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**A School for the Subject :  
The Vision and Experiments of Integral Education**

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## **A School for the Subject : The Vision and Experiments of integral Education**

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### **Abstract**

Education is key to human development but the question is what is the meaning of education. Since the dawn of humanity, mankind has struggled with different methods of education which would touch both the head and the heart. In the last one hundred and fifty years we have witnessed different educational movements all through out the world for a more humanistic and child-centered education that would treat the child as a subject and as a soul and not only as an object. The present essay is an inquiry into child-centered education and pedagogy. It describes the vision and experiments of integral education, an alternative educational movement inspired by the goals of integral transformation of self and society charted by Sri Aurobindo and his spiritual companion, The Mother. It describes the working of Integral Education Movement in Orissa where now there are nearly 300 schools, born of community efforts in civil society, striving to embody the vision of integral education in the relationship between the teacher and the taught and between the school and the wider community.

*Almost all over the world at present, as people are becoming more and more aware of the gods that have failed them, the heroic in them is searching for alternatives, an alternative in science and technology, alternatives in political and economic patterns, and also an alternative in education. Man everywhere has never been so rude and ruthless in throwing away the old idols as he is now. It seems there is going to be a total leap, a decision in direction of the vertical.*

*And in the direction of the vertical, lies the spiritual, the integral, the intrinsically human. Education must have a spiritual base; in other words, it must start from the basic faith that what is intended to be brought about is already involved within. In actual practice, this faith will mean freedom, love and commitment. Only those who are free can help others in the right way to grow with freedom.*

Chitta Ranjan Das (1980), "Searching for an Alternative," p. 14.

*This cannot be taught; it has to be stimulated. It can arise only out of the affective attachment of children or adolescents to a reference group who makes them feel deserving of unconditional love, and confident of their capacity to learn, act, undertake projects and measure themselves against others—who gives them, in a word "self-esteem." The subject emerges by virtue of the love with which another subject calls it to become a subject and it develops through the desire to be loved by that other subject. This means that the educative relation is not a social relation and is not socializable. It is successfully achieved only if the child is an incomparably singular being for the person educating him / her, a being loved for him / herself and to be revealed to him / herself by that love as entitled to his / her singularity: that is to say, as a subject-individual.*

Andre Gorz (1999), *Reclaiming Work: Beyond the Wage-Based Society*

## Introduction

Our educational systems are in a crisis now. This is evident in all levels of education--from the primary to higher. A major part of the problem lies in our education lacking a soul-dimension as pedagogical methods lack a relation of love, mutuality, care among the partners and fellow-travellers and educational objectives lacking the goal of the five-fold integral development of the human person--physical, mental, vital, psychic and spiritual. The vision and objectives of integral education strive for integral and child-centred alternatives in this regard. It draws inspiration and insights from the vision, experiments and works of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother and as a humanistic and spiritual pedagogy is in tune with the *gestalt* and integral educational movements of nineteenth and twentieth centuries pioneered by such educational visionaries as Kristen Kold, Rabindra Nath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi and others. Integral education is a vibrant social, cultural and educational movement in a state like Orissa with thirty years of continued striving to build on and now around 300 schools in different parts of the state--rural, urban and tribal. In this essay we shall describe the ideals and hopes that animate this striving for alternative and child-centred alternative.

These schools provide a soul-touching and child-centred education from pre-nursery to the high-school level (up to standard X). Probably first time in the country, these schools have achieved autonomy in terms of having their own syllabi and methods of examination upto the 7th standard. The first effort in integral education in Orissa began with the establishment of Institute of Integral Education in the state capital of Bhubaneswar in 1970 which had its model Sri Aurobindo International Center of Education of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry. In Orissa, now integral education has attained a level of grass-roots mobilization but integral education is a striving in many other parts of the country as well. For example, the Mirambika school run by Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Delhi is a radical experiment in child-centred and soul-touching education where there is no set syllabus till the 7th standard.

## The Vision of Integral Education

Integral education submits a radical and evolutionary challenge before humanity that education is not only for children but for all of us, the adults, and it is for the whole of our life. Thus declares Mother, Mira Richards, the spiritual fellow-pilgrim of Sri Aurobindo: "The education of a human being should begin at his very birth and continue through out his life" (Mother 1956: 96). She further tells us: "Education to be complete must have five principal aspects relating to the five principal activities of the human being--the physical, the vital, the mental, the psychic and the spiritual. Usually, these phases of education succeed each other in a chronological order following the growth of the individual, this, however, does not mean that one should replace the other but that all must continue, completing each other, till the end of life" (ibid: 96-97). For this, Sri Aurobindo enunciates three principles of education:

1. "The first principle of true teaching is that nothing can be taught. The teacher is not an instructor or task-master, he is a helper and a guide. His business is to suggest and not to impose. He does not actually train the people's mind, he only shows him how to acquire";
2. "The second principle of education is that mind has to be consulted in its own growth"; and
- 3 "The third principle of education is to work from the near to far, from that which is to that which shall be" (Sri Aurobindo 1956: 20-21)

The Mother describes for us the further contours of integral education as integral development of body, mind, the vital, the psychic and the spiritual. Physical education is a core dimension of integral education as it seeks to create a supple and healthy body which becomes an instrument of the Divine here on earth.<sup>1</sup> Mental education or education of the method has five phases:

- i) "Development of the power of concentration, the capacity of attention";
- ii) "Development of the capacities of expansion, wideness, complexities and richness";
- iii) "Organization of ideas around a central idea or a higher ideal or a supremely luminous idea that will serve as a guide in life";
- iv) "Thought control, rejection of undesirable thoughts, so that one may, in the end, think only what one wants and when one wants it"; and
- v) "Development of mental silence, perfect calm and a more and more total receptivity to inspirations coming from the higher regions of the being" (The Mother 1956: 114-115).

The Mother further writes about mental education "...learning is only one aspect of mental activity; the other, at least, as important, is the constructive faculty, the capacity to give form and therefore prepare for action" and for her, "control over the formative activities of the mind is one of the most important aspects of self-education" (ibid: 118).

The education of the vital is an important part of integral education which involves education and development of the senses. "The child must be taught to observe himself, to note his reactions and impulses and their causes, to become a clear-sighted witness of his desires, his movements of violence and passion, his instincts of possession and appropriation and domination" (ibid: 112). In integral education, art, songs, painting, music and drama play a great role in the education of the vital. While psychic education is the recognition of the psychic force in one's life and it helps one to pull out of the "barriers of egoism" (ibid:

124), spiritual education helps one to realise life as “light and balance, beauty and joy.” Spiritual education also enables seekers for a radical universality where one recognizes the Divine in each and all: “The Divine is the fourth dimension. The Divine does not come and go. He is there, always, everywhere.”

Integral education in Sri Aurobindo and The Mother is an aid in the integral evolution of humanity. For Sri Aurobindo, “Humanity in its education of children has chosen to thwart and hinder the rapidity of its onward march” (Sri Aurobindo 1956: 35). In this context, integral education aims at “not merely in a progressively developing formation of human nature--but a transformation of the nature itself, a transfiguration of the being in its entirety, a new ascent of the species above and beyond man towards superman, leading in the end to the appearance of a divine race upon earth” (Mother 1956: 131).

To this core of the vision, the participants of the integral education movement of Orissa have added their nuances and emphases. For many of them integral education is a method and a field of *yoga*. Where the conventional methods of yoga, spiritual union and spiritual realization had visualized individuals sitting cross-legged and doing *yoga*; in Sri Aurobindo’s path of spiritual striving, yoga has to be *karmayoga* and integral education is a method and field of *karmayoga*. Integral education is a *sadhana* for the participants in which one tries to realize the divine in oneself by establishing loving and life-elevating relationship with one’s students. For the participants of integral education, school is itself the literal embodiment of Divine Mother and many of them have a literal conception of school as Divine Mother. This view of integral education became clear to me during the annual meet of integral education activists in Matrubhavan, Cuttack in October 2000. In this meeting Lambodara Bhai, a longtime activist of integral education, said: “Earlier the *Rishis* were going to the forest and were doing their *tapashya*. In integral schools, we are doing *tapashya* through our children. Unless we realize this our education cannot fructify itself.”

Chitta Ranjan Das is a devoted participant and engaged leader of the integral education movement of Orissa. Das himself is a great experimenter in many radical efforts in child-centered and soul-touching education and in order to understand different dimensions of integral education we shall do well to get to know his elaboration of this agenda of human communication and evolution (on Das see, Giri 1996; Giri 2002b). In his educational practice Das combines the best source of inspiration in the world--Kristen Kold, Gandhi, Janus Korchak, Tagore--and he brings all these rich sources to have a dialogue with the pathway of integral education. Twenty years before joining the integral education movement in Orissa as the first Director of Institute of Integral Education in Bhubaneswar Das had himself started a new school in the forests of Anugul, Orissa, called *Jeevana Vidyalaya*, school for life. Das brings loving and life-affirming relationship with children and creating proper environment--outer and inner—for the integral development of the human person to the

heart of the vision and experiments of integral education. In the words of Das: “..the object of concern in integral education is the total child, the whole person in him that waits to be attended and unfolded. The stress is on each individual child with a style, a rhythm and a pace of his own and no effort is made arbitrarily to groom every budding soul to a uniformity that the adults around him have decided to hold as very significant and sacred. Integral education assumes that a really alive, alert and awakened person has a child within him and it is the business of all good education to perpetuate it” (p.iv). For Das, “Integral education deals with the human child as an emerging person, not as a thing. A person is never a thing, he is a totality, a unity as multiplex, with a dimension of depth suggesting the innumerable possibilities latent in him and divinely decreed to unfold in its own way.”

Earlier we have listened to Mother’s elaborations of the five-fold processes of integral education--physical, vital, mental, psychic and spiritual. Das adds his own originality while elaborating these dimensions. On vital education he writes: “vital education will engender in the child the penchant to develop a discipline of his own which would further his growth and take care of distractions and deviations. This education rules out all coercion and compulsion and aims at making the child willing to collaborate in his own growing up process, cultivating in him the right taste, right sensibilities and the right awareness of the fulfillment and joy that will be his if he is able to listen to the best in himself and co-operate with it” (Das, Preface, iii). Furthermore, “Vital education takes care of the vital emotional surplus in the child as a being that grows, that discovers and establishes the many threads of relationship that invisibly govern the development of the part in him that gives itself to others and shares in order that he can more wholesomely live” (ibid: xi). In the integral schools, mental education provides the child with the “clues to inherit the legacy of knowledge that is man’s, to organise it around an aim that one has chosen for oneself.” Mental education makes “the head equipped and ready to serve the heart, the real heart of man. The spontaneous love to learn, to know and to be linked with the world in a sense of genuine concern are the aims mental education has in view” (ibid: iv). For Das, “psychic education brings the human person to himself, to the center that unites him with the whole universe.” But Das urges us to realize: “...psychic and spiritual education in the total plan of integral education is not a separate segment in it xx it is the total climate that pervades everything that is done in an integral school, and characterises the quality of rapport that exists in all its educational and human situations.” Recently there is a relational redefinition and reworking of spirituality where spirituality refers to the quality of relationships and institutions rather than a thing (Giri 2002a; Wuthnow 1998). Das’s interpretation of spiritual education makes spirituality an aspect of our relationship and urges us to be aware of the quality of it. Das therefore writes: “There should be a total feeling of involvement and togetherness that should permeate everything that is meant and taught in the entire gamut of the school programme and the quality of that feeling will be spiritual, recognizing the truth that is in everyone and that is being explored in the daily relationship between person and person”

(ibid: xi). The new relational matrix that integral schools strive to create is not confined to either the classroom or the school. For Das, “The integral school tries to incorporate much of the child’s home within it and also tries to incorporate a bit of itself to the child’s parental home situation” (v)

Das now describes for us the special methods of teaching in integral schools and integral education. These are:

1. All teaching is primarily a learning situation. In integral schools, “encounter between the pupils and the teachers are not confined to the formal class room teaching only. Even the so-called formal teaching tends not to be formal at all.”
2. “The class is a group situation where the teacher gets an occasion to learn more about the child as well as about his capacity to really come close enough to the child in order to be able to really impart something useful to the child and where the child makes himself more and more exposed to the available occasions of learning without being abhorrently conscious that he is being taught.”
3. “The various subjects are introduced to the child not as abstractions and soulless scraps of foreign matter, but as mysteries waiting to be discovered and made one’s own.”
4. “The aim of all method in integral schools aspires to create an attitude of affirmation, towards life and towards the world, towards knowledge and its incumbent challenges” (ibid: vi). For Das, methods of education, including integral education, are “meant to help the children to find their own inherent way to learning, never to fit the child brutally to adult formations of methods.”
5. An alternative educational practice which seeks to recognise the many-sided potentialities of children needs to have an alternative method of assessment and evaluation. For Das, “The Integral education centers in Orissa have already made a beginning towards change in the traditional pattern of assessment because they are convinced that a new education ought to have a totally new approach to this also.” It must be noted here that Integral education schools in Orissa have got autonomy of internal evaluation and assessment up to class seven and they are not required to go through the state examination board for this purpose. In his introduction to the Comprehensive Syllabus of Integral Education, Das writes about the method of assessment which would be gradually adopted in all schools: “..tests will be through-out the year and the cumulative results will tell us how a child has fared in a particular subject and in the aggregate.” Further more, “Besides the so-called academic performances, a pupil’s performance in the so-called non-academic fields has to be taken into

account. xxx Thus, our pupil's performance in games, sports, music, painting, occasions of leadership, his cheerfulness, capacity for endurance and even his sense of humour and an attitude of non-complaining non-exhibitionistic equanimity will all be taken into full account in assessing him. Personality and attitude tests can be made use of to make the teachers more scientific in their judgements.”<sup>2</sup>

## **The Experiments of Integral Education**

The first center of integral education was established in 1970. The initiative was taken by some of the devoted followers of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother who were searching for an alternative in education and also for a more meaningful field for embodying one's devotion. Many parents and interested members of the community take a lead role in forming centers of integral education. They begin from scratch and most of the teachers work almost honorary in these schools. The experiment of establishing integral schools followed a vibrant study circle movement in Orissa in the late 1950 and the 60s when the ideas and works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were being socialized. *Pathachakra* is a study circle where interested people join and read the works of Mother and Sri Aurobindo together. This common reading creates a basis of solidarity and intimacy and it helps in a shared and sometimes deeper understanding of the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Prapatti writes about it: “The Pathachakras were centers where groups came together regularly to read Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, imbibe their vision and enlighten themselves with it upon the total context of their lives claimed and spend a few minutes in collective meditation. This went a long way to invisibly lay a foundation of a community, that was to emerge as a sort of catalyzer in the larger community. The Pathachakra gave them the inspiration that things could be different, that things will change if we are ready to change, change ourselves and the level of our relationships” (Prapatti 1980: 25). What Prapatti further writes gives us an intimate picture of the birth of this educational movement: “This togetherness went on for quite a few years. This brought about a sense of mutuality and mutual concern that gradually came to take a concrete shape in the form of a school. By now many had been to Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry, had chanced to have a close look at the working of the International Center of Education there and had an idea of what might be, provided the human factor was willing. This really gave a leap and the first school was born” (ibid).

Some of the distinguishing features of these new schools which distinguish these from the traditional schools are:

1. “The goal is the all round development of the child and the curriculum is oriented to that goal as far as possible. The new schools deal with the total environment, inner as well as outer.”;

2. "These schools try to take parents along with them."<sup>3</sup>
3. The new schools have a new method of examination and assessment and to help "underscorers to fall in with the rest as quickly as possible, there are also special classes independently planned by the teachers concerned."
4. Physical education is one of the main programs in integral schools and here there is no discrimination between boys and girls. "Besides, there are music, painting, handwork etc." All the schools have classes of music, painting and dancing which create a deeper aesthetic environment. This aesthetic environment creates a deeper aesthetic sensibility in children's lives and begins to realize that it is not only a lamp or a temple which is work of art, his life itself is a work of art<sup>4</sup>
5. Integral schools have a low teacher-pupil ratio. This "greatly facilitates individual attention, personal concern and above all, better educational and growth-promoting encounter and rapport between teachers and the pupils" (Das, tryst, p. 13).
6. In integral schools, there are regular staff meetings. Subject teachers sit together to discuss and solve

## **INTEGRAL SCHOOLS**

### **Sri Aurobindo Centre of Integral Education, Gopinathapur, Cuttack.**

Sri Aurobindo Centre of Integral Education at Gopinathapur was established in 1974 just four years after the first school in Bhubaneswar. It was the first integral school in a rural area. The school began with the initiative of members of Pathachakras who were interested in an alternative education. Vira Bhai was an enthusiastic young man then. It was 1967 when Vira Bhai, his elder brother and some young men of the village wanted to activate the local pathachakra. They were inspired by Babaji Maharaj and Prapatti, two legendary and inspiring sadhakas from Orissa at Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry who were working hard to socialize and bring to common people the ideas and visions of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.<sup>5</sup> Vira Bhai, even after thirty years, embodies the same spirit of youthful enthusiasm when I visited him and spent a night in his school at Gopinathapur.

In one fine early morning last spring (March 2001) Vira Bhai took me to the outskirts of the village where the school has an orchard and a piece of land. On the way he told me the tumultuous history of the school and the Ashram. As a young man, he was much interested in education and he wanted to establish a high school in the village. It must be noted that the decade after independence in Orissa was a period of building of new schools and institutions to which socially concerned educated people used to devote themselves.

Vira Bhai was not interested in a government job. But after spending few years in the school he himself had founded he felt disillusioned that his school was one of the many ordinary schools in the locality. In the mean time, Vira Bhai and his friends from the village visited Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry and saw the sports of the students of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education in Pondicherry and thought that they can also build a similar school in their village. That is how the seeds for building an Ashram and a school grew in their minds. Vira Bhai's family took a lead role in this. The two young girls who came to join the school to start stayed with his family in the village. One of them is Anjal Tripathi or Anjali Apa who is the principal of the school now. On this Vira Bhai says: "When we started the school Babaji Maharaj clearly told us that we should do with teachers who come from outside and can stay here fulltime with students and teachers as members of a community. On hindsight we feel that this was a wise decision. There were many young graduates in our village also. But if we had started with them we could not have obtained from them the same commitment."

The integral school at Gopinathpur began with twenty students. Initially, the teachers did not have much to eat. The students would bring lunch for the teachers and in the evening their parents would send dinner. But parents of twenty students would take care of the dinner of teachers for twenty nights only and they would have to manage somehow the rest ten days. Anjali Apa, the present principal of the school who had come there in 1974 tells us: "In some evening we would share pieces of bread with each other." But this lack of resource and food was not the only obstacle they had to go through. What was about to crush their backbone but for their will power and divine grace was the stiff opposition to the Ashram and the school from the villagers. Initially, it involved the land on which the school was built. The villagers were interested to build an Ayurvedic hospital there. Says Anjali Apa: "We would build the walls of our school building and the next day they would come and destroy it. There was threat to our life also. Villagers would boycott those who send their wards to us."

The struggle for growth, survival and transformation here was as much collective as it was individual. Anjali Apa had left her home to join the school without her parent's approval. She had just passed matriculation and as a young Brahmin pretty girl, she was subjected to harassing remarks when she would ride her bicycle in the village. She was assigned the task of managing the Ashram departmental store in the village. The school-cum-ashram in Gopinathpur was running a department store with whose profit the organizers were planning to take care of the expenses of building of the school. While working in the departmental store and packing groceries in the old books and newspapers the desire for further study got rekindled in her. Anjali Apa would read from 10 p.m. to 1 a.m. every night and through this she completed her intermediate, BA, and finally obtained her master's degree in education.

Through this struggle and striving slowly the school grew and so did the individuals who are part of it. Today the school and the Ashram are spread into the village and the activities of the school give new energy to the village. Through process of confrontation the villagers have begun to appreciate the good work that the school is doing. The school has classes from pre- nursery to 10th standard and 160 students coming from different parts of Orissa stay in the hostel. It is one of the most distinguished integral schools in Orissa and it draws students from far away places. The School-Ashram constellation has different components and branches spread out in different parts of the village:

- Ashram : relics center, library and a guest room
- the school
- hostel
- playground
- garden
- Auro orchards

Many of the teachers stay in the Ashram as ashramites. Their life is intertwined with the lives of the students. The life of the Ashram begins at 5:30 a.m.. in the morning. Their day begins with the daily offering of their labor for one hour. Both the students and the teachers work together. In fact, all the construction work of the school is also done by this offering of labor. Through devotional offering of labor, the school has been able to build a common ground of well-being both for itself as well as for the village.

Anjali Apa tells us about the active routine of the *ashram* and the school. In her words: "Before the village awakens in the morning we are active in our works. At one time we are at work in 10-15 places in the village." The school has also planted trees in the village main road and every morning students water these trees. Says Anjali Apa: "our students know most of the work—from cleaning the latrine to cultivating the land. So they will not feel despondent in life even if they do not get any job which is scarce anyway. They love to work because we work with them. If there is dirt in the latrine, instead of advising students to clean it, we clean it ourselves and this has an impact." She tells us further: "Education is not confined within class room only. We apply integral education at every moment of our lives."

The school did not initially have a play ground and only few years ago it has purchased same land near the village middle school for this purpose and has developed this into a play ground. The school stresses on appropriate physical education. For vital education, it has classes in painting, music and drama. In fact, the school also runs an art and music school called *Matru Kala Niketan*. Anjali Apa is a spiritually impassioned writer of poems and dramas. In fact, every year Anjali Apa writes a new drama for the children to enact. In

order to popularize the vision of integral education, Anjali Apa also writes *kabalis* for children to enact. The *kabali* that she has written on integral education has the following lines:

Oh my brother listen, listen with attention  
 Do you know about our education  
 Its name is integral education  
 But its work is not only teaching

\* \* \* \* \*

Our first education is physical  
 We have taken the vow to play everyday  
 We play everyday at the end of our study  
 We play *Khoko*, *Kabadi* and football  
 Once a year we conduct our annual sports function

\* \* \* \* \*

Our second education is vital  
 It takes away all our sorrows and suffering  
 We get energy from the education of our vital  
 In one Saturday every month we sit down  
 We all watch each other dance here  
 All of us together  
 enact a drama once a year

Then...  
 Mental education makes our mind strong  
 We acquire all the knowledge of the world for ourselves

\* \* \* \* \*

But oh brothers!  
 however educated mind, vital and body may be  
 If we do not understand our soul  
 It is no use at all (translated from Oriya by the author)

Two distinguishing features of the integral school at Gopinathapur are: the intimate relationship that teachers have with students and the beautiful physical and relational environment it has created for the growth of both the students and teachers. Says Anjali Apa: "We want to come down to the level of the students and create an appropriate environment so that students can learn and study without fear and hindrance. Small children are staying in the hostel and it is important that there is no fear in the environment. If there is slight trace or shadow of fear they cannot grow." Anjali Apa further says that children are not afraid of examinations: "They do not know when examination would be conducted and

are ever alert!" "After years of trials and experiments we know how to turn the mind and open their hearts to study and learning."

Anjali Apa told me during our discussion with her last March (2001): "We want to make the best use of the autonomy we have. We are now thinking of varieties of educational innovations. We have introduced the project method of teaching in KG (1st level of kindergarten). In project method of teaching we do not follow any set syllabi but have projects on different topics and through this we teach students. For example, during the rainy season we have projects on water. Through project on water, we teach them literature, mathematics, science and social science. We also involve students in drawing. In the spring season, as there are so many flowers around, we do projects on color. One great advantage of the project method of teaching is that students are not confined within the class room but a great disadvantage here is that students do not get enough opportunity to grow in mathematics and literature."

The integral school at Gopinathapur has introduced the project method two years ago. Initially the teachers were afraid that they would be met with resistance and lack of co-operation from parents. But they faced none of these. Says Anjali Apa: "The guardians have trust in us that what we are doing is for the good of the children".

In her reflections which were inspiringly meditative Anjali Apa gives emphasis on establishing inner touch and inner contact with students and on inner growth on the part of all concerned. After nearly three decades of struggle and striving the school has established a materially secured foundation and it can take care of the minimum needs of fifty spiritual *sadhakas* and *sadhikas* who devote themselves to integral education. Says Anjali Apa: "When we began twenty-seven years ago, we did not have food to eat but now our institution can shoulder the responsibility of fifty people with security for the future. But what is important now is that what fifty people do with their mind and what is their inner growth." Says Anjali Apa: "Our success does not lie in how many buildings we have or build. Our success lies in how much we are able to discover the Psyche in us and how much open we are to Mother. If that is not happening and all these external things grow, I feel very small inside. I look at myself and think: isn't my inner life taking a back seat in the face of these external growth and success? Inner mobilization is the core of the matter in integral education."

In a self-critical vein Anjali Apa says: "The graduates of our school have entered life and society for the last twenty years. Most of them have scored first divisions but they have not been full bearers of the vision of integral education in their lives and society. The inner call which drove us away from the security of our homes, if only we had been able to transmit it to our students then at least some of them would have come forward to be contagious bearers of integral education in the wider society." Anjali Apa wants to build a

workshop and industrial training center in the school which would provide useful training to the unemployed alumni of the school and make them much more involved with the vision and activities of the school-ashram complex.

Anjali Apa thinks that after thirty years of striving for a child-centred spiritual education, now a ground and climate has been created in Orissa for it. Now people of Orissa have accepted integral education and many are open to it. But, at the same time, integral education suffers from the danger of being made into a routine and there is a crucial challenge now to deepen it: "I feel we need something else to take this movement into a new height and depth. I am not able to express this in words."

As Anjali Apa was taking me into these new horizons of challenge and responsibility, Sun was setting down behind the banana trees of the Ashram and both of us set out to the neighbouring village of Satyabhamapur to meet with some students and their families who were to take part in the high school board examination. Integral schools have attained autonomy only up to 7th standard and the activists of the educational feel sad that they and their students have to go through the torture of a faceless examination system at the 10th standard. The parents of the students were overjoyed to see Anjali Apa. One of the mothers said: "My dear sister! Both of us are of the same age but I got married and became entangled in my marriage and raising my children. But you have grown into so much depth spiritually. I always feel identified with you and I wish I had a life of your spiritual aspiration and seeking."

There is a middle school and a high school in the village at the stone's distance from the Gopinathapur integral school. There are schools in the neighboring villages. Though there is still jealousy and unspoken hostility around, different creative experiments of the integral school of the village is also having an impact on these. Vira Bhai, the founder secretary and still the dreaming young man of the village as well as the integral education movement of Orissa, helps us understand this: "In our village schools (i.e. schools run by the Government) they have introduced drawing and painting. The teachers of the Govt. school are realizing that if they do not do something now then they would be extinct. In our school we spend time with students and do not charge fee for extra time and classes. In the local high school, the teachers are also beginning to realize the significance of spending more time with students without charging extra tuition fee. The teachers of the Government school have begun to be self-reflexive."

### **Sri Aurobindo Nabodyama School, Markona**

Nabodyama which means new striving is an innovative school and enjoys a high esteem among all the integral schools of Orissa. It began ten years ago and it has a revolutionary origin. Dhinendra Bhai and Mayadhara Bhai, two of the founder of this school,

were earlier working in the integral school at Raghunathapura, Sora, at a distance of twenty kilometer from this place. Along with another committed activist Narayana Bhai, late Narayana Pangrahi, they had built this school from the scratch. But shortly ideological differences cropped up. Dharendra Bhai wanted to teach the book *Mother* by Maxim Gorky along with Sri Aurobindo's *Mother* in the school. He also argued that children should not be forced to sit in meditation and they must be first taught. Dharendra Bhai also argued that the management should not dictate terms to teachers. Dharendra Bhai believes that one who has the chalk and duster in the class room should also run the school. On these issues he was thrown out from Raghunathapur Integral School. On their way back, not knowing where to go, they stopped at the bus-stop of Markona. There a local leader invited them to take rest for a few days. During this time, Sudhanshu Sir—an engaging poet and writer of drama—joined them and they decided to open a press. This was their means of survival and also to mobilise resource to build a school. Their determination to build a school was stirred by the comment of Chitta Bhai (Chitta Ranjan Das) who used to visit the group every now and then “just keep a vigil that your teacher's heart does not remain hungry.”

Dhirendra Bhai and others built a small roof on the piece of land donated by a villager. Now the school has a beautiful campus and exists in the midst of the paddy field. The small campus of the school has many beautiful trees and flower gardens all over the place. The school and the hostel are taken care of by ten to eleven *bhais* (brothers) and *apas* (sisters). They stay in the school and take full care of the children. The school has classes from nursery to 7th standard and even small children of 4 years stay in the school hostel. The teachers of the school take care of these children in the hostel as well as teaching them in the class room. It is a full time—twelve hour— job for the teachers and a major portion of the task falls on the women teachers.

Nabodyama has many innovative pedagogical methods. One of these is the idea and practice of mobile schools. In the mobile school programme children are taken to beautiful places near a river and a mountain such as Kaptipada. In this programme they observe nature and write literary pieces-- poems, short stories and essays. It must be noted that the school has a knack for creative literature as Dharendra Bhai and Sudhashu Sir are intimate and passionate poets and writers of dramas.

This love for literature has created an artistic and aesthetic environment in the school. Sudhanshu Sir, Manoj Babu and Gayadhar Gochait come here to teach drama, songs and musical instruments to the children. They come on a part-time basis and serve the students and the school without any payment. Manoj Babu, the part-time music teacher of Nabodyama, says: “There is a lot of talent among the children and it is our duty to provide them appropriate and adequate opportunities. Developing artistic qualities help the children to attain power of concentration.”

The music, songs and dramas here help in self-awakening and development of the soul. In another context, Chitta Ranjan Das had posed a creative challenge in the field of vital education before the practitioners of integral education: "Till now, our programmes of music, dance and dramas have been mostly imitations of familiar bazars. xx We should perhaps sit together to evolve a stage style of our own, a definite pattern which is inostentatious but deeply suggestive, an inward directing performance which not only entertains but also elevates" (Das 1981: 4). When we talk to the teachers of songs and dramas in the Nabodyama school we see an affirmative response to the challenge posed by Das and see efforts to realize the following insights of Das: "We ought to remember that vital education is an education of the vital to make it more and more ready to be in touch with the psychic. And more than anything else it is the psychic that has central place in all good education." Sudharshu Sir, the inspiring teacher of drama in the school, tells us that whatever dramas they do here, they bring a spiritual dimension to this. For example, while enacting the familiar story of Rama and Ravana what gets emphasised is spiritual elevation and spiritual transformation. In the words of Sudhanshu Sir: "Rama and Ravana become different aspects of the human soul, they symbolise two different powers. In the drama here Ravana addresses Sita as mother. Sri Aurobindo has written in *Durga Stotra* that we should have in our body the power of a giant. Similarly in our drama the giant in Ravana is seeking to touch the soul power of Divine Mother." This becomes clear when we listen to the songs written by Susdhanshu Sir. One of the songs goes like this:

*As Rama, Atma Rama, Hasa Rama Priyatama  
Padadhoidebi Luha Kalasire, Mala Gunthidevi Bhakati Phulare  
Sevadesi Hebi, Snehe Basaibi  
Sajadi Hruda Asana*

Oh Rama, my soul Rama, come, and smile  
I shall wash your feet with my tears  
and shall weave a thread with my flowers of devotion  
I shall serve and make you sit in my heart throne

There is a participatory and dialogical method of teaching at Nabodyama. Says Sudhanshu Sir: "We discuss the methods of acting with students. We do not impose anything on the students. Before writing a drama we discuss what would be its impact on students."

An alternative socio-cultural movement has to have an alternative music and song to bring to people's heart an alternative worldview, an alternative knowledge system and an alternative way of perceiving and relating to the world (Eyerman & Jamison 1998). In integral education movements heart-touching songs and music give both students and teachers a new *weltanschauung* and an identity. In one of the lower classes children were singing with their teacher Arpita Apa:

*Ame Sabu Sathi Tikitiki Kali  
Emati Mara Dhana  
Ajisina Sana Bayasare Ame  
Sana nuhe ama mana*

We are all friends  
Small buds as we are  
We are the voice of this Mother Earth  
We are small in our age  
but our mind is not small

*Gotiye sutare guntha ame sabu  
khilikhili phulahara  
Ameje batoi gotiye batare  
Agami kalira swara*

We are all woven into a thread of small flowers  
We are all travellers in the same way  
and we are the voices of tomorrow

Arpita Apa in whose class I listened to children singing the above song loves to work with children. She is a young woman of 24 and has worked at Nabodyama for the last eight years. She loves being with children and like many other sister teachers of the school such as Mamata Apa and Pravasini Apa, take care of the children as mother. I attended one of the classes in geography that Arpita Apa was teaching in class six and she followed a discussion mode of teaching. What was striking was that not only there was dyadic dialogue between her and another individual student but also a multigonal and multilateral conversation. Students themselves were posing questions to each other and in the process finding an answer. But such a dialogical pedagogy requires a dialogical spatial and sitting arrangement. I suggested Arpita Apa that instead of students sitting on rows – one after another – facing the teacher it would be helpful if students can sit in circles.

Arpita Apa is busy with children from dawn to late in the night. But she enjoys being with children. In her words: “I learn so much for myself even while giving children a bath. When they point out our mistakes, we try not to be angry and learn.” Despite her busy schedule she finds time out for her own self- study and self-development.

Like Anjali Apa, Arpita Apa had seen the advertisement for teachership in this school in *Naba Prakash—the journal of Navjyoti Karyalaya*, and against the will of her parents she came running to work with this school. She was a member of the village *pathachakra* and

her participation in the *pathachakra* had sown seeds in her mind for the work of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. At this point it must be noted that a majority of teachers of integral schools in Orissa have grown up with the *pathachakras* in their young days. This association gives them necessary moral and spiritual perseverance to follow the path of integral education where there are so many obstacles and where one does not get much financial remuneration anything worth the name of a salary. On the other hand, the school demands so much of involvement and labor from the teachers. In the words of Arpita Apa: "We have never been afraid of hard physical work. When we first came here there was water upto knee in this place. But we filled this place. I myself have done this by using the spade."

Arpita Apa and Mamata Apa joined the school after one year of its establishment. Once they joined they took care of the kitchen and the small children which provided the school an anchorage.

The actors of Nabaodyama make clear that the school here is part of a wider spiritual movement. There are two *pathachakras* once a week--one for the inmates and the other for the wider public. On Sunday the teachers of the school meet for two hours, and discuss educational matters and read from the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on education.

One distinctive aspect of *Nabodyama* is that it is run and managed by the teachers. The school which are managed by the influential and wealthy sponsors of the community many a time suffer from the problem of domination, control and interference from the management. In many an integral school, this is a crucial problem. But in *Nabodyama* there is no hiatus between the managers and teachers as teachers themselves manage the school. Rabi Bhai is one of the enthusiastic supporters of the school. Rabi Bhai has a drug store but he is deeply committed to integral education. He tells us that only attending Pathachakra is not enough for one's spiritual growth and development. In the words of Rabi Bhai: "Pathachakra can provide us a temporary sensation but it cannot provide a stable ground to us."<sup>6</sup>

Rabi Bhai, Dharendra Bhai and Sudhanshu Sir are not satisfied with the building of a school. They also want to build an Ashram where those who devote their whole life to this path of integral education can stay as members. It must be noted that committed teachers of the school such as Arpita Apa are in the midst of a crisis now. They do not get any fixed salary from the school. Of course, the school takes care of their minimum requirement such as provision of their dress and their pocket money. But a bleak future faces workers such as Arpita Apa in terms of conventional standards of securities of life such as marriage and financial stability. Keeping this in view *Nabodyama* is now planning to build an Ashram called *Navajata Ashram (The Ashram of the Newborn)* in a village near Tihidi. Ten years ago when the printing press was in full swing, the actors of Nabodyama had purchased a piece

of land near Tihidi. They have named it Savitri Vihar. There is a Pathachakra there named *Madhumayee Pathachakra* and there is also an evening school here run for the children of the surrounding villages. Most of the parents of these children are refugees from Bangladesh and they have difficulty in getting adjusted to the regular schools. The evening school helps these children. But *Nabodyama* has a far radical vision for the school. It realises that integral education imparted through predominantly residential schools such as *Nabodyama* is only for the rich and the middle class. What about those parents who would like to give quality education to their children but cannot afford? What about those children who are orphans, who do not have any parents at all? Savitri Vihar wishes to offer hope to such children. It wishes to have sufficient amount of land by cultivating which the children who would study in Savitri Vihar would earn the their bread.

There are two or three children in *Nabodyama* now who stay in the hostel but do not pay their hostel fees. *Nabodayama* manages to take care of these children out of the fees other students pay. The food of the teachers is also dependent upon the hostel fees that the students pay and the school do not have much source of income of its own. It can well be appreciated that the school has its limit in offering assistance to all the needy students. But Dharendra Bhai makes it clear that the school cannot abandon its commitment to students like Lalit. Lalit is studying in standard six now. His parents had left him in the school when he was studying in standard one and had gone to Delhi in search of a livelihood. But in Delhi, his mother was raped and murdered. Not being able to bear this, his father lost the balance of his mind and became mad. But *Nabodyama* continues to support Lalit and take care of him.

*Nabodyama* has a few Muslim students in the hostel also. It wants to arrange courses in Urdu for these children.

Sarojini is an enthusiastic student of *Nabodyama*. Her father has a liquor business in the district town of Bhadrakh. But Sarojini had an influence on him and he has started realising the value of education. His another daughter i.e., Sarojini's younger sister, is also studying in *Nabodyama* now.

Apart from the hostelers there are a few day scholars from the neighboring village studying at *Nabodyama*. But *Nabodyama* always does not find it easy to work with day scholars as their parents supposedly do not cooperate with the school on matters of discipline. The proportion between hostelers and day scholars differs from schools to schools. Many integral schools which are located in small towns and cities have a major portion of their students as day scholars. Even some of the rural integral schools such as Kanthibhauri in the northern most part of the district of Balasore actively seek local students. But the same active seeking for local students is not noticeable in *Nabodyama*. Part of the reason may be

that the founders of the school such as Dharendra Bhai do not come from the village itself and they have an all-Orissa supply area in mind in terms of attracting interested pupils. They are also sincerely trying to build it as an ideal integral school founded and run by the teachers themselves where money and power of the management does not dictate terms.

Integral schools are established with the initiative of the interested devotees of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. Many a time those who establish it are either influential persons in society and they have either a high position in the Government or resourceful persons in society in terms of wealth and land ownership. This enables them to establish the initial infrastructure for the school. The secretary of the managing committee of the school is a powerful position with sometimes unlimited power to hire and fire teachers. Many a time they do not continue to grow with the same initial enthusiasm which has motivated them to start an integral school in the first place. They then tend to apply a managerial approach to their schools and treat teachers of the school as hired peons. Dharendra Bhai, the co-founder of Nabadyama integral school, is an intense critic of such a managerial approach to integral education and has consciously striven to build his school as an alternative integral school. Here he draws inspiration from Chitta Bhai who writes in one of his many writings on the current state of integral education in Orissa: "The managers of integral school often complain that teachers are not sufficiently committed to Sri Aurobindo and Mother but how it would be when teachers start asking whether the managers are sufficiently committed or not."

Dharendra Bhai is a man of many parts but he combines in him fire of social struggle and the rose of creative literature. It is his passion for literature which had first brought him to the public sphere as he established literary associations and carried out popular literary meetings in his native Tihidi, a place which takes the pride in being the literary center of Orissa. Through this work Dharendra Bhai has made many friends such as Sudhanshu Sir, Rabi Bhai and Gayadhara Bhai—friends who are part of the experiment of Nabadyama now. They stay near Tihidi and come regularly to the school covering a distance of nearly forty kilometer.

But founding and nurturing Nabodyama has demanded much from Dharendra Bhai as it continues to demand from his fellow teachers. Nityananda Bhai, Mr. Nityananda Nayak, is another such teacher. He comes from the neighboring village of Bari. He is married and he has a small son. He comes to the school early in the morning and leaves for home only ten in the night. He is always busy--from the class room to the field. He gets almost nothing as his remuneration for working with *Nabodyama*. Sometimes he is not able to bring medicine to his ailing son and his wife understandably is at times angry with him. He has tried his best to bring his wife also to the net of integral education but she continues to maintain a cautious distance from such paths of idealism. Say Nityananda Bhai, "Sometimes when I

return home I find that my wife has put water into the cooked rice but I do not complain. I fill myself with whatever is left in the kitchen and stealthily retire to the bed.”

For the financial security of his family Nityananda Bhai has recently taken to raising of fish in his family pond. He draws inspiration from the writings of The Mother and has the satisfaction that he is taking part in a great experiment. He is a man of dignity and tells that it is better to die than to beg. He has a similar relationship of dignity even with God: he does not ask him any favor. He says that in the conventional schools teachers give more attention to parents and children who have more resources. He, coming from a poor background, was a victim of such class bias during his own childhood. He therefore wants to make sure that this does not happen to any of his students.

### **Some Neighboring Schools**

There are nine schools in the vicinity. All these schools have created a climate for child-centred education in the locality. The nearest is Matrupuram, Sri Aurobindo Integral school in Bhagia, Markona. This is the oldest school in the locality. It started in 1980 with the initiative of Mahendra Bhai. Mahendra Bhai is one of the senior most activists of the integral education movement of Orissa. Currently in his 70s, Mahendra Bhai does not have a doctrinaire approach to Sri Aurobindo and he strongly feels that the followers of Sri Aurobindo should learn from Gandhi’s emphasis on manual labor. Mahendra Bhai told emphatically to the participants of Surhrut Shrama Sibira held in his school in May 1999 that a new chapter on labor should be added to Sri Aurobindo’s Mother. In Mahendra Bhai’s school there is a strict emphasis on physical work which sometimes students and teachers find hard to cope with. The school has few cows and it is part of the tasks of the inmates of the school to take care of these cows. But Mahendra Bhai feels sad that sometimes when he is not in campus the cows are not properly taken care of. But Mahendra Bhai even at this ripe age of seventy plus cleans the cowshed and then takes his food. In this identification, Mahendra Bhai is influenced by the thought of The Mother that to be spiritual is to be conscious of the whole world at the same time.

A distinctive aspect of Maturpuram school is that the school has an excellent library, perhaps one of the best collections among the rural integral schools and there is a monthly literary wall magazine here run by the students and teachers. The school has also been the formative ground for many important activists of integral education in the locality. Dharendra Bhai, Malati Apa (currently principal of the integral school in Kadabarang), Rashmi Bhai (founder of the teacher-managed integral school in Salabani in the district of Keonjhar)—all have initially worked with Mahendra Bhai at Matrupuram. All of them have left him not being able to cope with him and his strict discipline but all of them acknowledge with gratitude the hard work, perseverance and persistence they have learnt from Mahendra Bhai.

Dulu Bhai, Mahendra Bhai's son, is currently the secretary of Matrupuram and is now trying to loosen some of the strict disciplinary norms of Mahendra Bhai. I discussed with Dulu Bhai about the problem of management in the integral schools and asked him whether he finds a new management emerging in integral school which considers itself as a spiritual partner in the running of the school rather than as boss over the teachers. Dulu Bhai did not give a direct reply to my question but said that let there be no bossism from the managers and let the teachers not misuse their freedom. Dulu Bhai also regrets that integral schools themselves are in competition with each other and some of them have a very narrow individualistic approach to the well-being and excellence of their school rather than considering themselves as part of a movement.<sup>7</sup>

Like the Nabodyama integral school, a majority of students of Matrupuram integral school also come from far off places and stay in the hostel. But Dulu Bhai now wants to have a much more vibrant contact with the local villagers. Says Dulu Bhai, "From the beginning the school has never cared to involve the local village. But now we would have to involve this village in both the happiness and sorrows of the school." Dulu Bhai also says that for strengthening Sri Aurobindo integral education movement there is a need to strengthen the *Pathachakra* movement. It must be noted that the *Pathachakra* movement which had founded the integral schools have lost its initial enthusiasm probably as a response to the "space-time compression" (cf. Harvey 1989) of the time and all concerned in integral education movement any trying to revive and reactivate the *Pathachakra* movement. For example, during my visit to the Kadabarang school there was a meeting of the activists of the Block Pathachakra movement (of Banta block of District of Bhadrakh) and they were discussing various ways of making the *pathachakra* movement active. One of the proposals which came up in this discussion is that *pathachakras* instead of just reading the books of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother should also undertake concrete projects of voluntary and devotional labor for the collective well-being of the local community such as building of road etc. It must be noted here that *Suhrut Gosthi*, a new movement within the Sri Aurobindo Pathachakra and integral education movement combines reading of Sri Aurobindo's works with devotional labor for the building of foundations of collective well-being such as school building or a pond for the school and this has created new streams of consciousness and energy within the movement. We shall come to the vision and work of *Suhrut Gosthi* a little later in the text.

The integral school at Divyabhumi, Kolha, a small town 15 kilometer away from Bhadrakh is product of a vibrant Pathachakra movement and still keeps alive the spirit of a vibrant Pathachakra. The teachers and managers of the school meet every night at 9.30 and hold a *Pathachakra* i.e., they read something from the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. In this, Ashok Bhaina (Mr. Ashok Nayaka, the pain sponsor of the school) and Mr. Suryamani Nayak, another founder of the school, also take part. But Ashok Bhai not only

joins other teachers in the daily *pathachakras* he joins them in their every trials and tribulations. He joins them in their physical work. *Dibyabhumi* has a beautiful campus, perhaps one of the most beautiful in the state, where the relics center of Sri Aurobindo has been founded in the middle of a pond. The school has also a beautiful play ground for children. Like Nabodyama all this has been built with the voluntary and devotional labor of teachers, members of the managing committee and students. It seems in this school both the teachers and managers consider themselves as spiritual partners in their conjoint striving for creative and child-centered alternatives. The school has committed young teachers such as Pradip Bhai and Basanti Apa who work with children from dawn to late night and whose enthusiasm is really contagious. During my visit they told me that they interact with students as friends. The school has a hostel where students from far off places stay but the school has also a large proportion of students who come from the local area. It is a dream with the activists of this school to make the school self-sustaining in such a manner that no poor student will be returned from the school because of lack of funds. Their objective is to build an integral university where there would be classes from "K.G. to P.G." under one roof.

The integral school in Chandbali is called *Divyadhama* where the school has a relics center. The school is approximately 10 kilometer away from the integral school at Kolha. This school was established in 1992 and Mrs Nirupama Nayak is one of the founders of this school along with her late husband. Nirupama Apa and her husband were earlier in Basta, another small town in the district of Balasore, when interested followers of Sri Aurobindo and Mother took the initiative to establish a school. Nirupama Apa had left her studies long ago and was a fulltime housewife when she was called upon by the local *pathachakra* to be the principal of the integral school to be founded in Basta. In a moving autobiographical essay Nirupama Apa tells us how she became a teacher of the integral school and started offering her whole life to the cause of integral education. She had forgotten much of what she had learnt but she taught herself. Over the years she also learnt to be caring and non-violent towards the children. She comes from a high-caste background and initially she used to maintain distance from the low-caste students. Even she was not directly handing over the slates to low-caste students of her school lest she would touch them. But one day a scheduled caste boy came running and told her that he does not know to do subtraction of sums. Tells Nirupama Apa: "On seeing the pure and sinless face my whole being was moved and the trace of casteism and untouchability that I had got melted."

Kalpana Apa is a deeply meditative teacher in this school and she tells us some of the difficulties teachers like her go through. As they do not get much salary from the school in order to survive they would have to do tuition. So they do not have much time for their own self-study and self-growth. Because of financial problem, they are not even able to join the teachers training programme conducted by the New Life Education Trust, the

co-ordinating body of all integral schools of Orissa. Kalpana Apa believes in the free progress system and does not believe in imposing anything on children. She has a colleague who has got five-year training in the free progress system of integral education at Mirambika, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Delhi Branch. Kalpana Apa has a deeply meditative personality and when one talks to her one cannot but notice the field of intensity that she creates.

Is the pedagogy of integral education confined to the integral schools only? When we meet with young enthusiastic activists of integral education such as Ashok Bhai and Bina Apa we realise that integral education is slowly becoming a wide-spread cultural and pedagogical movement where we can embody integral education in our relationship with each other and with the students without uttering its name. Ashok Bhai works as an officer in the local State Bank of India, Chandbali, and has been part of *Suhrut Gosthi* for the last ten years. Ashok Bhai met his wife Bani Apa in one of the Suhrut camps. Bani Apa was first working as a teacher in the integral school of Matrupuram and now works in a Government primary school. There she applies method of integral education and slowly this is having an impact on her other colleagues. They moved to Chandbali in 1996 and in the mean time brought to the world two beautiful daughters. Even though there exists one integral school in the town Ashok Bhai, Bani Apa and some enthusiastic friends have started another small school called *Ananya—Different*. They send their children to *Ananya* which combines child-centred education with aesthetic education. Ashok Bhai and his colleagues have taken a piece of land in the middle of a paddy field and they are eager to build a cultural and educational centre there. Ashok Bhai is keen to sensitize the parents and guardians of the locality about treating and teaching children with love and care.

During our luncheon meeting Ashok Bhai told me: "Education is a means of self-development." We then proceeded to the neighboring village of Chandbali where Ashok Bhai works with the village high school. The high school has been working in the village since 1992 but has not but obtained Government grant. The teachers are working without any salary. Earlier, as the common practice all over the state, students of the school were going to tuition masters of the locality after the school hours. They had to pay exorbitant tuition fees to those outside tuition masters. Ashok Bhai suggested that instead of students going to the outside tuition masters, the teachers of the school can take coaching classes in the morning and in the evening. The money that students used to give to the tuition masters could be shared with the school teachers which would help them to keep their body and soul together. Students would also get quality education from their own teachers. Much more than that the extra time they spend together would help them to establish further intimacy and deepen their solidarity. Ashok Bhai reaches the school early morning at 7.00 to take his classes in mathematics. He then comes back home covering a distance of six kilometers, has a quick bite and rushes to his office in the local state bank.

Ashok Bhai has built up a devoted team around him and there is both firmness and

suppleness in his method of organizing. When we talk to him, we see a fire of dream in his eye. He is moved by a sense of mission, of belonging to an alternative movement. He is critical of the *pathachakra* and integral education movement of Orissa where Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have been made objects of ritual worship. He and the members of the *Suhrut Gosthi* to which he belongs are now trying to overcome routinisation and ritualism that has crept into the Sri Aurobindo movement in Orissa and want to make the movement a people's movement where all seekers should have the same recognition and encouragement and where the movement is a vehicle for self-development and social transformation rather than a means for accumulation of social prestige and ego-aggrandizement. There are two different kinds of educational movements now--one is integral school and the other is *Saraswati Sishu Mandir*. *Saraswati Sishu Mandir* is being run by the agents of the Sangha Parivara and has close affinity with the Hindu fundamentalist groups. For Ashok Bhai, parents and guardians in the local community are looking for an educational alternative and for them these are the two alternatives. But in *Saraswati Sishu Mandir* there is an effort to brainwash the small children into a fundamentalist mode. But it seems there is a contestation between integral schools and *Saraswati Sishumandir* in the local communities.

Ashok Bhai is a member of the managing committee of another innovative integral school in the locality, Matrubiha integral school in Kadabarang. Laxidhara Bhai, Mr. Laxidhara Pal, who has founded this school was part of Sri Aurobindo Student Mission when he was in his college in the late 60s. His children were studying in the integral school at Markona (Mahendra Bhai's school) in the 1980s and few years later in (1988) he could not resist his spiritual temptation to start a new school in his village. He himself has been working as the headmaster of the village Government Middle school right after his graduation for the last twenty six years. But he is not satisfied with the education imparted in the Government high school. He also realized that though he is the headmaster of the school his ability to make changes in the school is limited. In order to create an alternative space of being, becoming and learning, Laxmidhara Bhai founded this school with support from his father (who donated land for it) and some villagers. Laxmidhara Bhai comes everyday to the school after completing his duties in his Government teaching job and works as laborer in the school campus doing a variety of chores--constructing building, cleaning the cowsheds, catching fish and watering the plants. Laxmidhara Bhai has given his blood and sweat to the school but in him there seems to be no trace of possessiveness. He is no more the secretary of the school managing committee, he has offered this position to a fellow villager who was once a great opponent of the school. Laxmidhara Bhai has made himself totally available to the integral school of his village as well as to the integral education movement of Orissa as a humble servant. In his *Essays on Gita* Sri Aurobindo has spoken about the life and works of a divine worker and when one spends a moment with the activists of integral education such as Laxmidhara Bhai who are silently working in the remote corners of the state without any craze for name and fame, one comes reassured with a feeling that the

divine worker is not only a lofty ideal, it is also a reality. It can be made a reality in our lives if we offer ourselves to a cause beyond our own ego-aggrandizement and preoccupation with securities.

Laxmidhara Bhai is known in the circle of both Suhrut Gosthi and the integral education movement of Orissa for his humor, sometimes titillating youthful humor but this is just an iceberg. Beneath this lies a depth of wisdom—a wisdom born of years of struggle to build the school and a commitment to integral education. Taking inspiration from Chitta Bhai, he says that he has opened his school to the village. He himself has founded two other educational institutions—Kadabarang Girls' High School and the BEd Training College but because of politicking in these institutions he has resigned from these educational institutions.

Laxmidhara Bhai does not want to be confined to his school only. He wants to move around in the circle of integral education in Orissa and wants teachers of integral schools to have an all-Orissa perspective. He is also an involved, connected critic of the integral education movement: "There is bossism here. If integral education is a reality in Orissa, it is because of the work of the *Apas* (sisters / female teachers). Ninety-five percent of teachers of integral schools are women. But where is the recognition of their labor and sacrifice?"

One woman who has worked hard and struggled quite a lot with Laxmidhara Bhai is Malati Apa—Ms. Malati Jena. Malati Apa comes from a very poor family background and had not completed even her high school when through a series of circumstances she landed in the house of Mahendra Bhai in Markona. She had not taken her food for one and half day the day she landed in Mahendra Bhai's house in September 1978. Mahendra Bhai provided her succor and when Matrupuram school was started in July 1980 Malati Apa looked after the kitchen and the cowshed. But when she was observing the students and teachers of the school, her desire for learning got rekindled. She also wanted to be a teacher instead of being a cook. She completed her high school in 1983 and slowly started teaching in the integral school at Markona. I had first met with Malati Apa when we had assembled for the first summer camp of interested readers of Sri Aurobindo and Mother in May 1984. But after four years Malati Apa had a dramatic turn in her life. She was carrying a child, a gift from the love she had with a fellow teacher of the school. Some how the marriage between the two could not take place which was partly due to Malati Apa's devotion to an alternative life and not to be bound by the conventional systems of marriage. But under this circumstance she was no more a welcome in the Mutrupuram integral school in Markona and Mahendra Bhai, a strict disciplinarian as he was, wanted to say goodbye to Malati Apa. At that point, Laxmidhara Bhai whose children were then studying in Mahendra Bhai and Malati Apa's school came to Mahendra Bhai and said: "She is my sister. I wish to take Malati Apa to my house." During this critical juncture, Chitta Bhai and members of Suhrut Gosthi were with

Malati Apa and the child to come. When she came Chitta Bhai probably could not have chosen a more appropriate name for her than *Preetisikha*, flame of love.

I had met Malati Apa and Preeti Sikha together for the first time in a children's camp in 1999 and a year later it was a joy for me to watch Preetisikha grow into a beautiful and inquisitive human person. She was then in her 7th standard and she was the reader of the class. She is very good in geography, music and songs.

Malati Apa's case shows the difficult pathway through which integral education movement in Orissa passes and in this love, mutuality and sharing have been the capital with which fellow travelers proceed. Because of poor financial condition, teachers of integral schools have difficulties in getting married and setting a household. But some sympathetic leaders of the movement such as Chitta Bhai do not judge the relationship between male and female teachers of schools with the yardstick of conventional morality.<sup>8</sup>

Malati Apa has already worked with integral schools for the last twenty-one year. She is now struggling with an inner discontent. She is sad that in integral residential schools such as Nabodyama, Markona and her own, it is the children of rich parents who can afford to study. But how to make integral education a process of freedom and enlightenment in the life of those who are poor? She acknowledges that with the generous support of Laxmidhara Bhai she can give free studentship to four-five deserving students every year but she thinks this is not the solution to problem of affordability and access to integral education on the part of the poor.

Integral education is a pedagogy of love and the loving relationship between the teacher and the taught is its distinctive characteristic. But what is the place of beating in this pedagogy of love? Malati Apa tells that in the initial years she was beating the "wicked students" sometimes mercilessly but not now. Now, it is becoming difficult for her to gauge who is a wicked student. For her, every child is a ray of potentiality. In Dharendra Bhai's much acclaimed Nabodyama integral school, there is still the persistence of beating in which, according to an insider, both male and female teachers participate. But it must be noted that in the past in Nabodyama Dharendra Bhai has taken stance against continued merciless beating done by one teacher. For Dharendra Bhai, sometime teachers have their frustration against the management including the frustration of not making enough money and they take it on children. Finally, the concerned teacher who was beating children mercilessly in Nabodyama had to leave. But there is still beating in Nabodyama as in some other schools. One way to understand this is that teachers of integral education do not take a doctrinaire approach of non-beating but through the dialectic of love and beating slowly develop themselves and adopt a non-violent approach. Even the legendary Chitta Bhai has beaten, sometimes, mercilessly young children when he was the Director of the Institute of Integral Education in Bhubaneswar. So there is a dialectic of love and beating, violence and non-

violence in the practice of integral education but what is certainly a distinct ray of hope here is that this dialectic is characterized by critical self-reflection. The teachers who beat children in integral schools do not defend beating as a mode pedagogical engagement and pathway to success.

During my visit to Kadabarang integral school, I had a very touching conversation with Sabita Apa, a devoted activist of integral education. She was earlier working as Principal of the integral school in Markona but she left on some ground of principle.<sup>9</sup> But she now wants to go back to the Markona school, the school which is the mother of all the integral schools in the locality. She told me with tear in her eyes: "I have given my best to that school. I wish to still do all my best to set that house in order. This is my school, my home. I want to recreate as a beautiful garden and make it an exemplary place where people from all over Orissa would feel attracted to come."

The striving for creative education that goes in the paddy fields of the remote village of Kadabarang is incomplete without listening to the enthusiasm of Fakir Bhai. Fakir Bhai is a good artist and he comes every Saturday to the school, covering a distance of more than twenty kilometers, to teach painting and drawing to the students. Integral education and creating a condition of love and sharing is very dear to Fakir Bhai's heart. There is a commitment in Fakir Bhai's eye and this commitment gets expressed not only through ideological rigidity but through heart-touching smile and humor. On this point Fakir Bhai shares a lot with Laxmidhara Bhai whose cousin sister he has married. But it is integral education which has transformed Fakir Bhai from a status-seeking son-in-law to a loving seeker for a new path of a education and a shared subjectivity. It is the actors like Fakir Bhai who constitute the seeds of hope in the integral education movement of Orissa.

From the integral school in Kadabarang let us come briefly to the integral school at Ganeilo in the district of Cuttack. The school is part of an Ashram and teachers here stay and work as Ashramites. Minaprava Ojha or Mina Apa says: "This is my goal, my home. Integral education is an inner quest with me. The *karmis* (the Ashramites) here carry a higher mission. However, those inmates of the Ashram who are not open towards truth leave on different excuses. They are not able to resist the temptation of the outside world." The teachers in the school look at themselves first as spiritual *sadhakas*: "We realize that instead of being a hard task master we have to become a helper and a guide for the children which would facilitate the development of their inherent qualities." She also tells us that the co-operation of the guardian is vital for integral education. Because of non-cooperation from the parents of day scholars, the school wants to make it fully residential. Mina Apa further says: "... despite one's all limitations, if one has accepted the path and seeks God's help then she is able to contribute to the working of a higher force in her life."

Ganeilo integral school has multiple activities—diary, stores, canteen, orchard, *gobar* (cow dung) gas plant etc. All this is being manned by the teachers. Do the teachers of Ganeilo integral school have any feeling of insecurity about their future? An Ashramite brother replies in the negative: “All this depends upon what you value in your life. If your goal is *sadhana* and this is your way of life than you do not need much money for this.”

### **Institute of Integral Education, Bhubaneswar**

This was the first school of integral education in Orissa. Let us meet with some of the devoted activists of integral education in this school. Let us begin with Milli Apa. Milli Apa comes from a well-to-do family background. Being immersed in integral education for the last thirty years, she had not had time to get married and start a settled family life. But she makes it clear that her decision not to marry was not a sacrificial decision. The school has two senior spinsters--Milli Apa and Jyotsna Apa—and both of them make it clear that not marrying has not been a sacrificial act on their part; rather it has facilitated in their lives a more joyous participation in Mother’s love and integral education. Milli Apa has a special sense of mission that by participating in integral education she is contributing to the evolutionary transformation of humanity. Every child has an inner truth and integral education strives to express it. “Suppose a small child is doing painting and her father comes from the office and tells her to stop painting and do mathematics as she is not doing well in this subject. This is antithetical to the spirit of integral education. Here the father is not realizing that through painting the child is striving to express herself and if she does well in painting she would do well in mathematics also. Whatever interest the child has—if only we can enkindle it as a flame.” But this calls for living by the ideal of integral education rather than just beating its drum. This also calls for co-operation between students and teachers. It is helpful if the school becomes residential as students and teachers can spend a lot of time with each other but in a metropolitan city like Bhubaneswar it is not easy to make the entire school residential.

Milli Apa says that integral education is the education of the future. “In the school we practice the art of sharing with our students. During *tiffin* break we share food with each other our *tiffin*. In our schools we do not encourage competition among students. Those who are better students are encouraged to help the weaker ones.”

As we shall see shortly, the pioneering integral school in Bhubaneswar is now going through a lot of difficulties. A major difficulty revolves around the conflict between the teachers and management on the issue of teacher’s salary and job security. A court case is now pending in Orissa High Court on the issue of suspension of a supposedly errant teacher from the school. The whole teaching staff is divided into three groups—pro-management anti-management, and neutral. Those who are with the management have given a written undertaking to the school authorities that they are not employees of the

school but devotees and for their work they will not legally demand for a regular salary on a fixed scale of pay but an honorarium. Those who are fighting against the management want a much more secured service condition and democratic accountability from the school authorities. Only four or five teachers who occupy a neutral ground and they strive for a reconciliation. But to come back to Mili Apa, for her, these difficulties do not mean that all is over with the experiment of integral education and the flame is out. No she is optimistic. Whenever she feels depressed the face of her children takes her out of such a slumber and despondency. To those of her colleagues who fight her suggestion is “Yes, we must not accept any injustice but there are different ways of fighting injustice. We should never make the children the scapegoats for our struggle. We should never skip their classes. What is the mistake that the children have committed and why should we penalize them? We should never forget that children are our sources of inspiration.”

Satyabhama Apa is a colleague of Milli Apa in the school and is the principal of its Kindergarten section. She has been with the school almost for the same time as Milli Apa. Satyabhama Apa gives us a glimpse of many intimate striving that constituted the experiment of integral education in Bhubaneswar in the early days. She says: “Earlier we used to go regularly to children’s homes and interact with the parents on every Sunday. Through such home visit we were also able to observe the behavior of children and the attitude of parents. We used to tell the parents to regularly pray with their wards. We were telling parents to spend more time with children and also involve themselves in their studies.” But she is not able to continue this home visit any longer now. In the early days the school was in the heart of the city so distance was no bar. But now the school has been shifted to Khandagiri at the far end of the town. The number of students has astronomically increased now and definitely there is the difference of a generation. Thirty years ago teachers like Satyabhama Apa were young, mostly single, and they were fired with a zeal--the zeal of working with an alternative educational and cultural movement. But now a process of routinization has set in so that the striving for the ideal could be spoken of mostly in past tenses.

Another story from the past that deserves our attention here is the way teachers were then spending their vacations. According to Satyabhama Apa: “We were using our vacation time for self-enrichment and self-development. There was a number of seminars, conferences and workshops on integral education. There was summer teachers’ training program for a month. We were getting very little money but the management was making our participation possible.” Seminars and conferences still continue but for most of them these are no more fields of creative self- growth and slowly it is becoming a ritual. To energize integral education in this domain a new experiment in radical dreaming and intersubjectivity has emerged such as the study-cum-work camp of *Suhrut Gosthi*. In this interested seekers of a new way of life meet for ten days twice a year during summer (May 22 to May 31) and winter vacations (December 22 to December 31), study the works of Sri

Aurobindo and the Mother and offer their devotional labor in completing a concrete project of construction and reconstruction such as digging a pond in an integral school, or constructing a school building or constructing a boundary. If participation in conferences and workshops is declining on the part of some, especially the old timers, the new entrants and the young are taking part in such alternative modes of experimental sociality and the discovery and realization of meaning made possible by the study-cum-work camp of *Suhrut Gosthi*--the Friends' Collective.

We shall have more detailed description of the vision and experiments of Suhrut Gosthi a little later but as we are in the integral education school at Khandagiri, Bhubaneswar we must have a spiritual fellowship with Rabi Bhai. Rabi Bhai is a young man and his radiance and equanimity is truly inspiring and one would think that it is much ahead of his age. Rabi Bhai was in touch with the Pathachakra movement in his remote village in Bahadrakh and during his childhood. He came to Puri for his higher studies. After completing his post-graduate studies in English he got in touch with Prapatti. This initial contact with Prapatti was a turning point in his life as he describes it in a heart-touching book of poems of him entitled *Smrutira Samuka—Shells of Memory*. He joined the integral school at Puri and then like most of the radical youths of Orissa came in close personal touch with Chitta Bhai and slowly took integral education as a vocation of his life as his *brata*. In the process, adding to the sadness of his many admiring friends, he has forgotten to get married.

Rabi Bhai is currently the Principal of the Institute of Integral Education, Bhubaneswar and it can well be appreciated that this has been a thorny task for him as the school is now ridden with factionalism of various kinds. But Rabi Bhai is a creative seeker and he strives to embody love and mutuality in his relationship with students, fellow teachers and the non-teaching staff. For example, he addresses lower rung workers of the school such as the peons as brothers and this plays its part in the making of a relational revolution which is the other name of integral education.

Rabi Bhai is a soul-touching composer of poems and songs. As we have earlier noted, an alternative educational and pedagogical movement calls for alternative music and song and Rabi Bhai's songs are sung in many integral schools. His songs like "*Ananta Premara Parabara Tume Mo Jeevana Belabhui, Bipula Taranga Barabara Taba Jaye Mote Chuichui* [You are an ocean of infinite love, your vast waves touch me time and again]" touch the innermost core of those who sing and listen. He has composed many children's songs also which go a long way in creating an altitude of respect to children. In one of such songs, a child sings:

*Jedina sikhili chaka gadai*  
*Chitara Anki Au Gita Mu Gai*

*Jedina Sikhili Gachare Chadhi*  
*Kabita Anki Au Nai Pahari*  
*Sokhibara Maja Kahire, Siikhibathu Maja Nahire*

[The day I learnt to run my wheels  
to draw my painting and to sing  
The day I learnt to climb the tree  
to compose a poem and to swim  
Where is the fun other than learning  
That is no greater fun other than learning]

Rabi Bhai is an active participant in the Suhrut study-cum- work camp. There he leads the study of the books of Sri Aurobindo and Mother and also the singing of *Rabindra Sangeeta*. Rabi Bhai also visits the youth groups in different parts of the state and leads the study of Sri Aurobindo literature. While the earlier generation of integral school teachers are going through a process of routinization new generation of actors such as Rabi Bhai are bringing new creative energy to the movement in the process preparing to make themselves much more worthy instruments of the Divine.

In my work with the integral school in Bhubaneswar I had discussion with some other teachers who bring us to the ground and urge us to understand the difficulty of practising integral education in a metropolitan context where parents are competitive and their only adored value is the value of success. Pratap Kumar Mati teaches English in the school and he loves teaching his subject in a systematic and involved manner. For him, teaching English is not summarizing in Oriya what is written in English but teaching the language--use, grammar, syntax and so on. But this is what the tuition teachers of the market do not understand. Parents are sending their wards to tuition and in a place like Bhubaneswar it has become a craze. So, students are now overburdened with classes. They study in the school and before coming to school and after the school hours they are sent to tuition classes most of which are group tuition classes. Says Mati: "The tuition masters do not give individual attention and in the school itself because we have large number of students we are not able to give individual attention." Moreover, says Mati: "The student is "sandwiched" for time from both the sides. He has no time to play and to think. He has no time for reflection." Speaking of the predicament he faces because of tuition class, Mati tells us: "I tell my students not to study the subjects in English in advance because when students know the subject in advance, as they do as in most group tuition classes, they complete half the syllabus itself in the summer vacation, they lose the charm and sense of wonder when I teach the same subject in the class. But the greatest danger comes from the fact that the tuition masters are not experts in any subject, they do not have love for the subject. They cannot instill in the children a love for subject."

Mati shares with us his understanding of the distinction between conventional education and integral education. In mainstream education, the only education that is emphasized is mental. In his words: “But in integral education we are sensitive to both the education of the physical and the vital.”

One of the alumni of the integral school in Bhubaneswar has now joined the school as a teacher. He is Mr. Sachidananda Parida. He has joined the school out of his choice and love for the Divine Mother. His parents are also members of *Pathachakra* in their village. He could have opted for business life and earned more money but that would have, as he says, destroyed his creativity. As he does not get much from the school by way of salary, he has a small part-time business of making of *rakhi*.

### **Integral Education Movement in Orissa and the Wider Environment of Influence and Interaction**

The actors of integral education movement of Orissa have a vibrant and emotionally inspiring link with Sri Aurobindo Ashram Pondicherry. In fact, in the both the movements, Babaji Maharaj and Prapatti, two *sadhakas* of Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry Ashram have played an important role. Prapatti had pleaded with Mother to start this special work in Orissa--first the *Pathachakra* movement and then the integral education movement. During his life time Prapatti led this movement. Most of the actors of the integral education movement are devotees of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and they draw inspiration from visiting Sri Aurobindo Ashram and having a glimpse of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education. Many of them come to spend time during vacation in the Ashram and discuss pedagogical issues and experiences with the educationally inclined *sadhakas*. For example, during our discussion Anjali Apa of Gopinathapur integral school was telling me that she comes to Sri Aurobindo Ashram every summer. Now she is collaborating with a *sadhaka* of the Ashram in preparing a text book in Sanskrit for the primary as well as secondary schools. The writings of Manoj Das, internationally acclaimed educationist and short-story writer, are also a source of inspiration to the integral education movement in Orissa. *Nabaprakash*, the magazine of *Navajyoti Karyalaya*, the department of Sri Aurobindo Ashram dealing with Sri Aurobindo's work in Orissa, also plays an important role in working as a connecting link among the actors of integral education.

In recent times, actors of integral education also have established a vibrant link with the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Delhi. This got started with the holding of the first all India integral education meet at Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Delhi. In the meeting Prapatti had suggested that the Delhi Ashram can open a teacher's training programme in which teachers of integral schools of Orissa can take part. With this in mind the foundation of Mirambika, the innovative teachers' training programme and centre for creative children's education, was led. Over the last twenty years many young people of Orissa have joined the Mirambika

teachers training programme of creative and child-centered education. Sulochana Didi, earlier Principal of the Integral school in Gopinathapur, has been with Mirambika right from the beginning and she has certainly played a foundational role. A sociologist in Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, who is currently carrying out a research project on innovative education in India says: "It is the teachers from Orissa in Sri Aurobindo Ashram here who are so committed and they provide the soul to its educational programmes."

Let us listen to some of the engaging voices Mirambika. Vijaya Bharati has been with Mirambika almost from its inception in 1981 / 1982. Bharati says: "Integral education is the answer to the deepest seeking in your life. If you want to be a teacher awaken your deepest self and also touch the soul of the students." For Bharati, in integral education what is important is not only communication but also silence. But for her, "silence is not keeping mum; in it we see another part of ourselves." For Bharati, the role of a teacher in integral schools is that of a facilitator. "I am not the only information provider. Let the student also seek for answers and let her involve the parents in the whole process." She further says: "If I am teaching Akbar, Akbar should not be a dead historical subject. I would have to make him alive in my presentation. Akbar can be a factual person or represent a level of consciousness. During teaching we need to establish linkage between the soul of Akbar which was open to all religions and the soul of the children."

In one's relationship with children Bharati says integral education makes you more compassionate which for her is different from being sympathetic. This compassion is much more vital now as the world is much more complex and challenging compared to a generation ago. In her words: "The temptation of consumerism is much more now compared to when we were growing up. There are so many brands of pencils from which she had to make the choice. On the other hand, the child has to fight with boring teachers and boring parents." For Bharati, "Integral education is not an experiment but a test of faith. It is a faith that the child is not a thing but a soul which has come to the world for some divine purpose." "If I have forty students in my class I would have to realize that I have forty flowers in my garden and my role is that of a gardener only. I would not scream at the child when he breaks the glass. I would have to sit down with the child and understand that what made him do so. If a child hits another child then I would not just scream at him. I would try to find out why he has done so. If he has enjoyed hitting then it is a much more serious business."

Mirambika has been running a teachers training programme for the last sixteen years. Its objective is to prepare teachers who will bring the pedagogy of integral education to various educational settings—Government schools, integral schools and the non-formal schools. At some points, it had recognition from Devi Ahalyabai University, Indore for its B.ED programme but after the scrapping of private BED its teachers training programme does not have any recognised Government value. At some point, Mirambika was trying for some sort of formal governmental recognition for its teacher's training programme but it

proved to be full of so much bureaucratic hassle that Mirambika now proceeds on her own. It selects those who are genuinely interested in pedagogy of love and spiritual transformation of integral education. Says Bharati: "We are a teachers training college with a difference. Its time has not yet come but the time will certainly come."

Shila Didi is the principal of the Mirambika teachers training college as well as the innovative school. This has classes from the nursery to 7th standard then the school does not go by conventional standards. Mirambika does not have any fixed syllabus. It teaches through the project method and the free play system. Since the school does not follow any set syllabus those who send their children to this school undertake a lot of risk but they have trust in the whole process. For studying in Mirambika the monthly tuition fee is Rs.550. Children get their lunch in the school which costs one Rs.500/- per month and in addition to these, they also have to give a computer fee. Even the principal agreed with me that the poor cannot afford this.

During my first visit to Mirambika I could not sit down and spend more time with Sulochana Apa, the other member of the Mirambika core staff. Sulochana Apa was earlier the Principal of Gopinathapur integral school and she has been with Mirambika for the last twenty years. She says: "There is a much more wider environment of learning here. There was some limitation for the expansion of my mental horizon in Orissa and therefore I came here. But the situation here is different. Here teachers have a much vaster mental and educational background. This is important because in order to understand the vastness of integral education, one has to develop oneself much more mentally and educationally." But at the same time Sulochana Apa says: "In Orissa they give much more emphasis on the inner while here it is much more directed towards the outer. From the point of view of external environment there is a lot more scope here but for your own inner growth there is much more inner preparation in Orissa."

### **Frames of Co-ordination and Movements of Transformations**

From the beginning New Life Education Trust has been carrying out the work of co-ordination among the centres of integral education of Orissa. It has been establishing liaison with the Government as well as organize training for teachers. The Trust in the earlier years has spearheaded a struggle for autonomy on behalf of the integral education movement of Orissa. The Trust from the beginning has never been a controlling body issuing *diktats* and guidelines to the integral schools. It has envisioned its role as that of a facilitator and a co-ordinator. Of course it grants affiliation to the integral schools but it must be noted that there are some schools which have broken away from the Trust. The Trust has encouraged variation rather than stressed for mechanical uniformity. Prapatti thus aptly writes: "The second school came up at Rourkela in 1973 and the third at Sambalpur in 1974. Rourkela opted to have English as the medium of instruction. The other two had gone in for Oriya.

This brought in, almost those very first years, the necessity to decide whether these schools were to be developed in a uniform way under a single central management and supervision or each school had to grow its own way though always sharing the experiences of others and gaining from them. The second alternative appeared more appropriate" (Prapatti 1980: 24-25).

There are now 261 integral schools affiliated with New Life Education Trust and if we add to this many schools who have applied for affiliation the number will easily come to three hundred. I had a discussion with Mr. Ramakanta Sahu, the coordinator of the New Life Education Trust. Sahoo told me that the Trust has prepared one teacher's hand book for primary teachers and text books in English up to standard. The Trust is now working on textbook in other subjects and standards. This has become crucial as the integral schools have attained autonomy up to 7th standard. The trust organizes annual meet of teachers of integral school and organizes different educational meets both at the state level and the zonal level. The state of Orissa has been divided into seven zones for the purpose of integral education.

Fifty integral schools are now receiving some kind of Government support in form of grants. But managing this grant has become quite cumbersome and involves a lot of wastage of time and mental energy. Says Sahoo: "If we spend the same amount of time in mobilising resources on our own we shall do better. So we are telling new schools not to waste time in running after Government grant." This has also been the position of Chitta Ranjan Das from the beginning and he and the members of *Suhrut Gosthi* have worked with many integral school in alternative resource mobilization. Suhrut study-cum-work camp has dug ponds in many schools across the state and the concerned schools have started pisciculture. This has helped concerned schools in having an alternative source of income.

One of the continuing problems in integral schools is the distance between the management and the teachers. This has led to many difficult situations, in some cases different groups within management going to the court for control over the school and in other cases, like the integral school in Bhubaneswar, some teachers have gone to the court against the management of the school. There are also instances where members of the management committee have come to the school and physically assaulted teachers. In my discussion with Sahoo I was interested to know what the Trust is doing in these fields. Says Saho: "We are trying to bridge the distance between the management and teachers. We are organising an annual meet of members of management as well as the teaching staff as the meeting of the Mother's workers. We want to make both of them realize that their first identity is that of Mother's workers."

Babuli Bhai, Mr. Prasad Tripathi, is the secretary of New Life Education Trust. He is above fifty years of age but he has an inspiring youthful spirit. He works in the Census

Department of Government of India and works closely with the entire Sri Aurobindo movement in Orissa. Babuli Bhai was born into a poor Brahmin family and has gone through many trials and tribulations in his life. He takes seriously integral education as a striving in not trying what others have done but doing what others cannot do. He takes pride in the fact that integral education does not promote unhealthy competition among students as they do not take part in scholarship examinations.

There are various expectations of the Trust on the part of actors of integral education. A radical proposal comes from Dullu Bhai, the current secretary of the integral school in Markona: "Let the land and building of the school be registered in the name of the Trust, New Life Education Trust." He expands on this: "A major problem of integral school is the problem of egoism of the management. Because of this they are reluctant to change. If the trust can have the ownership of land and school building the builders of schools can not use those any more for their personal ego aggrandizement."

The other set of expectations revolves around academic direction and leadership. Now that there are so many integral schools and the movement has been at work for the last thirty years it requires a new direction. The Trust should be able to provide this. This point of view is most forcefully expressed by Anjali Apa, the principal of Gopinathpur integral school. She says: "Earlier academically more competent people were members of the Trust. But now there are not many people in the Trust to provide educational leadership. The Trust should also evince more interest in research on the pedagogy of integral education. The expansion of integral education calls for more research into different dimensions of integral education." But no such initiative is being taken by the Trust.

## **Suhrut Gosthi**

Suhrut Gosthi means a friend's collective or community. In the text we have referred to it many a time. It is a community of friends helping each other in their own development as well as preparing themselves to be worthy instrument of God's work in society. As has already been mentioned *Suhrut Gosthi* organizes study-cum-work camp twice a year in which interested seekers for creative meaning in life join together in studying the work of Sri Aurobindo and Mother and engaging themselves in a concrete act of construction and reconstruction such as the digging of a pond or the construction of a school building. This study-cum-work camp is called *Suhrut Sibira* or *Suhrut* camps. The Suhrut Gosthi and the Suhrut Sibiras are also creating deeper threads of connection among the activists of integral education in Orissa. It has created spaces of radical hope and enthusiasm. Without making noise it has sought in a quiet manner to provide a deeper opportunity for self development and development of a deeper mutuality of sharing and love. In another context, philosopher Emmanuel Levinas has written: "Ontology as a state of affairs can afford sleep but love can not afford sleep. Love is the incessant watching over of the other" (Levinas 1995). In Suhrut

Gosthi and in the life and thought of its main source of inspiration Chitta Ranjan Das one can see such a permanent wakefulness. There are innumerable difficulties in the field of integral education now but a major difficulty relates to a lack of personal and relational revolution in the life of the actors.

Traditional Orissan society is a hierarchical society and the onset of modernity in Orissa has not done much to destroy traditional feudalism and hierarchy. In the changing context of modernization and post-independent developments, the officers and power holders of society replaced the earlier feudal lords. The managers of integral schools belong to the affluent sections of society and most of them have higher position in the Governmental machinery. They continue to be bound to feudal attitudes and frames of relations. They look down upon other fellow participants on this movement of becoming. What has retarded Sri Aurobindo movement in general and the integral education movement in particular is the postponement of a relational revolution. In words of Chitta Ranjan Das: "No homogeneous school community is possible as long as the organisers and the teachers function as two different groups though it is formally professed that both have the same end. The organisers belong to the old society, they are somewhat successful in the old society and are people who matter in the old order of things. But there has been no personal revolution in their lives though they may sincerely wish a change and show sufficient gesture in favor of a change. One has to be very much in the process of change if one realises that there should be a change. Integral education in Orissa has yet to be freed of this dichotomy and come of age. Most of our problems are to a large extent those ensuing from this distance. It appears, a solution will come when both the sides really decide to grow. It is self-growth that engenders better understanding and annihilates the distances. The ideal will be when a whole group of people who have made a decision to take up an experiment live together on the spot very much in the pattern of an intentional community" (Das 2001). *Suhrut Goshti* has stressed to create experimental grounds for the germination and generation of a relational revolution and through this to create transformative webs of connectedness and mutuality among all concerned.

If New life Education Trust is the formal centre of co- ordination of integral schools, *Suhrut Goshti* is a node of co- ordination which lies on the margin and being on the margin it strives to interrogate the center not for ego-aggrandizement nor for acquisition of political power but for transforming the establishment of integral education in the direction of continued divine mobilization. After thirty years of work, a process of routinization has set into the Sri Aurobindo movement of Orissa and *Suhrut Goshti* seeks to create ripple in the still water of the pond by creating new waves of relationship and consciousness. *Suhrut Goshti* visits integral schools in different parts of Orissa twice a year but whenever it visits a school it brings a set of books to present it to the school library. In addition to building a common ground of well-being such as the construction of a pond in the school premises, the gift of

books to the school library goes a long way in creating an environment of enrichment in the school. Many of the teachers of integral schools have vulnerable financial position and are continuously stung by poverty. In case of a slight disturbance in their life space such as visitation of sickness or illness they have no where to go. To provide a ray of hope here the participants of *Suhrut Gosthi* have created a modest fund out of their humble contributions and efforts such as publishing book on behalf of *Suhrut Prakashan* or Suhrut publications. Suhrut Gosthi provides financial assistance to the needy teachers of integral schools in moments of crisis.

In this context the case of Mantu Bhai deserves our careful attention. Mantu Bhai was an enthusiastic young activist of integral education. He along with some of his friends from the village of Kanthibhauri--a remote village near the Bay of Bengal in the northern most tip of Orissa—started a school in Kanthibhauri. Unlike many of the integral schools we have met so far this school is not primarily a residential school as it has a large number of students from within the village itself. Mantu Bhai was a moving spirit behind his village integral school and he along with Kalapataru Bhai who is an innovative science teacher and Sabita Apa they transformed a desert of sand into an oasis. I had first met Mantu Bhai in May 1990 when the integral school at Kanthibhauri was hosting the Suhrut camp. But two years later Mantu Bhai was struck with a debilitating nervous illness. There was a bending in his neck and after sometime he became bed ridden. As this tragedy befell Mantu Bhai his family and the integral school of Kanthibhauri, there was great sadness in the entire circle of integral education in Orissa. Suhrut Gosthi mobilized resources and helped Mantu Bhai but Mantu Bhai could not survive this illness. Suhrut Gosthi organised its summer 2000 study-cum-work camp in Kanthibhauri in the memory of the inspiring struggle and dedication of Mantu Bhai.

But what is to be noted that the initial support for Mantu Bhai's medical treatment came from the selling of a book that Suhrut Gosthi had published and that Madan Bhai, one of the earliest participants in the Suhrut camp, had written. It was a small book entitled "Our children, our school." Over the last ten years, Suhrut Prakashan has published many books and it has published another book of Madan Bhai named *Jane Sikhkanka Kahani*, The story of a teacher. It is a story of Janus Korchak, the legendary doctor and loving friend of destitute children of Poland who offered to accompany his children to the concentration camp of Hitler. In the preface to this book Madan Bhai who is a medical doctor and an activist in the integral education movement of Orissa writes that when he was growing up there were simultaneously two ideals of becoming before him: to become a doctor and to be a teacher. From Janus Korchak he got the inspiration to combine both the vocations of a teacher and a doctor. Writes Madan Bhai in the first paragraph of his heart-touching preface to the book: "It was 1980. At that time I was a student of Revenshaw College, Cuttack. My youthful mind was in the whirlwind search for an appropriate ideal of life. I had passed

thorough many religions and social organisations since my childhood. For acquiring the confidence to serve people I was reading the biography of great men. But I was in a dilemma as to whether I should become a teacher or a doctor for serving people better. From my childhood seeing the Bengali compounder in my village giving injection to villagers I had a desire to become a doctor. But when I started knowing the world more and more the role of a teacher became more significant for me. At the same time I was also dreaming to unite both the lives” (Pradhan 1998). The life of Janus Korchak inspired Madan Bhai to combine the dedication of both a doctor and a teacher and Madan Bhai has been striving for this.

*Suhrut Prakshan* publishes books and its members bring copies of it--ten or twenty--to their respective villages and towns. They sell those books in the local communities and the proceeds home the sale goes to the enhancement of the humble *Suhrut Panthi*, the Suhrut Fund. Sometimes members do not take their task of selling books seriously which leads to stockpiling of books and sadness in the heart of enthusiastic Suhrut leaders such as Kumudini Apa (Mrs Kumudini Guru who teaches in a Govt. school in Bhubaneswar), Barendra Bhai (Mr. Barendra Narayana Sahoo who works in a bank in Cuttack) and Ashis Bhai (Mr. Ashis Pathy who works as a teacher in a Government primary school in Berhampur). Kumudini Apa is however not dampened in her enthusiasm and during a meeting of the mid-term Suhrut study circle in October 2000 in her own house in Bhubaneswar she told me that she now wants to donate some of her jewellery to the Suhrut Panthi.

Ashis Bhai edits the Suhrut journal *Suhrut* which is published twice a year in which many teachers and participants of the integral education movement of Orissa write. This handy journal has created a forum for critical self-reflection and discussion on integral education in Orissa. In one of the issues one activist writes how in some schools the management spends all the collected donations in building relic centres (relic centres are the places where Sri Aurobindo’s relics is kept. Many integral schools of Orissa as such as Chandbali, Kolha and Gopinathapur have relic centers in their campuses) were students and teachers study and teach under leaking roofs and when the teachers are not paid any salary for years. “In a recent issue Santosh Bhai (Mr. Santosh Kumar Panda of Dhenkanal Integral School) critically writes that in integral school not much effort is made to involve the parents in the decision-making process and in the evaluation of the performance of teachers. For Santosh Bhai, a deeper involvement of parents and teachers, instead of a mere tokenism, is a must if integral education is to overcome its many current difficulties—financial as well as relational.

In recent years, Suhrut camp is becoming a festival of togetherness and singing of *Rabindra Sangeet* (songs of Noble Laureate Rabindra Nath Tagore) early morning before dawn is an inspiring part of this festival. This festival is enriched by the mobile book shop that Bhagayadhara Bhai—Mr. Bhagyadhara Sahoo—establishes during the Suhrut camps.

Bhagyadhara Bhai brings bag loads of books on his sturdy shoulders. This provides an opportunity to the participants of the Suhrut camp to see many important books on life and light and to purchase these albeit on credit. Bhagyadhara Bhai's efforts to make Chitta Bhai's books available to the seeking community of students, teachers, guardians and managers of integral school establishes a connectedness of heart among all concerned. In the last four years Bhagyadhara Bhai himself has taken the initiative to publish many books on behalf of *Pathika Prakashan* (Traveller's Publications)—a publishing house that he has founded.

Bhagyadhara Bhai has a very humble beginning. He was thrown out of an integral school in Hindolo on some pretext. On getting resettled in Bhubaneswar, he and his family of four sharing a one bed-room apartment with his younger brother, he started selling life-enhancing books riding the bi-cycle. After many years of working as a vendor of books, the aspiration to publish books which would transform our mental blocks and the grammar of lives struck him deeply. This led to his starting of *Pathika Prakashana*. His journey and growth in all these years have been inspiring, especially the journey from a book seller on a bicycle to a publisher of books and the aspiration and activities of actors like Bhagyadhara Bhai create a new space of togetherness in the field of integral education in Orissa.

Overcoming of distance and creation of a space of genuine mutuality is the continuing challenge before the integral education movement of Orissa. Suhrut Gosthi is striving to make a difference in this regard especially in the line of distance that exists between managers and teachers. While by and large the leaders of integral schools come from an affluent background of position and power and hence impart an elitist character to integral education members of Suhrut Gosthi have a much more radical openness and are striving to give a dignified place to the poor, especially the poor teachers, in the scheme of integral education. Apart from the two annual study-cum-work camp it organises it also organises two day mid-term study meets and hosts an annual student meet.

### **Integral Education and the Spaces of Hope**

Primary and secondary education in India, especially in rural India, is in shambles now. The dismal situation in which we are in is movingly portayed by A. Vaidyanathan and Gopinathan Nair: "Eradication of poverty and illiteracy figured prominently in the political rhetoric of Indian nationalist movement even before Independence. Achieving universal elementary education within 10 years was included as one of the Directive Principles of State Policy in the Constitution of the Indian Republic. The rhetoric continues but the goal remains elusive even after 50 years of planning. Governments, both at the Center and the states, irrespective of their ideology, have not pursued this objective seriously and with vigour. Resources allotted to education have been woefully inadequate, and with higher education absorbing a rising proportion of allocations, elementary education has remained

on a semi-starvation diet. The idea of making legally compulsory for all children has not evoked much enthusiasm. Some states have enacted the necessary legislation but none has exerted itself to get the law enforced. The prospects of a dramatic turnaround in this situation do not seem bright” (Vaidyanathan & Nair 2001: 23). In this context, expansion of primary and secondary education for accelerating human development in India is on everybody’s lip now. Amartya Sen has been one of the leading votaries of such an agenda of education and human development. For Sen, an expansion of primary and secondary education is critical to the realization of autonomy and well-being of millions of people. This expansion is not possible without political mobilization for primary education on the part of the poor and the underprivileged. As Sen & Dreze tell us: “The more privileged groups, who clamour for further expansion of higher education, are politically much more powerful and better organized in pressing for what they want. Xx To counter this resilient stratification, what is needed is more activism in the political organization of the disadvantaged sections of Indian society” (Dreze & Sen 1995: 95).

But what is the pedagogy of this desired expanded education? And here is political mobilization, as important as it is, enough? Sen has not raised these questions and here the case of integral education movement provides us important lessons. This has been a movement from within local communities and civil society and this movement has drawn inspiration and continues to function because of spiritual mobilization of individuals and communities. A commitment to a higher purpose of life in which one wishes to be an errand in the evolutionary transformation of humanity, an evolutionary engagement however concretely manifested in loving and caring relationships with oneself and one’s students is a primary motivation behind innumerable young men and women of Orissa who have given their lives to this pursuit without much material gain in the process. Their pedagogical strivings teach us that it is not enough to have schools, what is important is to build a school which would be a school for the subject, a subject who is not subjected to multiple determinations of society and history, but a subject who contributes to the making of this world as a more beautiful and dignified place of being, becoming and transformation. Recently Alain Touraine has also spoken about the need for establishing a school for the subject but in Touraine, the subject is a subject of reason. The school that integral education movement builds is not only a school for the subject of reason but also a school for the integral human person whose full realization requires not only mental education but also physical, vital, psychic and spiritual. Our ethnography of this movement shows that the movement still has a long way to go in terms of radically interrogating and transforming power within and without but there is no doubt that it has made an important contribution to the development of a new education and a new pedagogy—a pedagogy which truly respects the integral person within the taught and contributes to her multi-dimensional unfoldment.

In his recent reflections on education and miseducation, Noam Chomsky raises

some fundamental questions. Chomsky regrets that schools have been agents of socialization and miseducation and avoid “important truths” (Chomsky 2000: 21). In this context, it is the intellectual responsibility of teacher—or any honest person for that matter—to try to tell the truth” (ibid). Chomsky further tells us: “One should seek out an audience that matters. In teaching, it is students. They should not be seen merely as an audience but as part of a community of common concern in which one hopes to participate constructively. We should be speaking not *to* but *with*. That is the second nature to any good teacher, and it should be to any writer and intellectual as well. Any good teacher knows that the best way to help students learn is to allow them to find the truth by themselves” (ibid: 24). Integral education strives for a practice of learning which is a practice of learning and discovering with and it is a striving to discover truth both within and without. The following lines of Chitta Ranjan Das contain creative response to the anxieties and concerns admirably posed by Chomsky about education and human destiny:

We have taken to education because we are convinced that it is primarily through education that a real beginning can be made towards desired change. We refuse to reduce education to a technique, to a system that can be run by a heartless band of people who have skills only. For us education is a whole job, a *sadhana* that claims the loyalty of the whole man. It begins by changing oneself before one sets out to change others. It means making oneself worthy of knowledge, power, truth and beauty before we at all think of making these available to others, especially to children (Das 1981: 8).

## Endnotes

1. The flexible body of integral education is different from the flexible body and body culture promoted by late capitalism where body becomes a flexible and ready instruments for the valorization of capital (cf. Martin 1994).
2. This is an ideal set by Das and in some schools we find a much more dedicated striving towards this. Still, as a whole, much needs to be done for following alternative method of evaluation and assessment.
3. Some of the enthusiastic and committed activists of integral education stress this much more emphatically. In a recent article, Mr. Santosh Kumar Panda, an activist of integral education and currently teaching in the integral school in Dhenkanal, writes that integral schools should take many more steps in involving the parents in the decision-making process of the school and here managers of the school must be prepared for a greater sharing of love, power and sorrows. As we shall see, in many schools, teachers still regularly visit parents which create a new bond of intimacy between two important actors in the lives of children—teachers and parents. In my recent fieldwork, I accompanied Anjali Apa, a deep and inspiring proponent of integral education and currently Principal of Integral Education School in Gopinathapur, Cuttack when she went in the evening to meet with some of the students who were to sit for their high school examinations.
4. Michel Foucault writes about it beautifully: “What strikes me is the fact that in our society art is now only linked to objects, rather than to individual or life itself. But couldn’t we ourselves, each one of us, make of our lives a work of art? Why should a lamp or a house become the object of art and now our own life?”
5. In the Pathachakra movement in Orissa, Prapatti and Babaji Ramakrishna Das or popularly known as Babaji Maharaj in Orissa who were staying in Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry have played an important role. To this the Oriya translation, more appropriately said, Oriya transcreation of the major works of Sri Aurobindo and Mother by Chitta Ranjan Das added a new momentum. Prapatti, Babaji Maharaj and Chitta Ranjan Das are three major sources of inspiration in the integral education movement in Orissa today. As we shall see, they have their differential nuances. Both Prapatti and Babaji Maharaj have passed away and it is Chitta Ranjan Das who is now striving to energize this movement making it still more child-centered and a vehicle of self-development and social transformation.
6. Rabi Bhai’s distinction between spiritual sensation and long-term spiritual commitment

finds support in the recent work of Robert Wuthnow who writes in his *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s*: “spirituality deepens only as it is practiced” (Wuthnow 1998: 170).

7. An example of competition is the way integral schools are extending their classes from 7th standard into high school without making proper arrangement for infrastructure such as science laboratory. As many schools in an area open high school none of them gets an adequate number of students.
8. In his recent work, philosopher of critical realism Roy Bhaskar (2000) has argued that non-judgmental observation, engaged action and unconditional love are the pillars of self-realization. Chitta Ranjan Das and members of *Suhrut Gosthi* in Orissa have been striving to embody this and with this to galvanize the integral education movement which at some places has fallen into beaten tracks of conventional morality and systemic roles of society.
9. Sabita Apa had left Markona integral school on the ground that one teacher of the school enjoyed unquestioned power because of her proximity to the management.

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