human hand, has helped human beings in their path of progress. Still, there are a lot of lacunae in the education system even today. Like all other aspects of human enterprise, knowledge, work and emotions have been kept separate in the field of education too. For this reason, attempts are being made to integrate all these aspects of human personality in the field of education.

2. In any school today, we can see various teachers teaching various subjects according to their allotted periods. The student does not have any opportunity to consider whether there is any correlation among the subjects taught to them. Whether those subjects have any relation with life is still a more complex problem for them. This causes a lot of damage, because we can imagine life and human culture as an indivisible whole. There are various aspects in human life, there are various manifestations of human culture, but all these are complementary to each other. The educationists like John Dewey and Gandhi, having realized the basic truth have espoused the need for correlation in the field of education. The students might not like to only sit in the classroom with their books. Like their minds their bodies might also be looking for an opportunity for growth. The students might be interested in games and might be trying to utilize their surplus energy. The needs of the students are multidimensional; therefore, their development should be multidimensional and total. This consideration is behind the effort to bring about a correlation in education.

In our society there is a reign of experts today. If one person is a doctor, another person is a philosopher, yet another becomes a pure scientist. Even if someone is an accomplished philosopher, they lack basic knowledge about health and hygiene. To know more and more about less and less is probably the main preoccupation of modern education. But life is a totality, not expertise in a particular field. All kinds of enterprise to build life should keep this broader point of view in sight. In schools there should be an attempt to link all the insights of various subjects with the boarder thread of life. By correlation we mean this.

3. Education through manual labour has been accepted as a helpful method for correlation. But while putting this method into practice we have made our education quite artificial and mechanical. So despite all our efforts, the student is unable to take advantage of the correlation.

We believe that the so-called experts are doing more harm than good to the society. The people who are employing their brain-power to solve the social problems do not have the energy to look at themselves or solve the daily problems of their neighbours. This state of affairs has divided the society into two camps— the brain-camp and the hand-camp. The hand-camp is following the direction the brain-camp blindly. The people of the brain-camp do not have the energy to put into practice the thoughts they are so assiduously perfecting through their intelligence and contemplation.

The division between intellect and skill in works has landed the society in an impasse.

Every individual's opinion should be valued properly in a democracy. But if some people would be working like hands without using their brains, democracy will be weakened. So we have to give equal attention to the heart, mind and hand in our education to achieve the aims of correlation.

#### Fourth Study-circle

##### *Explanation and Valuation in Education*

1. Gandhi has put forward the plan of Basic Education in order to plug some of the errors of the conventional education. But it seems some of the old lacunae still dog the

Basic Education System, The examination system is one such lacuna which has become a cause for frustration.

The current examination system continues to be the source of various failures and frustrations. The frustrated students are unable to apprehend where education will lead them to. If we look at life from a progressive view point we cannot call any human being unfit for life. Because no one is born in this world with an irrevocable tag of fitness or unfitness attached to them. The social ideals, situations and principles consider someone fit or unfit. Human beings fulfil their needs and aspirations within the society. We cannot demand that every individual must develop all the inherent potentials and aspirations within them. We cannot also predict which aspirations and potentials a particular individual would prioritize for development. By unduly emphasizing intellectual accomplishment, our contemporary education actually ends up perverting intelligence. Acquiring knowledge is not merely remembering a few facts verbatim. While implementing an educational system the British did not have the welfare of India in mind. The government of the independent country claims to have implemented a new education policy. But the examination system continues to be in the old mould and it continues to harm the students. By asking students to sit down for a designated period and test their level of information in a few subjects we cannot assess their knowledge-base. Normally we provide a very limited atmosphere to the students to acquire knowledge. Our examination system too like our scope for acquiring knowledge continues to be extremely narrow. Such a situation prevails even within the Basic Education System. To declare a student successful or unsuccessful after an examination at the end of the year is not the purpose of the Basic Education. The entire set of activities of the student throughout the year have to be evaluated.

2. Our examination system should help the students in fulfilling their requirements not to hinder their progress. There may of course be two or three written examinations in a year. But it must be kept in mind that the questions ignite the inquisitiveness and original thinking of the students. They should not be encouraged to vomit information culled from books on the answer sheets. Apart from written examination, the success or failure of a student should be judged from all their activities in a year.

3. Today the certificates of schools and colleges are considered as passports for success in any social sphere. But are certificates really the indices of a person's merit. There are many meritorious people in the society without any certificate to their credit. But unfortunately the contemporary administration of our country considers certificates the only indicator of merit. By this, it is committing an injustice towards many meritorious people without a certificate. Moreover, because of this, acquiring a certificate becomes the only purpose of education. The process limits the quest for knowledge and makes us forget that there are many more uses of knowledge than just ensuring a job.

### **Fifth Study-circle**

#### ***Education and State Control***

To provide good education to the entire country is the most sacred duty of the government of an independent country. But often the rulers of such a state fail to pay adequate attention to this. Not only education, even science, literature and culture have

become unhealthy under the control of the state machinery. The modern science having been manipulated by the rulers of the state has threatened to destroy the entire world. Not the scientist, it is the rulers who are to blame for this widespread terrorism. While proposing the Basic Education System Gandhi had hoped that this education would be able to arrest such degeneration. But the implementation of the Basic Education System requires a structural readjustment of our society. This structural readjustment probably does not suit the self-interest of the contemporary ruling class. The Basic Education aims at establishing a social structure based on justice in which no one can exploit another human being. Not merely as a challenge to the existing ruling class, it is a movement against all the conservative forces that thrive on injustice and exploitation. If successful, a new social arrangement will crystallize in our country. The ruling class is scared of this. The government has become a captive of various conservative and political interests of the ruling class. So the Basic Education has become a monster in the hands of the government. While the political leaders in their speeches are singing paeans about the Basic Education, the aims of the system are being undermined more and more in the actual field. We urge the government to stem this tide by demonstrating a more committed attitude towards educational policy. The educational policy should be laid out on a scientific foundation. And the government should adopt a scientific point of view while considering educational issues. The training of the teachers should also be done accordingly. We want to draw the attention of the government to its important responsibilities in this regard.

### Sixth Study-circle

#### *Psychological review of Basic Education*

1. The way we have to study the tribal culture and anthropology in order to embark upon some welfare activities among the tribals, similarly we have to base our educational policies on the insights provided by educational psychology. We consider the Basic Education to be only one among many experiments in the field of education. Therefore Basic Education has to be founded upon the minimum discipline and principles of normal education strategy. But one has to admit that even twenty years after implementation, the Basic Education has remained indifferent to educational psychology. Probably due to this reason Basic Education has lost many radical elements hitherto inherent within itself. It seems to have forgotten that it had accepted the transformation of the society as its mission. It has now been reduced to a skeletal set of rules and a few mechanical activities. In this situation it is necessary to undertake a psychological assessment of the Basic Education System.

2. The Basic Education has adopted manual labour, corporate living and self-reliance as its methods for the personality development of the student. Many educationists have advocated a balance between the mind and the body, studies and manual labour. The Russian teachers have evolved a new method of curing mental angularities of the students through manual labour. They call it ork-therapy. We in India have been accustomed to hate all kinds of manual labour. By this we create a lot of barriers on the path of the total development of human personality. To teach the values of manual labour through education which the Basic Education has adopted, is of course a revolutionary step. But unfortunately, we have lost sight of the fact that like all education, the teaching of manual

labour cannot be accomplished through coercion. The personality of the students will be developed only if they indulge in manual labour with voluntary joy-In Basic Schools we try to put the students through a routine at an early age. As a result, the students are becoming something like machines. They are probably doing manual labour but are not repeating our idealistic slogans. They are torn apart by various conflicts within them. We are trying to entangle the students in network activities like weaving, prayer and contact with villages etc. at their early childhood much before they are in a position to understand the significance of these activities. Therefore, much of the child-like joy of their life is drying up. The routine of the school, like the life of the child, should be varied and flexible. The teacher should be able to understand the variety of needs of a child and should be in a position to guide them properly. If we allow the child to mature without imposing anything from above, then probably they will choose a healthy ideal in their lives in future.

3. Many people in our country do not understand what democracy is. They think that democracy means choosing a government through votes. Democracy also means a responsible social life. That is the reason why Gandhi had emphasized the corporate life in his Basic Education policy. The Basic Schools were supposed to provide ample opportunities of corporate living so that the students are prepared for the social responsibilities when they grow up. It would be better if the rulers of the country are more sensitive towards the psychological significance of democracy and social living.

Self-reliance is another important facet of the Basic Education. Self-reliance has been so emphasized as to create a sense of confidence in the students about themselves and the outside world around them. But unfortunately we have started thinking that self-reliance means the ability to produce more and more goods. The guiding principles of self-reliance should rather be giving more to the society than receiving, not participating in any injustice or exploitation etc. otherwise the real purpose of self-reliance in education will be lost.

In the Basic Education today we seem not to recognize the lucid dimension of the human mind and heart. We seem to paint before the students a picture of life as a mere busy schedule and cruel assemblage of works. This is a crime. The students should not consider manual labour, studies and social activities a painful burden but primarily a joyous attractive game. The Basic Schools should create a conducive atmosphere in which the student can get pleasure from all those activities.

Had it continued the Forest School would have completed eleven years today. In the government files it is now called a Post-Basic School. By Post-Basic School the government understands the old high school curriculum along with a few vocational training. Whatever be its other consequences, at least one thing has been achieved by this. The challenges of a new education policy has been shrewdly stifled in the moribund processes of the conventional education. There is no reason to think that the Basic Schools are running because the educational administrators love the Basic Education policies. Rather the Basic Schools are alive because there is a Congress Government in the country and the officials of the Congress party still feel the necessity of considering Gandhi a family deity. The puny bureaucrats under the command of the functionaries of the party in power are trying to retain a few signs of the Basic Education Policy. But it will be difficult to imagine that these signs are seriously meant to establish a new society.

We used to celebrate 26 August as the birthday of the Forest School. Every year I have been observing that day in my consciousness. My devotion to that day strengthens my faith that some day there will be a transformation in this country, the social darkness will be dispelled and the human values established. Though not recorded in government files, many efforts are being made in this country even today towards that goal. This book is not merely an autobiography of a school, it is primarily meant for them who share my faith in such a goal. This book is meant for them who love this country despite all its poverty, have faith in themselves and the people of the country despite all the despair around them. There are many teachers in Orissa who still believe that many a thing can be accomplished through education, there are many bureaucrats who feel suffocated under files, red-tapes, fat salaries and prestige.

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