



DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

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BASIC EDUCATION
ITS PRINCIPLES AND
PRACTICE

BY

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WHAT IS BASIC EDUCATION

PART I—PRINCIPLES.



1. Why "Basic" ?—

There are fashions in words, just as there are fashions in clothes and jewellery. When a word becomes fashionable, people are very apt to use it whenever they can, without thinking about its real meaning or of whether it is, or is not, suitable in that particular place. "Basic" at present is such a fashionable word; it is therefore all the more necessary to stop and ask what it actually means, and then what it means when applied to education.

"Basic" is derived from the noun "base"—the foundation or bottom of a thing, that upon which the whole weight of an object rests, such as the base of a pillar or a lampstand, and the basement of a house. It comes first in time, and first in importance; unless the foundation is laid, the base prepared, the rest of the structure cannot exist at all; unless it is laid well, and prepared soundly, the structure which is built upon it will never be secure.

The current idiom of many languages bears witness to the supreme importance of a sound foundation. "Let us get down to rock-bottom", we say in English when we wish to build up an argument on unshakeable facts. The wisdom of practical men about rock-bottom foundations is appealed to in a famous illustration in the teaching of Jesus:—

A wise man . . . built his house upon a rock. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the wind blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell not; for it was founded upon a rock.

That brings us face to face with the final test of the soundness of our foundations—will they carry the superstructure safely through the storms of life? Will they stand up to practical daily wear and tear, and to the special stresses which we must expect as part of normal experience?

Now, how are these facts about the nature and testing of bases or foundations to be applied to education? They mean that when we describe a method of education as "Basic" we are making three claims for it:

- (1) That this education comes first in order of time.
- (2) That it is essential for the proper development of the higher stages of education.
- (3) That it will prepare individuals to meet the demands of actual life in the adult society of which they will form a part.

This is a general definition, and in this sense any good system of primary education, which meets the needs of the society of which it forms a part, is "basic" in that society. In addition to this the phrase "Basic Education", as it is used to-day in India, has special associations.

It is common knowledge that the "Basic Schools" at present existing in India are the fruit of an educational experiment inspired by Mahatma Gandhi, and directed by a group of experienced and able teachers who have pooled their knowledge, skill and devotion to implement his ideals. The oldest of these schools have now had from six to ten years of continuous development, and as each year of actual practice confirms the soundness of the educational principles which have been followed, their directors can now speak with assurance of the results obtained. Experiment continues—in a *living* community experiment will always continue—but the fundamental pedagogic assumptions of the Hindustani Talimi Sangh, which has conducted the central experimental school at Sevagram, have now passed out of the realm of experiment into that of proved and effective pedagogic method.

2. *The Basic Method—Learn by Doing—*

What then is the pedagogic method of Basic Education? From one point of view it is not new at all, but as old as the wisdom of mankind. It is, we may say, learning by doing—just as the children of the Stone Age learned their hunting, swimming and woodcraft, and as the children of remote forest tribes learn them to-day. No one has ever yet found a method of teaching any skill, whether swimming or the "three R's", by any other method than practical experience. Reading, writing, and counting cannot be learned at second-hand, but only by actually reading, writing, and counting for oneself.

Every sensible man knows this, and yet a lot of time is wasted in our schools by ignoring this elementary principle of learning. Our usual method of teaching the prescribed syllabus of personal and community cleanliness and hygiene is a glaring example. The children are told what to do—in words; they can, perhaps, reproduce these words; but they do not *do*, and so they do not *learn*: the theory is never carried into practice. Cobwebs darken the corners of the classroom walls; chairs and tables are dirty and stained; faded, unsightly remnants of last year's festival decorations hang there heavy with dust, matching the torn dusty maps and charts on the walls; outside in a corner of the compound lies a heap of miscellaneous rubbish, breeding its swarm of flies—and of the latrine the less said the better. In the midst of this sordid disorder sits a class of children learning, certainly not cleanliness, but words *about* cleanliness. Even if the classroom and surroundings are reasonably clean, in how many schools have the children shared in the routine of cleanliness?—and in how many schools has the rubbish, instead of being properly disposed of as the textbooks teach, simply been tipped over the compound wall, out of sight and out of mind, for chance and the flies to deal with as they choose?

This is a description of the state of things before the ideals of "Citizenship Training" were laid before the schools as a whole: the programme of the citizenship training course is very largely inspired by the pioneer work of the Basic Schools themselves, but

unless it is carried out wholeheartedly on the principle of "learning by doing", it will not succeed in teaching citizenship, but only words about citizenship. Actions, not words, must be the test.

Children in a Basic School learn cleanliness and citizenship by *practising* cleanliness and citizenship. The first hour of the school day is a scene of purposeful activity. Classrooms are swept and dusted, equipment laid out in readiness, garden paths weeded, inorganic rubbish burned, and organic rubbish, weeds, grass, etc., carried away to the compost pit. Every child has a job, works quickly and eagerly, and then runs to put his tools away, wash and line up for the daily personal inspection. The routine of *safai* is no burden but a natural and pleasurable activity.

The same principle is carried out in every subject. In our ordinary schools it is still not only possible but common to find children taught to do elaborate sums in visces and palams, measures and ollocks, yards, feet and inches, without ever learning to judge by touch and sight the actual weights and quantities involved. The boy who has done a botany course but cannot recognize the field plants of his own neighbourhood, and the girl who has "passed" in homecraft but cannot cook a simple meal, are unfortunately to be found in real life as well as in the comic papers; they are products of our bookish education. They have not *done*, and so they have not *learned*. Any one who is familiar with the actual school situation can think of many more examples for himself. Such anomalies are unthinkable in a Basic School. There the children learn to cook by cooking, learn Botany by gardening, and learn the weights and measures by the constant weighing and measuring which is involved in managing the kitchen, the store room, and the garden. The emphasis on "learning by doing", obvious as it may seem, leads to a revolution in practice when it is properly carried out.

3. *The starting-point—Natural interests.—*

Closely related to learning by doing is another principle to which much lip-service is paid but which tends to be neglected in practice. This is that knowledge should be presented to children in "psychological order", keeping step with the natural development of the child's interest in its environment, rather than in the "logical order" which any series of related facts, regarded in isolation from the rest of life, might seem to demand. For example, a textbook of Zoology for advanced students is written in logical order; beginning with the simplest forms of life known, it moves onwards through forms of increasing complexity to the vertebrates, the mammals and man. The textbook has a useful function, but no teacher worth the name would dream of using its method in introducing the subject to children. He begins at the point of their natural interest—cow, hen, dog, spider, tadpole, butterfly—and takes that as his guide in teaching. Good teachers in our ordinary schools follow this method to the best of their ability within the limits of the courses prescribed; but very few stop to ask whether the prescribed courses themselves, with their division of knowledge

into artificial separate compartments, are in line with the child's natural interests, or whether what he hears in school in any way increases his understanding of the fascinating world outside.

The Basic Education syllabuses are based on a consideration of the child's ordinary life interests. These can be thought of under three heads, the physical environment, the social environment, and the economic environment, though no hard and fast lines can be drawn between them. The child of five or six years old is interested in the living plants and creatures which he sees around him, and in all kinds of inanimate objects which he can manipulate and master. He is interested in people, in his parents, brothers and sisters, and in other children. He is deeply interested in how things are done—in dressing and undressing, sweeping, cooking, cleaning vessels; in how men plough and fish and weave, in the potter's wheel and the carpenter's hammer and saw. A large part of the "play" of young children consists in imitation of the adult activities of the community; they are happy and absorbed in an occupation which satisfies at one and the same time their love of manipulation, their social interests, and their urge to creative and productive activity.

It is this psychological fact, not any desire to exploit children for the labour market (as is often and unfairly said) that determines the place given in Basic Education to the practice of the crafts and skills of real life, especially those connected with the satisfaction of man's primary needs of food, clothing and shelter. Madame Montessori's insistence on the importance of real-life activities in the training of very young children is an illustration of the same principle, which is really another aspect of "learning by doing". When reading, writing and arithmetic are seen to be useful and desirable in the pursuit of real activities, they are no longer a meaningless school drill. Cotton and grain and vegetables have to be weighed and measured, prices calculated, profit and loss recorded, planks sawn to size and buildings planned. When gardening and farming become a serious enterprise, the soil and its variations, the different plants in all their stages, the birds and insects which are the farmer's friends and foes, the care of stock, the significance of months and seasons, are all readily seen to be things some knowledge of which is of urgent practical importance. The manuring of a crop, the planning of a home, the preparation of a loom, can all lead into very wide fields of knowledge and interest. The method has close similarities to what is known in western countries as the "project method", with this very important addendum, that the projects undertaken in Basic schools consist of work of vital importance to every human community.

4. *The Social Background—a co-operative community.*—

For all these activities co-operation is essential. The work of each year, each term, each week, must be planned in common, an agreed goal set, and the daily work of the group organized so as to

reach it. This entails a tremendous amount of discussion, and provides a magnificent opportunity for practical training in the art of managing the affairs of a democratic community. Not only so, but experience of a self-governing class and school community is a natural starting-point for the study of other civic groups and the way in which their affairs are managed—in a word, for all that field of human activity which we introduce to children as “social studies”.

Interest in society is closely related to interest in the periodic social and religious festivals, beginning with those with which the children are familiar in their own homes. These provide an excellent natural focus for another very important side of creative self-expression, namely, the right development of the emotional life through satisfying aesthetic experience. Music and dance, colour and design, acting and story-telling, and many beautiful minor crafts, can be carried on with additional zest and pleasure when they have their place in such periodic celebrations.

This in outline is the pedagogic method of the Basic Schools. In a sentence, it educates by experience of a life of productive activity in a community. In one form or another, this type of education has been in use since the beginning of history; it has been successfully followed in schools in many different countries. If Basic Education were nothing more than a pedagogic method of great and proven value, we should nevertheless be wise to adopt its programme in schools throughout the country. But it is much more than a pedagogic method and it is that “much more” which gives it unique significance to India at the present time.

5. *The ideals of Nai Talim.*—

The educational ideals which Mahatma Gandhi committed to the Hindustani Talimi Sangh were spoken of by him as Nai Talim—the New Education. He conceived of this New Education as a life-long process drawing out to its full extent the latent capacity of each individual at every stage of growth and maturity, literally from the cradle to the grave. The stage known as Basic Education, the training of children from the seventh to the fourteenth year, is only one part of Nai Talim, and the aims of the Basic School can only be fully understood when they are seen in relation to the whole.

6. *The school—the servant of society.*—

In order to appreciate the idea of Nai Talim we must turn to a fundamental educational question, that of the relationship between the school and the society which it serves. For the teacher is the servant of society; his job is to turn out the children of the community as the kind of adults which the community wants to have. What kind of adult does the community want to have? Societies vary in their conception of the ideal man, and their educational systems vary accordingly. Studies of primitive societies show startling differences in the ethical codes accepted by one or another

tribe, and each tribe "conditions" its children to conform to its own code. The indigenous educational traditions of India prepared the children of each caste by a system of informal apprenticeship to take their respective places as productive members of a stable organised caste society. In England, the Education Act of 1870 set up a school system which reflected the ideals of the individualist competitive society which was then in its heyday; and this competitive individualism characterised in general the education of the United States. France has been for a century the scene of a bitter controversy, which is only now being healed; there, two ideals of society are represented by two types of school—the Church schools standing for the religious interpretation of human life by Catholic Christianity, and the "secular" schools reflecting the agnostic or atheistic humanism of the Revolution. The "conditioning" of children's minds in school by the totalitarian regimes of Europe was a more deliberate and intensive use of the same principle.

These examples serve to show the intimacy with which school ideals are normally related to those of the community. In modern India, however, our position is somewhat unusual, owing to the historical circumstances which have moulded our education under British rule.

The educational system which has developed in India during the last century, and the prior place assigned in it to a command of the English language, was intended, as has been universally recognised, to supply the manpower needed for a vast and complex administrative machinery. The Governments, both central and provincial, demanded an army of bureaucrats and clerks, and the schools supplied the demand. It was inevitable that in schools and colleges English models should be followed, and that the content of their teaching should have a strong English literary bias, and be largely divorced from the traditions of the country as a whole. This type of education has gradually spread into every corner of the land, and it has in some ways done us great service, but it is in no sense national. It is not the natural product of our own traditions, and it was never designed to meet the needs of the vast majority of the nation who live in the villages. It is essentially clerical and middle-class. The time has come to replace it by a truly national system which will reflect and conserve the social ideals which free India will take as her guide.

7. *Whither India?*—

India has won her political freedom. Her destinies are now within her own control, and it is for Indians themselves to decide "the shape of things to come". It is urgently necessary that all intelligent ordinary men and women should give thought to the kind of society they want to see, for we stand at the parting of the ways, and it is not yet decided in which direction our society will move. We should not be content to leave such vital questions to the so-called "experts" for it is we, and our children, who will

benefit or suffer. We cannot merely let things drift, for India has already taken several steps on the road to industrial capitalism, and it is only too likely that the natural drift, if no active force intervenes, will be towards that system in some of its least desirable forms.

There are those who want India to model herself as quickly and closely as possible upon the lines of the large-scale, highly mechanised, centrally organised industrial order of the western nation-states—as Japan did two or three generations ago. Whether the order should be capitalist, socialist or communist they are not agreed, but on the desirability of large-scale country-wide industrial organisation they do agree.

These guides are silent about the intimate connection between this national power-industry and the devastating world-wars which have shattered mankind twice already in our own times. They seemingly do not hear the voices raised in warning. In India itself Rabindranath Tagore, that great champion of the common man's right to freedom, spoke in prophetic terms of the menace of the machine-state. In both Europe and America thinking men are increasingly concerned at the results of wholesale mechanisation of production—on the material side at the lunatic, suicidal exploitation and destruction of the world's natural resources of forest and soil; and on the spiritual side at the decline of the sense of personal responsibility and initiative the very foundation of democracy—brought about by mass employment, mass housing, mass entertainment. Men are manipulated in groups so huge that the individual is made to feel like a powerless pawn in a game whose moves are beyond his control. When someone foretells disaster he shrugs his shoulders fatalistically: What must be will be, he says.

It is significant that of all the countries overrun by the Nazi armies between 1940 and 1944, it was Norway, a little country of three million people, that offered the most stubborn psychological resistance to the Nazi ideology. A determined effort by the German authorities to "Nazify" the schools failed, though all the physical power was on their side, because thousands of teachers and scores of thousands of parents felt a *personal* responsibility and took a *personal* initiative to see that their opposition was made known. Freedom and democracy were *alive* in Norway: and it is worth noticing that the towns are few and very small, that the country is cut up into hundreds of narrow valleys, each of which is a natural social unit, and that a large part of the population are working farmers living on their hand.

That is why in India, many of those who care most that freedom and democracy should be realities, and not mere objects of lip-service, are urging the nation to choose as its guide, not these materialist power-philosophies, but the social ideal of Mahatma Gandhi.

8. *Gandhiji's Social Ideal.*—

For thirty years and more Mahatma Gandhi impressed upon the Indian National Congress his own concern for the welfare of the villagers and his profound conviction that no *swaraj* would be worthy of the name unless it resulted in a real betterment of their lot. The only sure guarantee of their welfare, to his mind, was the re-foundation of the whole of Indian society on the unshakeable rock of non-violence and truth. He called on his fellow-countrymen to establish a just, peaceful, non-acquisitive social order, and he proclaimed as their essential tool a New Education—Nai Talim—which should train men and women throughout their lives to take their place in such a social order.

Those who follow his lead want to see the nation organised politically, socially, economically, in co-operative units small enough for each individual man and woman to experience real personal responsibility for the welfare of the community. They want to see the balance between self-sufficiency and co-operative division of labour properly maintained. They do *not* want man's inventiveness and mechanical ingenuity, his accumulated scientific discoveries, to be thrown recklessly away; but they want them to be used by a truly democratic society for the benefit of all, and not monopolised, as is so often the case nowadays, for the aggrandisement of the few. In this conception of the desirable human society Indian thinkers find themselves at one with sociologists in the west who are putting before their own countries the advantages of the small community.

9. *A National Education.*—

Because, as we have seen, the schools both shape and serve society, the question of the education of the nation is one of the utmost importance in planning the kind of society we want. Many people, however, still tend unconsciously to think of education as the privilege of the few, and therefore to judge it by the special needs of the professional classes only, and from the standpoint of the university. We must learn to think of it instead, in terms of the whole nation of peasants, farmers and craftsmen, and from the standpoint of the needs of the village community and of India as a whole.

10. *Self-sufficiency and co-operation.*—

The twin watchwords of Nai Talim are self-sufficiency and co-operation. Self-sufficiency is the key to self-respect and fearlessness; the most precious gift that education can offer is the knowledge and skill which will enable a man to supply his own needs. In a narrow and limited sense our literary education has done this for the children of the professional classes only, in the sense that it has enabled them to obtain the certificate which "qualifies" for some salaried post; it has also presented us with the wretched spectacle of the "educated unemployed", unable to get the kind

of job which they know how to do, and unfitted by their very education to turn their hands to anything else. The farmer and craftsman have either instinctively rejected it as useless, or sought after it with the deliberate intention of becoming something other than farmers or craftsmen.

Even at its best, the "self-sufficiency" bestowed by a certificate is a very second-hand and unreal affair. The self-sufficiency aimed at by Basic Education is real, and the test of efficiency for school or individual is a concrete test—so many maunds of grain or vegetables grown, so many hanks of usable yarn spun, so many yards of wearable cloth woven. This is knowledge that will stand everyone in good stead, from the humblest workman to the most brilliant, intellectual and nothing but good will result from a more practical and widespread understanding among the "higher classes" of the ways in which their daily necessities are provided.

On the other hand, even when he possesses the skill, an isolated individual could supply his own total needs only with the greatest difficulty, and the experience of co-operative labour, "each for all competitive and all for each", is inseparable from the enterprise of production.

11. *Is a competitive system necessary?*

Basic Education, as part of Nai Talim, is thorough-going in its determination to replace the incentives of competition by those of co-operation. At present the spirit of competition is still far too prevalent in the average school, largely because parents and teachers, who have themselves been educated under the same system, cannot conceive of any other incentive. One is constantly told that children will work for a prize, or for the honour of being "first", or for a certificate, but that without these inducements most children would not work at all. The majority of teachers do not expect their pupils to be interested in a subject for its own sake. They consider it normal and natural that once the examination is successfully over, the information which it has demanded of them should be forgotten and the text-books discarded for ever. Why not? It is not knowledge or skill, but the marks in the certificate, that will get them a job.

Yet the terrible and shameful results to which this system of competition for external rewards is conducting us, are only too painfully clear. It invites and encourages bad blood, petty jealousy, and sheer dishonesty. Every year the examination season brings its crop of disgraceful incidents—strikes against "difficult" papers, "leakage" of questions, flagrant cheating in the examination hall, cowardly attacks on invigilators who dare to be honest, the appeal to the police. All upright and sensitive people must be deeply concerned about it. Schools in which such incidents are possible are no training grounds in non-violence and truth.

The whole theory upon which this poisonous system is based is a libel on human nature. It is flatly untrue that children will not

learn without an artificial stimulus. If the work itself is in line with their natural interests, if the approach is psychologically sound, they can and do work for the work's own sake, untiringly and with enjoyment. There are hundreds of schools where the children work with zest and pleasure in their work, where the standard of honesty is high, where the children learn in all kinds of practical ways the art of co-operation and the spirit of public service. There are schools which have demonstrated, by their refusal to make use of competitive prizes, of "rank in class" and all the other apparatus of artificial incentive, that such things are irrelevant and unnecessary to real achievement, even under the present system. All honour is due to such schools and their teachers, and they are rewarded by the respect and affection of their pupils. The tragedy is that their work is done *in spite of* the system which is imposed upon them, that they are fighting *against* the stream, that the influence of their noble ideals on their pupils is countered by the contrary influence of unenlightened public opinion and the downward pull of a less worthy tradition.

12. *The individual and the group in a Basic School.*—

In the processes of Basic Education, there is no setting of one child against another. Careful records are kept of the individual's progress, but the goals are common goals, and they are to be attained by the united effort of a group of children working together. Let us take as an example the treatment of the craft of spinning. It would be very easy to introduce the element of competition into such an outwardly individualist occupation; a teacher who makes the old false assumptions about incentives would set the little ones to "see who can do most", and call for a hand-clap or cheer for the winner. But in a Basic School the children themselves (with the teacher to restrain them from setting an impossibly high standard) have decided how much yarn they will *together* aim to produce in a week. At the end of each day's spinning they add up to find their *total group* achievement, and measure it against the goal they want to reach. If it falls short, everyone must try to do a little better tomorrow. This method affords endless practice in fundamental arithmetical processes in a way which is of immediate relevance to the child's interests, and it also puts the whole affair on to a completely co-operative basis. This is only one example. The very powerful influence of suggestion is at work throughout the school day, silently teaching the children that co-operative work is the normal, natural, right method of managing one's affairs.

Nevertheless, as has been said, the individual is not lost sight of in the group. The teacher keeps careful record of his progress in the various aspects of school life; and the child himself is required to keep his own individual record of the day's work, of the decisions of his group, and of his own plans, interests and achievements. The record, in its simplest form, begins as soon as he has mastered his letters. By the time he has completed his course the daily practice in self-expression on subjects within the range of his com-

prehension which is afforded by class discussion on the one hand, and on the other by the writing of his diary, has given him a readiness and clarity in oral and written exposition which is notably superior to the average of the ordinary school.

In this way self-sufficiency and self-development, and co-operation and community consciousness go forward side by side, and in these simple concrete ways the Basic School child experiences the essentials of democratic freedom, which is freedom within the limits of laws freely accepted for the common good.

13. *Education for a non-violent society.*—

Another aspect of Basic Education, and of Nai Talim as a whole, which is vital to the goal of a non-violent and truthful community, is the scale of values which is inculcated by the daily life of the school community. It is not merely that in the periodic celebrations the children are told of the heroes of truth and non-violence whose lives have enriched mankind and are taught to reverence them. It is not only that in daily prayers they are taught to pause in silence before God. These things are good, and they are a part of the life not only of Basic Schools, but of many others. But, in addition, the whole organization of a Basic School is a demonstration of what things are truly to be desired, what it is that forms the true wealth of man. Simple healthful food, clean and sufficient clothing, good shelter, good health, the pleasure of music and of rhythmic motion, the creation of beauty with one's own hands, the joy of friendliness and fellowship in work and play—these are the things that count. These make up the happy atmosphere of a good Basic School, and they far outweigh gold and silver, luxurious clothes, and artificial "entertainment". The "acquisitive society" continually expands its wants, and fights to satisfy them. The non-violent society knows what true wealth is, and being content with that, has no need to envy its neighbour.

The small village communities of India in the past, able so largely to satisfy their own needs and to control their own affairs, came near to the non-violent ideal. It is not yet dead in the heart of India. Nai Talim is the means devised by Mahatma Gandhi to revive it, transfigure it, and by conscious revolutionary purpose to make it the foundation of a new and stable Indian society.

14. *The Goal in view.*—

Let us recapitulate. Basic Education is part of Nai Talim, a plan of productive and co-operative activity covering the whole of life, and designed to shape and conserve a new social order based upon non-violence and truth. Basic Education covers the eight years of childhood from six to fourteen, and constitutes the first stage of formal school training. It lays the foundation of successful living both physically and mentally; physically, by the stress it lays on bodily health and cleanly personal and social habits, and also by the muscular exercise, control and precision which are

learned through manual labour and handicraft; mentally, by following out the principle of relating knowledge to life-needs, which enables the "three R's" to be mastered with less delay and more efficiency than in many purely literary schools, and also by instilling into the pupils throughout the whole of school life the mental attitudes of co-operation and social responsibility.

A boy or girl of fourteen years, healthy and vigorous in body, alert in mind, able to grow food and to make cloth, to cook and sew and keep the surroundings clean, able to perform the calculations needed for practical life and to speak and write clearly on many topics, to enjoy music and to appreciate beauty, has an excellent foundation on which to build *any* career one cares to name. Many of the so-called "higher" careers will call for several years of specialized further education, whether linguistic, scientific, technical or commercial. The child who has completed the Basic School course is likely to be *better* equipped to make an intelligent use of this further specialized knowledge, whatever it may be, than the average product of the passive parrot-learning which so often goes by the name of education. And whatever form our future society may take, there can be no doubt that India will need more than anything else reliable, co-operative, public-spirited citizens in every walk of life. Basic Education is designed to produce them.

15. *The new Education and the Public.—*

What then should be the attitude of the general public, who are the parents of the new generation, and of the teachers and education authorities, towards the measures which are now being taken to introduce the ideals of Nai Talim into the schools of the Province? It should surely be one of sympathetic support and *constructive* criticism. It is inevitable that some of the new Basic Schools will fall short of their high ideal. All schemes, however good in themselves, have to be worked by ordinary men and women who are liable to errors of judgment and suffer from the same human failing as the rest of mankind. No one knows better than the sincere teacher himself how far his achievement falls short of his ideal, and because he is sincere he welcomes helpful suggestions and criticisms. He has a right to expect that those who judge his work should take the trouble to study its aims and understand what he is trying to do.

16. *The New Schools and the Old.*

Teachers and inspecting officers can, if they will, do work of immense value in supporting the new education. There is no need to feel that because the schools where one is working have not yet been officially reorganized as basic schools, therefore there is nothing that one can do about it. The recent reorganization of school courses, with the emphasis on crafts and gardening, on citizenship training and social studies, has been inspired by a desire to spread as quickly and widely as possible the principles of learning through productive work and co-operative community

living. Large areas of these new syllabuses can be correlated easily and naturally with the productive activities of the children and so presented to them as a unified purposive whole. It lies with the teachers to make or mar them by the spirit and method in which they are handled. It lies with headmasters and inspecting officers to encourage intelligent experiment and elasticity of treatment so that a living correlation of interests is secured. Real success in this reorientation of the general school courses to the Basic ideals, with encouragement of every possible exchange of experience and information between the fully Basic and the "ordinary" schools, will be the best possible way of dispelling misunderstanding and of preparing the way for a more complete adoption of the Basic programme.

17. *Towards a Co-operative Community.*—

Finally, all teachers, parents and public servants who are convinced of the rightness of the co-operative ideal of society, and the need to train our children to accept it, should consider in detail those features of present day school life which contradict that ideal, and should see that as far as their influence goes, these features are eliminated. The matter of community cleanliness has already been mentioned; it furnishes abundant contradictions. Then, we may ask, do we *need* competitive school prizes? How far are our inter-school sports competitions, *in actual practice*, having a healthy moral effect? Can we devise changes in our methods of examining progress and assessing work which will lessen the marks-value of parrot-learning and increase that of intelligent understanding? Can we establish real parent-teacher co-operation and sensible reform in the planning of "homework", and establish a constructive common policy to combat the use of "Bazaar notes" and the misuse of the system of private tuition?

These things are not remote from a discussion of Basic Education; they serve to indicate a wide range of practice which is at present unthinkingly accepted as natural and inevitable by large numbers of people, but which is neither natural nor inevitable, and which is directly opposed in spirit and outlook to the ideals of Nai Talim, and therefore to the just and peaceful social order which we desire to see. Any reform in these fields, any step which brings the activities of the school into a closer relationship with the needs of ordinary life, and which replaces competition by co-operation, is a real step in the right direction. By the immediate and progressive improvement of our established schools, and by strong and enlightened support of all Basic School experiments, we can bring nearer the full realization of Nai Talim, and of the society which Gandhiji called "The India of my Dreams".

PART II—PRACTICE.

Pen Pictures of Schools at work.

I have a small friend, J.P. She and her mother are sitting next to me in the bus on our 20-mile journey home. J.P. crouches near the outer edge, her eyes on the road, her face shining with pleasure, counting—counting the furlongs, the mile stones, the lines of bullock carts, the herds of buffaloes—counting anything that can be counted, for the sheer delight of counting. At home, she scrambles round the hill side collecting sticks and twigs. “Look what I’ve made, three brooms—one for you, one for Amma, one for me See come and see, I’ve swept the yard”—and indeed most thoroughly had she swept the yard, lifting things up, replacing them, going into all the corners. A little later she perches herself on the corner of the kitchen table. “Do let me cut up the vegetables too.” (Guests are heard approaching as we work. “You go and talk to them (grown-up talk, in English, is merely dull to J.P.), I’ll cook. I can cook.” The duties of hospitality over, I return; a bedaubed and sticky, but happily triumphant J.P. awaits me at the kitchen door; the vegetables bubble in the pot. After much pleading on her part, and with some adult anxiety as to probable damages, she is allowed to handle a small garden knife; the result is a set of straight rods, stripped and peeled with commendable skill and neatness, assembled on a flat bit of clean ground. J.P. is completely absorbed—she is building a house.

This is how one small girl, just old enough for the first grade of a Basic School, spends her free time and her holidays, of her own free choice. Every one who knows children well, or remembers his own childhood, will know that she is typical. This zestful interest in cooking, cleaning and construction is the rule, not the exception. She is also typical, alas, in having no Basic School within reach to which she can go, and in the fact that in the school to which she *does* go practically no use at all is made of these keen active childish interests; not even the zeal for counting is intelligently directed, and manual work is non-existent.

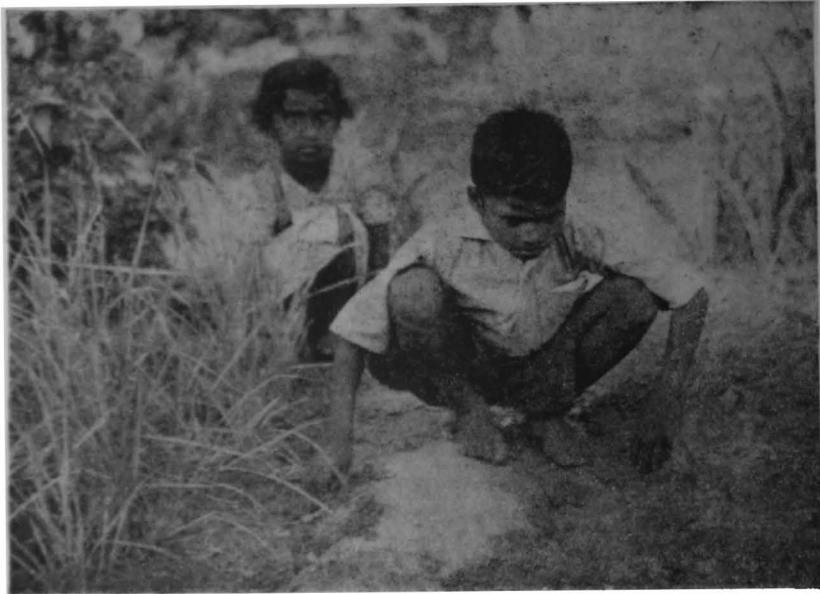
THEY SWEEP TO THEIR HEARTS' CONTENT.



Some of J.P.'s. contemporaries—four, five and six years old—are attending a “pre-basic” school. They sweep to their hearts’ content, they collect kindling, they help to prepare and cook their “kanji”, they polish their tumblers, they sit and eat together, and put their work away. They clean cotton, picking out the round black seeds, counting them in rows of ten, in squares of a hundred, and then planting them in a tiny garden, and building a tiny fence. They emulate their elders in twirling the *takli* too, and all the time their muscular control and co-ordination is growing stronger and more delicate. Like a good nursery school in any country, the “pre-basic” school gives them the healthful open-air life, the balance of rest and activity, and the ordered security which little children need; it gives them these things without the use of any equipment which would be foreign to their own home traditions or beyond their parents’ financial reach.

* * * * *

**SOME CLEAN THE GARDEN PATHS OF WEEDS
AND GRASS.**



The Basic School is a long, low, simple building standing in a couple of acres of land. There is a small, neat flower garden, a well, a simple movable latrine with *tatti* walls. There is a village a few fields' distance away; within a mile, in another direction, is a second village. Children come straggling across the fields into school, boys mostly, but even in this "backward" area a sprinkling of girls too. They get out brooms, buckets, garden tools. Some sweep, dust, and arrange the class-rooms, laying out equipment in readiness and order; some clean the garden paths of weeds and grass, hoe the beds, sweep up dead leaves, carry away the refuse to a compost pit. They direct their own work and the teachers are little in evidence, though they too are arriving and preparing for the day's work. A bell rings; the tools are put away, the children gather, neat and orderly, in an open space for their morning assembly. There is quiet, a simple song of worship, quiet again. The Headmaster reads the notices for the day. A boy of ten years, elected leader for the week, gives the word of dismissal. Classes are beginning.

Here are the youngest, the first-grade children. Their *takkis* and winding frames are ready—each frame has a little piece of paper stuck on its face. Near the teacher, in front of the class, is a box of cotton and a pair of scales. The children come in and settle down to work; the teacher calls out two of them and sets them to

weighing the cotton, on the scales, supplying the little parcels to their class-mates as they are needed. After they have had a little practice, another pair takes their places. The others spin; when a child's *takli* is full yarn, he goes up to the teacher and she helps him to count the rounds as he winds them on to the frame, and then watches him record the correct number on the paper. Another child comes up, then another; then, in a pause, the teacher turns to the weighers and sees that all is well there. These are beginners—there is intense and happy concentration on the mechanics of spinning. The talk, the physical activity, the number of games based on the work, the singing and writing and other social enterprises, will come a little later in the day.

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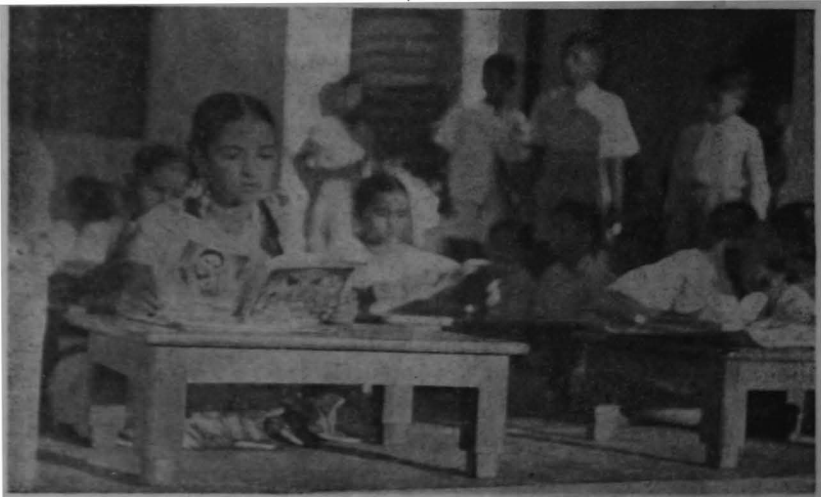
MORNING ORDERLY DUTIES.



Grade 2 has begun work differently—there is no hard and fast time-table. These children are intensely interested in their *safai*, in the names of tools and processes involved in it, and in the mechanics of reading and writing. The teacher is skilfully riding this wave of enthusiasm, and oral and written composition is in full swing, based upon the morning's orderly duties. After three quarters of an hour, may be, they will be busy ginning or carding.

GRADES 3 AND 4 ARE SKILFUL WITH THE TAKLI.

Grades 3 and 4 are skilful with the *takli* and are beginning to learn the *charka*. As their skill grows, there is no need for all their powers to be absorbed in the process itself, and here we find teacher and children talking over local and national news while they spin, or discussing the geographical distribution and cultivation of cotton, or learning a new song together. In the next class they are introduced to some of the processes preparatory to weaving, and in grades 6, 7 and 8 the looms are installed and the children's yarn is woven into cloth.

THE LITTLE LIBRARY IS A POPULAR ATTRACTION.

By the time the children reach the fourth and fifth grade they read with ease and enjoyment. During the midday recess the little school library is a popular attraction, and many children settle down to read a book or magazine. Others wander round the garden counting the fruit. The biggest of the young trees, planted by these same children when they were little beginners, are bearing now, and if you are lucky enough to visit them at the right season, you will be charmingly offered a handful of treasured guavas, and told of the great day when the whole school feasted and made merry over its own groundnut harvest.

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WATERING THE GARDEN.



Every Basic School has a garden, but some are planned so that gardening and agriculture take the place of weaving as the central productive activity of the older children. Seven acres of land surround one such school, providing both wet and dry cultivation, as well as the neat vegetable plots which the little children tend. As we draw near, one sunny August morning, the rice fields near the school building are alive with little boys of ten and eleven, planting out their rice seedlings and revelling in the mud. A class of older boys is going out to cultivate its vegetable garden. Two large fields, planted with maize and sugarcane, complete the picture; the maize, a fine crop, is nearly ripe, the sugarcane is vigorous and healthy. These fields are the great pride of the older boys, for every process, from the first ploughing to the wearisome, necessary routine of guarding the crops, has been done by their own labour.

The work in the fields has not been an unthinking rule of thumb routine. The children have learnt something of the different varieties of seed, and chosen their strains to suit local soil and

conditions. They have studied fertilizers, and they know how much seed and fertilizer they need per acre of their land, and how much the initial outlay on their fields must be. They know what interest they would have had to pay on this capital, supposing they had had to borrow, as their fathers might do, in the local market. They know something of the opportunities for cheap credit. They know the current prices offered for the crops they are ready to sell, and are prepared to calculate their yield and their probable profit. In other words, the enterprise of raising a crop of maize has been the natural focus of much study of botany, soil chemistry, bacteriology, arithmetic, and economics, much practice in exposition, both in speech and writing, and much experience in co-operative organization and equitable division of labour.

Nor do these young farmers accept, unquestioned and untested, what is stated in books and other authorities. They experiment for themselves. Here in a corner are twelve neatly labelled, equal rows of sugarcane. These, the children explain, represent an experiment in which they are treating three different strains of cane by four different methods of manuring; their growth is being observed and the results recorded; at harvest time the yield of each of the twelve rows will be measured and compared.

It is not surprising that practically every farmer in the neighbourhood now sends his boys to school and sees that they go regularly.

* * * * *

A WASH AND BRUSH UP.



The workshop in one way is a busy place, with some two dozen boys of 21, in twos and fours, in all manner of occupation. couple sawing planks: "What are you making?—cots for ag of stel." Others are turning table legs, some one else is mending markas, others making penholders, handles for garden tools, shelves, windows, all manner of homely, useful carpentry. Another whole section is working in metal—bolts and nuts, hinges, simple field and garden tools and household utensils. They offer to supply bolts at an anna each—and say that they would cost four annas in the market town. They repair spindles, and supply all manner of small necessities and conveniences for the building and equipment of school and home.

These boys too have studied the nature of their materials and the economic conditions of their craft. They know something of local timbers, their qualities, their seasoning, their price, and how they can be most profitably worked. Their knowledge of their trade is intelligent and experimental, and their knowledge is not limited to their trade. In the classroom, for example, a keen discussion of national and local government is being carried on, involving a considerable study of modern Indian and British history. Their daily diaries, neatly written and clearly arranged, make a pleasant and interesting record of a great variety of activities.

* * * * *

THE TEACHER IS TELLING A STORY.



It is afternoon. The teacher is telling a story. It is a great story—of the Buddha's tenderness and compassion, or the Christ's heroic love, or the Prophet's courage for Truth. When the story ends there is spinning—a little period of silent spinning. It is quiet, the hands have steadying occupation, the minds, many of them, dwell on the story they have heard. The growing spirit is

nourished in silence. It is fertilized together: ten minutes later there is shouting and laughter. One acre garden is watered or a drama practised for next week's festival.

* * * * *

The festival day has come. In the evening we walk over to the village, conducted by some of the children. On the out-skirts is a simple but adequate latrine. "We made that", our hosts explain, "like the ones in school." Here and there are the beginnings of little vegetable gardens "like the ones in school." The village is clean—the whole school community has been out in the morning to make it spick and span. A team has been busy cooking, and the feast is ready in an open space. The children and their guests sit down and eat, all of them together, whatever their caste or creed. Their parents do not join them—such doings are too new and strange, and they will not easily change their ways. But they look on, not hostile, but interested and pleased, and they muster strong to see the entertainment that the school has prepared for them. Here and there the seeds of a new India are sown, and germinate in silence.

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SCHOOL MEAL.



Perhaps it may be said, the pictures are too bright. No, they are real pictures of real schools and real events. But the schools are very few and scattered, compared with vast area and population of India, and many of them struggle against many and great difficulties. That the struggle is worthwhile, no one who has seen their work and understood the spirit which inspires it, can ever doubt.

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