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Jakob Erle in front of the UN headquarters during the annual DPI/NGO Conference
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Tagore, Gandhi and Freire synthesising their educational thoughts with that of Grundtvig: Viewed from a third world perspective

Asoke Bhattacharya, India

Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783-1872), Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) and Paulo Freire (1921-1997) are four epoch-making thinkers of the last two centuries. They were pioneers of people's enlightenment in Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America. The movements they initiated in Denmark, India, South Africa and Brazil found universal acceptance.

Grundtvig is considered the father of adult education. His concept of Folk High School conceived as 'school for life' against the 'black' school or 'the school for death' is also the forerunner of the modern concept of lifelong education. His idea regarding democracy and popular enlightenment is undoubtedly the answer not only to despotic regimes in many third world countries but also so-called 'democratic' rules in which the guardians of 'democracy' usurp all the wealth and power and the broad masses, the downtrodden and oppressed, perpetuate in poverty and ignorance. The root of modern-day Scan-

dinavian socialism can be traced to Grundtvig's thoughts. Folk High School and Cooperative Movement which emanated directly from Grundtvig's idea of education charted an alternative path to development and social progress - a non-violent path to peaceful societal transformation.

Tagore's concept of education, vocational skill development and rural reconstruction found adherents not only in the countries of the Indian sub-continent but beyond. Every year visitors and students all over the world throng Santiniketan, Tagore's University, to learn first hand how his ideas found fruition in his own land.

Gandhi started his political, social and educational movement in South Africa. Historically, his was the first movement of enlightenment in that continent. He, of course, continued his struggle on his return to India. His social philosophy - particularly *Sarbo-daya*, *Satyagraha* etc. - became powerful tools of struggle in the hands of activists all over the world. Needless to mention that his concept of educa-

tion is closely related to his social philosophy.

Paulo Freire, though initiated his crusade for the pedagogy of oppressed in Brazil, his native land, found worldwide acceptance among the poor and the oppressed as well as among renowned thinkers in Europe, America and Australia. He himself experimented with his pedagogy in many countries across diverse continents. His theories of conscientization, liberation and humanization are unique additions to the philosophy of education.

In this article I will briefly discuss the essential thoughts of Tagore, Gandhi and Freire and identify their philosophical proximity. We would also ask ourselves whether it would be possible to find a synthesis of their thoughts with those of Grundtvig so that educationists of the Third World could apply it in the concrete reality of their day to day existence.

Rabindranath Tagore

To understand the full significance of Tagore and his philosophy of education, one has to appreciate how he is ad-

judged by his own people. Buddhadeva Bose,¹ a well known poet writing in 1948 referred to him as a "phenomenon". "Rabindranath", he said, "was our Chaucer and Shakespeare, our Dryden and our equivalent of the English translators of the Bible..." Krishna Kripalani,² biographer of Tagore wrote, "Essentially a poet, Tagore was much more than a poet... he shed light and warmth in his age, vitalized the mental and moral soil of his land, revealed unknown horizons of thought and spanned the arc that divides the East from the West". Ketaki Kushari Dyson³, an eminent Tagore scholar said that Rabindranath Tagore's achievements, by any criterion, were outstanding. She went on to say that he was a pioneer in education. "A rebel against formal education in his youth, he tried to give shape to some of his own educational ideas in the school he founded at San-

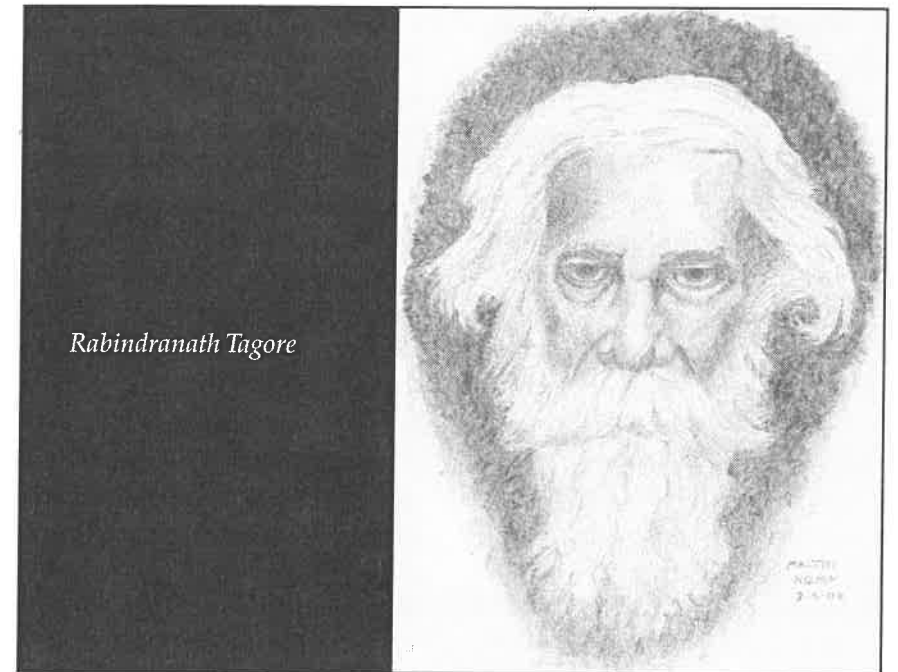
tiniketan in 1901... To his school he added a University Visva Bharati, formally instituted in 1921... in Sriniketan, adjacent to Santiniketan, he started an Institute of Rural Reconstruction..."

Rabindranath Tagore was born in 1861 to an illustrious family of Bengal. His father Debendranath revived Brahmo *Samaj*, the reformed Hindu religion shorn of superstitions and obnoxious practices, after the death of its founder, Raja Rammohan Roy (1782-1851) who's principal associate Dwarakanath was Rabindranath's grandfather.

Born in a large joint landlord family and brought up by many servants and maid-servants, Tagore learnt the stories of the Indian epics - the Ramayana and Mahabharata - from these illiterate people and greatly appreciated the wisdom of these simple folks. Tagore was admitted to a normal school in his early childhood. The un-

couth teachers used vulgar language in the classroom. They were rude and rough with the children. Tagore expressed his displeasure about these teachers in later years by portraying some of his well known characters in the short stories drawing on his childhood memory. He was equally disgusted with the habit of private tutors who had the uncanny ability to turn unique literary pieces into most uninteresting subject matters. Tagore changed schools a number of times over the years until finally he ceased going to school at all. Thus the greatest Indian of the 20th century, on whom at a later date many Institutions all over the world conferred honorary doctorates, did not possess even a school-leaving certificate.

However, by great insight Tagore understood the malaise of the prevalent Indian education system. He came to express the view that the mo-



ther tongue should be the only vehicle of imparting real knowledge in the schools and colleges. In a colonial set-up, education through English would produce an English-speaking elite isolated from society. It is well-known that Grundtvig and Gandhi held the same view regarding the medium of instruction.

Tagore wrote a number of articles on education in his late 20s. These writings were widely accepted by the Indian intelligentsia for their thought-provoking arguments against many aspects of the colonial education system. In an article on education written in November 1892,⁴ he expressed his opposition to learning by rote in order to cross the hurdle of examination. He also pointed out the utter futility of learning through a foreign language, marked by the absolute absence of imagination in the child.

In his early 40s Tagore thought of developing a system of education in line with the ancient Indian tradition of Brahmacharya where a student would be educated in harmony with nature in the residence of the guru, away from the affluence and distraction of city life. One could find the echo of Kold⁵ in the Tagorean scheme. Tagore founded the *Brahmacharyashram* – the school – at Santiniketan in 1901.

In a concurrent article Tagore emphasized the need to organize country fairs which would bring together entrepreneurs and consumers to bridge the gap between people's needs and innovati-

ve solutions and thus to give rise to a national awakening and self-reliance.

Tagore always believed in sustainable development. He felt that development could be brought about not from above but by the effort of each individual dedicated to a national cause. He despised big talk and little action. In 1905 a great political movement took shape against the partition of Bengal. In this period of political turmoil the British government issued a number of black circulars to restrain the students of schools and colleges from joining this movement.⁶ To protest against these repressive measures, some educationists contemplated developing what was termed national education, through establishment of national schools; and the idea was mooted of establishing a National University. Many national schools were organized at various locations in Bengal. Tagore was fully supportive of these ideas although he doubted how many of these mushrooming institutions would stand the test of time.

During the movement for restoration of unity to Bengal, Tagore started his own movement for self-reliance. He took a number of measures in his estate in this direction. He firmly believed that in a country like India, with an overwhelmingly large rural population, self-reliance of the rural people was the most important weapon for achieving self-sufficiency. In 1905 he founded a cooperative rural bank with the participation of local peasants. It may be

pointed out that cooperative concepts had not yet gained ground in India. He also started a night school for adults in a village of "untouchables".

The movement for repealing the partition of Bengal also witnessed widespread boycotting of British goods. Tagore felt that without a viable alternative the movement would fizzle out. He therefore started a school for the revival of the Bengal handloom. All these programmes were to be incorporated in the Visvabharati University which came into being later. In 1907 under a village improvement programme he took the initiative in the construction of roads, the digging of ponds, the clearing of bushes and such. He believed that *Swaraj* (self rule) called for all these and also for a raising-up of the so-called lower strata of the society. His activities in regard to development of village infrastructure, formation of cooperatives, introduction of labour-saving machinery in agriculture, development of diverse cottage industries, diversification of agriculture and such earned the wrath of the British colonial administration against his *Brahmacharyashram* at Santiniketan. A circular was issued to restrain government servants from sending their wards to his school.

In 1913 Tagore received the Nobel Prize for literature. He kept the prize money (British Pound 8,000) in the cooperative rural bank he had created, in order to boost the local economy and help the development work which was being

carried out in the rural community.

In 1916 Tagore initiated a village development programme in his estate in North Bengal.⁷ His scheme consisted of :

- 1) Improvement of health and hygiene of the rural people with measures to treat the ailing in the village itself.
- 2) Organisation of the village library.
- 3) Construction of roads, digging of ponds and wells and clearing of bushes.
- 4) Protection of peasants from money-lenders.
- 5) Resolution of local disputes through negotiations.

These programmes had a direct relationship to his own scheme of things at Santiniketan. His concept of Visvabharati evolved out of his concept of development'. In all other countries', he wrote, 'education had a link with the life of the people. Only in colonial India', he lamented, 'was education linked up with qualifying for a waged livelihood. Where the peasants were producing, where the oilseeds were being crushed, where the potter's wheel moved, and our education did not reach there. The reason was that our universities did not have any root in our soil. If we really had a national university, this would utilize its knowledge in such areas as economics, agriculture and health, for the development of the village and the people residing there. This university would employ superior methods in

agriculture, animal husbandry and cottage industries, and would develop economic self-sufficiency through cooperation. All these would bind together the students, teachers and the local community'. He declared that Visvabharati, established in 1918, would be such. And he realized these ideals when on February 6, 1922, he established the Rural Reconstruction Wing at Visvabharati.

Tagore's Institutions

Tagore's conception of education has been reflected in the various practical applications he has made. Therefore, it will be worthwhile to study these institutions to get a comprehensive idea of Tagore's thoughts.

A. Brahmacharyashram

On December 22, 1901 Tagore inaugurated his school at Santiniketan, in the district of Birbhum, Bengal. To start with there were only five students and as many teachers. His eldest son was also one of the students. Three among the teachers were Christians. The school did not attract many students though boarding and tuition were free.

The life in the Ashram was simple. The students had to attend all their needs themselves. They had to sweep the floor, and keep things in order. The food was simple and vegetarian⁸. All instructions were given in the mother tongue to help the child express freely and happily⁹. The idea of teaching through some form of activity and craft was implemented here long before Mahatma Gandhi devised his *Nai Talim* or Basic Educati-

on.¹⁰ The classes in Santiniketan were held in the open, under the trees, in close proximity with nature. The students were encouraged to study and love nature as it unfolded over the seasons.¹¹ Music and fine arts refined the child's emotions and sensibilities and these were parts of the curriculum.¹² Emphasis was laid on community service and corporate action.¹³ Finally, Tagore was opposed to rote learning and burdening the young minds with too many books.

B. Visvabharati

The foundation was laid on 22 December 1918. On the same day, three years later, the University was formally inaugurated. But it was far from his intention to create it in the model of the West—Oxford or Cambridge, for example. It was rather like a Nalanda or Taxila of the Buddhist period.

Tagore believed that on each race was laid the duty to keep alight its own lamp of mind as its part in the illumination of the world. To break the lamp of any people was to deprive it of its rightful place in the world festival. Once India had this lamp. The time came to rekindle it so that it not only illuminated its own courtyard; others were invited to partake in it. The lamp would glow more brightly by absorbing the radiance of other cultures.¹⁴

The constitution¹⁵ designated Visvabharati as an Indian, Eastern and Global cultural center.

C. Sriniketan (or Institute of Rural Reconstruction)

On February 6, 1922 Rabindranath inaugurated the Institute of Rural reconstruction. As noted earlier, Tagore realized the problems of the rural folk in the 1890's when at the age of twenty nine he took charge of the family estate in East Bengal. He started a literacy center cum library for education of the village community. He initiated there experiments relating to cooperative farming, common water supply, network of roads and other programmes of village development, and empowerment. Tagore had urged, through numerous articles and speeches, the effectiveness of organizing rural fairs for development and dissemination of local art and craft. In Tagore's scheme of things, folk songs and plays had a vital role in keeping alive the cultural traditions of the rural community. He wanted villages to be developed as self-supporting units with schools, workshops, granaries, co-operative stores and banks.¹⁶

Way back in 1906, he sent his son Rathindranath and another young man Santosh Mazumder to study agriculture at the university of Illinois-Urbana. On their return, they were put in charge of the land purchased at Surul village, adjacent to Santiniketan, in 1912. They confronted apparently insurmountable problems in setting up a model farm: suspicious villagers, dense jungle, attack of malaria, substandard soil,

droughts and floods. The reconstruction effort received momentum when Leonard Elmhirst, a British agronomist from Cornell joined the team in November 1921. From February next, the Reconstruction wing started functioning as a unit of Visvabharati.

During the next few years, numerous educational, cultural and developmental initiatives were undertaken in the villages around.

Four general areas: agriculture, craft and cottage industry, village welfare and education were taken up for immediate attention. The agricultural unit included farming, vegetable gardening, orchards, dairy and poultry, sericulture and fishing. Crafts and cottage industry wing sought not only to rejuvenate the existing local industries but also create new industries, innovate artistic designs and crafts such as leatherwork, tailoring, carpentry, lacquer work, raw silk production, pottery, tile making, cane work, embroidery, book binding and so forth. The village welfare department looked after rural health. With a dispensary as a base, cooperative health societies were founded to provide health education. The villagers were also provided with limited amount of free treatment. Educational initiatives were implemented at all levels. By 1929 night schools were established for both children and adults in twelve villages. Rural circulating libraries were also created.¹⁷

The Sriniketan experiment incorporated all that Tagore had visualized. It was a holi-

stic development programme meant for individual and social as well as material and spiritual growth.

MAHATMA GANDHI

Gandhi was a great genius of enlightenment who could reach almost every household of the nation. Under his leadership, the spirit of India was aroused. All of Gandhi's movements had deep social connotation. Gandhi's educational ideas were unique. Since the establishment of the British rule, educationists and thinkers condemned colonial British-imposed education as unreal, inadequate, rootless, shallow, alien, demoralizing and denationalizing. Gandhi condemned it in moral terms – 'conceived and born in error, nurtured in sin'.¹⁸

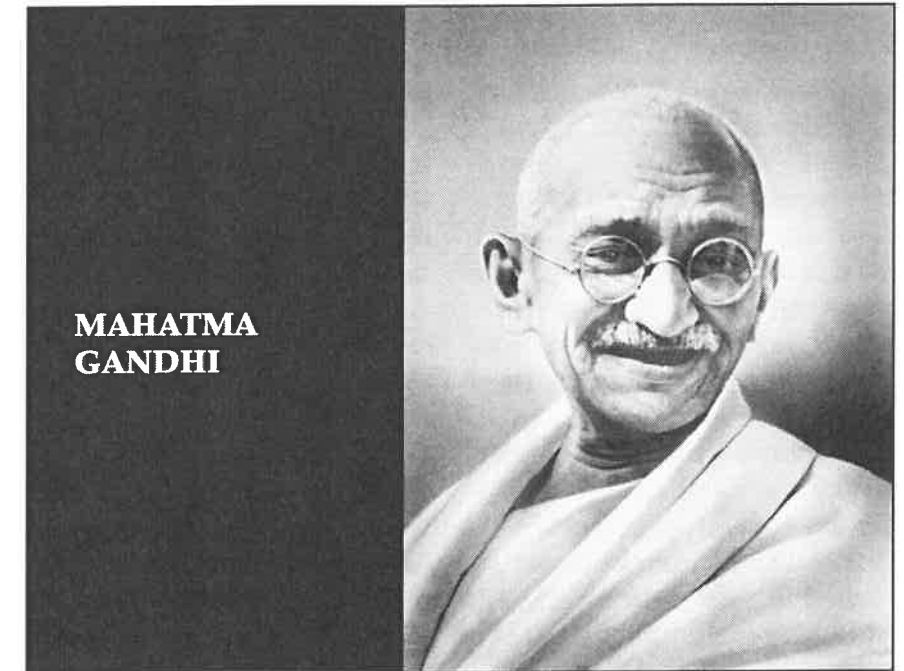
Gandhi's experiments in education began in South Africa with the foundation of the Phoenix settlement in 1904 and Tolstoy Farm in 1910. He stressed education through craft. He used to say, "There is no point developing the brain only. One has to develop one's brain through one's hands. If I were a poet, I would write a beautiful poem on the possibility of the five fingers of the hand. Books are never sufficiently interesting to hold the interest of the mind. The mind begins to wander. Only manual works brings you back to reality".¹⁹

Gandhi wanted students to work for the country's freedom from foreign rule. The aim of his education was not only "Swaraj" – Self rule but also 'Sarvodaya' – welfare of all. His social and educational principles are explained in

numerous books and articles. He envisioned true education coming about primarily through a particular pattern of life in a community and not merely through formal instructions in schools.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, later known as Mahatma Gandhi, was born on October 2, 1869 at Porbandar, a small town in the province of Gujrat, on the western coast of India. His father Karamchand Gandhi was the *dewan* or Prime Minister of the princely state of Porbandar. Gandhi came of a middle class family of trading caste.

Mohan passed his matriculation examination in 1887. He then got himself admitted to Samaldas College at Bhavnagar. He found the subject's tedious, English medium difficult and the atmosphere uncongenial. As Gandhi was becoming frustrated, he was visited by a family friend who suggested that to get a good job; he should become



a Barrister in England. Gandhi, however, preferred medicine to law. As practising human dissection was unthinkable for a member of the orthodox Hindu family, the legal profession stood out as the best option.

After procuring the necessary finance through borrowing and sale of jewelry, Gandhi set sail from Bombay on Sept 4, 1908. He was out-casted by his own community for crossing the 'black water'.

The first few days in England were miserable. The additional inconvenience was his vow he took before his mother that he would not touch women, wine and meat. The food he ate was tasteless and drab. One of his friends read out to him the theory of utility from Bentham. But vow was a vow. He would suffer but not break the vow.

One day he discovered a vegetarian restaurant in Farringdon Street. The sight of it

filled him with the joy of a child. Having had his first satisfactory meal in London, Gandhi bought a copy of Henry Salt's

A Plea for Vegetarianism. Reading it, he was more than delighted. From now on he became a vegetarian by conviction.

His vegetarian contacts began to expand. He started to read a great deal in the subject. He was introduced to *The Ethics of Diet* by Howard Williams. He read in this book that Jesus was a vegetarian. He came across a book which suggested that many diseases could be cured by changing the diet only. All these readings had an enormous impact on him. He would in his later life experiment with his diet even in the midst of a grim political battle.

He was now introduced to the Theosophical thoughts of Madame Blavatsky and Annie Besant. It was through the Theosophists that he came to

know the *Bhagabat Gita* in Arnold's English rendering. He also read Arnold's *The Light of Asia*, life of the Buddha. In Carlyle's *Hero and Hero Worship* he read the teachings of Mohammed. He read *Bible* and fell in love with the 'Sermon of the Mount'. His young mind began to unify the essential teachings of the major religions.

Three years passed. Gandhi was called to the bar and enrolled in the High Court on June 11, 1891. The barrister sailed for home the following day.

It was easy for Gandhi to become a barrister. But it was quite difficult for him to practice it. He had studied Western laws but had no grounding in Hindu or Muslim laws. He was not confident. He felt helpless and nervous as he came to India.

After a luckless trial of six months in Bombay young Gandhi wound up his establishment and went to Rajkot. Whatever hopes he might have had of receiving State patronage or an appointment at the Court had been dashed to the ground after his unhappy encounter with the British Political agent.

In this predicament came a godsend. A Muslim firm having large business interest in South Africa offered to send him there for instructing and assisting their counsel in a big law suit. The terms were attractive and the period of engagement was only one year. To escape from the humiliating dilemma in which he had been trapped and for a chance to try his luck in the big world outside, Gandhi

gladly accepted the offer and made ready to sail for Durban in April 1893.

Experimenting with Truth in South Africa Embarking at Durban, also called Port Natal, Gandhi was received by his employer Abdullah Seth. At the port itself, he observed that the way the whites were treating the Indians was anything but courteous. However, his first humiliating experience came on the second or third day of his arrival, when he went to Durban court with his client. The magistrate kept staring at him and finally asked him to take off his turban. Gandhi refused and left the court room. Then Gandhi sent a few letters to the local press defending his right to wear the turban. He was immediately dubbed as an 'unwelcome visitor'.

After about a week's stay at Durban, his host decided to send him to Pretoria, the capital of the then Boer Republic of Transvaal. A first class ticket was purchased for him. When the train reached Maritzburg, the capital of Natal, in the evening, a white passenger boarded the train. Seeing a 'coloured' man in the compartment, he contacted the railway official who ordered Gandhi to shift to the 'van compartment'. Gandhi refused. So a constable pushed him out and his luggage was taken care of by the railway authority. It was a bitterly cold winter night. Gandhi sat in the dark waiting room thinking 'Should I stand up for my rights or should I go back to India?'

But there was more to come. He continued the train

journey the next evening. A bigger mishap lay wait on the journey the next day from Charlestown to Johannesburg which had to be covered by stage coach. Gandhi was made to sit with the coachman on the box outside while the white conductor sat with the white passengers inside. In the middle of the journey, the conductor wanted to have some fresh air outside. So he asked Gandhi to sit on the foot-board. He refused and started explaining why. But then something terrible happened. The 'leader', wild with rage, swore vilely and rained blows on the 'coolie', trying to throw him down. Gandhi clung desperately to the brass rails, refusing to yield his seat and refusing also to be provoked to retaliate. Some of the white passengers protested at this cowardly assault, and the 'leader' crestfallen, was obliged to let Gandhi remain where he was.

Having come face to face with the appalling conditions in which his compatriots were forced to live in the Dark Continent, one of Gandhi's first acts was to call a meeting of the Indian community. There he gave the first public speech of his life. This time he did not fumble nor falter nor sit down in shame. He unconsciously struck the well of courage within him.

Gandhi often said in later life that he loved nothing better than being a teacher. No one was too young for him to teach and none too old to learn from him. His teaching was an all - purpose act. He taught, moralized, preached, propagated, and disciplined -

all simultaneously in one process. This address in Pretoria was the first demonstration of this act as a teacher.

Phoenix Settlement ²⁰

A few years later, when Gandhi had become quite well-known in South Africa as the undisputed leader of the Indian community, he read a book by John Ruskin

Unto This Last. He found some of his deepest convictions reflected in Ruskin's thesis. Ruskin had argued that the true wealth of a community lay in the well-being of all its members, the good of the individual being contained in the good of all; that all work had the same value, the barber's no less than the lawyer's; that the life of one who worked with hand, on the soil, or at a craft, was the most useful life.

Gandhi made up his mind to put these principles into practice. He bought a dilapidated farm of 100 acres with a little spring and a few fruit trees on it. With the help of one of his friends, Albert West, he shifted the office of the *Indian Opinion* to an improvised shed. There he started the experiment of doing all the work by the residents themselves. The settlers had their families shifted there. A real working community grew up - the motto was dignity of labour. The children - sons and daughters of the residents - all took part in the work joyously. They learnt through their work. Here Gandhi started his experiment in education in a unique way which would later be re-

fined at the Tolstoy Farm a few years later.

Tolstoy Farm²¹

In 1906 Gandhi started his famous *Satyagraha* (urge for truth) as he called his civil disobedience movement. The prospect was disheartening. The tempo had slowed and the spirit was flagging. Hardly any funds were left to meet the minimum recurring expenditure to keep the struggle going. In this hopeless situation Gandhi took recourse to self-help. Kallenbach, his German collaborator, had purchased a farm of 1100 acres, about 22 miles from Johannesburg. This he offered for the service of the struggle - for housing and maintaining the families taking part in the civil disobedience movement. Here among other things, Gandhi continued his experiments in education. Everything, right from sweeping, cleaning, making food, doing agricultural work, making all necessary implements including shoes was being done by the settlers. So formal classes for the children could not be organized in a disciplined and orderly way. The students used to come to the class in the afternoon, after doing all sorts of manual work. The teachers were tired too. Beside Gandhi, Kallenbach used to teach the children. Both the teachers and the students used to fall asleep due to over exhaustion. There were other difficulties. Students were Tamil, Telegu, and Gujrati speaking. There were Hindus, Muslims, and Christians. The age group varied between se-

ven and twenty. Both girls and boys studied together. With great patience Gandhi taught this heterogeneous group. He discovered that story-telling was the best method of getting the students' attention. As far as practicable he taught the students in their mother tongue. History, geography and mathematics were taught in a lively and unconventional way. The students learnt to sing prayers.

The children mixed freely. The experiment was quite daring since any misadventure would jeopardize the life of the settlement. The children used to sleep together, bathe together and pray together. Gandhi used to keep an eye on their behavior.

Gandhi came back to India in 1915. He traveled extensively to arouse the Indian people from their ignorance and apathy and give them a new consciousness. He went to the remotest villages to organize peasants against inhuman conditions of living and ruthless exploitation. He organized workers and fought for their rights. He lived and worked with the so-called 'untouchables' and vowed to end the evil practice. All these experiences led him to refine his own idea about education of the Indian masses. For a period of twenty years he continued working on these issues in India and finally placed his draft of Basic Education to the nation.

Gandhi considered that the British - imposed education in India made Indians intellectual slaves of the British Empire. It was rootless, alie-

nating and anti-national²². He believed that education should be imparted in the mother tongue²³. Education, especially primary education, should be imparted in such a manner that a relationship was established between the child's environment at the school and at home. This could be done by educating the child in the craft he / she found most relevant. The family vocation and the child's education could thus be complementary²⁴. Alphabetization was not for Gandhi the be-all and end-all of all education. Education and alphabetization were two different things to him. A person could be highly educated without being literate. The vice-versa was also true²⁵. Alphabetization that did not uplift a person morally was not desirable. Gandhi felt that physical education and craft education would develop the student's intellectual capability²⁶. Gandhi was opposed to too many text books. He preferred that students should be taught, at the initial stages, orally and through dialogue and story – telling. Text books might be introduced later but not those usually written for rote – learning. Text books which would connect the child with his / her environment should be written. Guide books for teachers were needed more than text books to enable the teachers to do their work properly²⁷. History, geography, mathematics should be taught in such a way that the child could find interconnection between his / her own life and the subjects taught. New kinds of text books, me-

ant more for teachers than for students, should be written keeping this in mind²⁸. Higher education, Gandhi felt, should not be provided at state's expense²⁹. Gandhi wanted a mass movement for education of the adults³⁰. Gandhi was aware of the deliteracisation process of the adults and felt that if education and life-requirements could be harmonized and integrated, the adults would be able to utilize the new-found knowledge. The process of deliteracisation could be checked in this way. Gandhi never emphasized alphabetization and did not consider it of much value. Gandhi wanted women to be educated as much as men. He felt that women were mother-teachers of a nation. Therefore, they should be educated properly to play their special role as mother –teachers. However, they would need special orientation in home science and child-rearing³¹. Gandhi was against any sort of punishment to the child³².

As already stated, Gandhi was deeply concerned about the kind of education India would adopt for its masses. That one of the principal aims of education was to make a person economically, politically and intellectually independent was the realization he had had while working in South Africa and India.

In 1937, the Congress party gained limited power in eight states. Gandhi thought that his ideas of Basic Education could be implemented in these states. Accordingly at the Wardha conference (22 – 23 October 1937) Gandhi placed before the nation his draft of

Basic Education for discussion.

In this draft he said that the prevailing education system could not meet the needs of the nation. English being the medium of instruction in higher education, the current system was creating a gap between the English – educated upper strata and the general masses of people . Since manual labour played no part in the educational system, the so-called educated people became unsuitable in the production process. Primary education had been absolutely ineffective. The students tended to forget everything they learnt and whatever they retained lacked any utility so far as meeting the needs of the urban and rural community. The tax payers received nothing from what was being spent for education.

- Primary education should take place over a period of seven years. The students should have enough general knowledge by this period. English would not be taught at the primary level.
- For proper unfolding of their faculties, children should be taught through some craft and thus they would be able to utilize their knowledge for earning also. Firstly, students would be able to use for themselves what they produced and they would have some income out of the excess production. Secondly, by this process, the children would grow up as per-

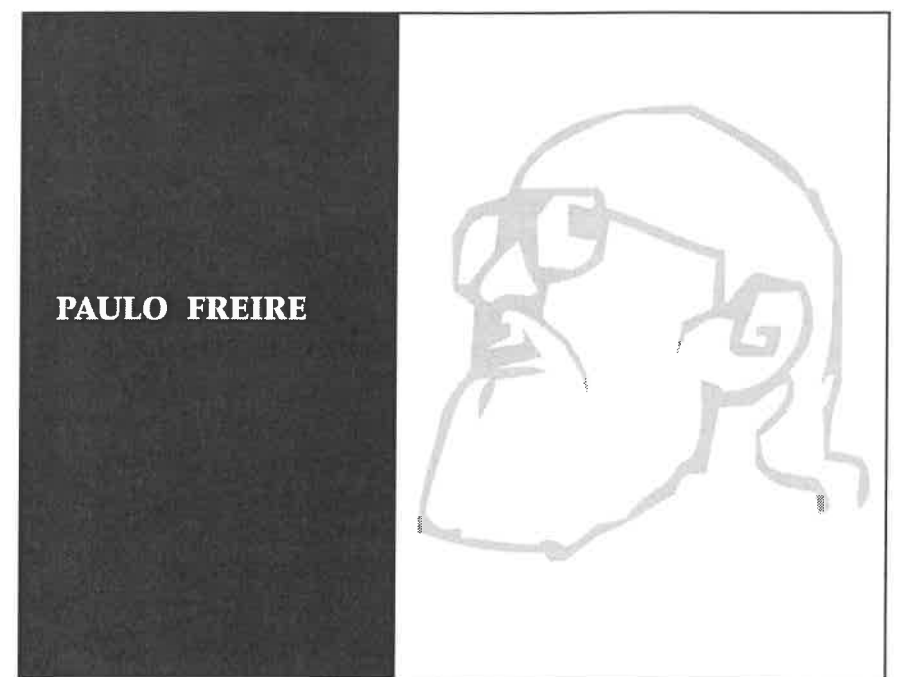
fect human beings with strength and virtue.

The Wardha conference³³ discussed Gandhi's proposals and took the following resolution:

3. Seven years of free and compulsory primary education should be provided.
4. Mother tongue will be the medium of instruction.
5. Seven Years' of training will be based upon productive labour – oriented education. For all – round development of the child, some environmentally suitable craft will be taught.
6. Teachers will earn their remuneration through such training and production.

PAULO FREIRE

Paulo Freire, the Rousseau of the twentieth century, is one



of the greatest philosophers of education. His work on the educational methods and practices of the oppressed brought about a qualitative change in the philosophy and practice of adult education. He is the first philosopher who connected literacy with liberation. Not only in the sphere of theory but also in the domain of practice he had brought about revolutionary innovations. In his unique method, an illiterate person could gain literacy within a period of thirty hours. The method he devised emanated from his philosophy of education of the adults.

Born on September 19, 1921, this great educationist and philosopher started his journey in this world with a lot of difficulties.

His father, though an army officer, was moderate in temperament. His mother was a cool-headed lady.³⁴

Paulo learnt his alphabets in the garden under the man-

go tree in company of his parents, as he played with them. This lively, natural and free way to literacy influenced him greatly in his later years when he discovered his unique method.

The world economic crisis of 1929 affected the economic condition of the Freire family adversely. His father could not cope with the rising cost of living in Recife and therefore, shifted to nearby Jaboatao. He lost his father, the sole earning member of the family, at the age of thirteen. As a consequence of this tragedy , Paulo stopped going to school. He resumed his schooling at Recife when he was sixteen. Most of his classmates came of affluent families. Paulo was tall, thin and unfed.

At Jaboatao Paulo was as free as a bird. Many of his playmates were from the countryside. Some of them were sons and daughters of working class families. Get-

ting to know them, Paulo came to appreciate the beauty of the diction and grammar of their language. Of course, on hindsight, he could feel that there were unbridgeable differences between him and his play mates.³⁵

Paulo was admitted to the University of Recife at the age of twenty. Here he came to know the primary school teacher called Elza Maia Costa de Oliveira, five years' senior to him. He married Elza in 1944 when he was twenty three. Elza helped Paulo develop his unique method of literacy. She was a companion in his work³⁶.

Paulo joined Social Service of Industry (SESI) in 1946 and worked there for eight years. SESI was an employers' institution whose objectives were to assist the workers. While working here Paulo came face to face with the stark reality of the working class. Here he gradually became a teacher who would always like to innovate. While working with their children, Paulo discovered that dialogue was the best way to teach. At this time he studied extensively. He came to know and appreciate the best writers of Brazil. His aim was to utilize the knowledge thus gained in his own work.

Thereafter he joined the cultural extension wing of the University of Recife. In 1950, while working here, he discovered a new method of adult education. In 1959, he wrote his dissertation

Present Day Education in Brazil. This dissertation earned him the Ph.D degree and the chair of History and Philosophy of Education in the

School of Fine Arts of the University of Recife.

The evolution of Freire's epistemology can be traced to the conditions of living of the majority of the people of North East Brazil in the 1960's. They were victims of the culture of silence. It was necessary to break this 'culture' so that they could take an active role in creating a new Brazil.

Paulo's first large-scale experiment took place in Angicos of Rio Grande do Norte. Three hundred agricultural workers learnt to read and write within a period of forty five days. The President of the nation, Joao Goulart and the Minister of Education Paulo de Tarso Santos invited Paulo to take charge of the national literacy programme. Freire conceived of two thousand cultural circles so that two million people could be made literate by 1964. This and other pro-people actions of the Government infuriated the ruling class. A military coup took place. Paulo Freire was arrested. On being released he left, first for Bolivia, and then, Chile. He continued the work that he started in Brazil. In 1967 he wrote *Education as the Practice of Freedom*. In 1970 was published his most important work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Paulo connected education with conscientisation. There was no one before him who gave such a strong voice to the education of the oppressed.

Educational Thoughts of Paulo Freire

In his introduction to the first U.S edition of the *Pedagogy of*

the Oppressed, Richard Schaul wrote "Fed up as I am with abstractness and sterility of so much intellectual work in academic circles today, I am excited by a process of reflection which is set in a thoroughly historical context, which is carried on in the midst of struggle to create a new social order and thus represents a new unity of theory and praxis."³⁷ The same process of intellectual dissection dealing with non-essentials also befell Friere.³⁸ In this article we shall briefly place before our readers some of the essential thoughts of Freire.

Paulo Freire contributed to adult education its theoretical foundation. Adult education, especially literacy, used to be equated with alphabetization. If through acquiring literacy a person could write his / her name, identify street names and do such other works, it would be considered an achievement. Still now, in India, most of the literate people view adult education in this way. Freire discarded all these notions. He linked literacy with culture and liberation Freire writes:

"The first literacy attempt took place in Recife, with a group of five illiterates. The participants who had migrated from rural areas, revealed a certain fatalism and apathy in regard to their problems. They were totally illiterate'.. During the twenty first hour of study, one of the participants wrote, confidently "I am amazed at myself."

'We began with the conviction that the role of man was not only to be in the world,

but to engage in relations with the world – that through the acts of creation and re-creation, man makes cultural reality and thereby adds to the natural world, which he did not make. We were certain that man's relation to reality, expressed as a subject to an object, results in knowledge, which man could express through language'.

'From that point of departure, the illiterate would begin to effect a change in his former attitudes, by discovering himself that he, as well as the literate person, has a creative and re-creative impulse. He would discover that culture is just as much a clay doll made by artists who are his peers as it is the work of a great sculptor, a great painter, a great mystic or a great philosopher; that culture is the poetry of lettered poets and also the poetry of his own popular songs – that culture is all human creation'..³⁹

By one master stroke Freire elevated a scavenger to the level of a professor. Don't we find an echo of Ruskin and Gandhi in Friere's thoughts?

Freire further writes "The literacy process as cultural action for freedom, is an act of knowing in which the learner assumes the role of knowing subject in dialogue with the educator"⁴⁰

But it is not always easy for the illiterate to look at the world in the way it is proposed. Freire writes, "Self-depreciation is another characteristic of the oppressed, which derives from the internalization of the opinion the oppressor's hold of them. So often do they hear that they

are good for nothing, know nothing and are incapable of learning anything — they are sick, lazy and unproductive – that in the end they become convinced of their own unfitness."⁴¹

This notion is further elaborated by Freire, "In the culture of silence the masses are 'mute', that is, they are prohibited from being. Even if they can occasionally read and write because they are taught in humanitarian – not humanist – literacy campaigns, they are nevertheless alienated from the power responsible for the silence."⁴²

It is imperative to break this culture of silence. The process of liberation starts with the opening up of the oppressed as he / she begins to know the word and the world. And here we come to the threshold of Paulo Freire's method of imparting literacy to the adult. Freire writes, "To acquire literacy is more than to psychologically and mechanically dominate reading and writing techniques. It is to dominate these techniques in terms of consciousness; to understand what one reads and to write what one understands; it is to communicate graphically. Acquiring literacy does not involve memorizing sentences, words or syllables – lifeless objects unconnected to an existential universe – but rather an attitude of creation and re-creation, a self-transformation producing a stance of intervention in one's context.

"Thus the educator's role is fundamentally to enter into dialogue with the illiterate about concrete situations and

simply to offer him the instruments with which he can teach himself to read and write. This teaching cannot be done from top down, but only from inside out, by the illiterate himself, with the collaboration of the educator. That is why we searched for a method which would be instrument of the learner as well as of the educator, and which, in the lucid observation of a Brazilian sociologist 'would identify learning content with the learning process'.

'Hence, our mistrust in primers, which set up a certain grouping of graphic signs as a gift and cast the illiterate in the role of the *object* rather than the *Subject* of his learning. Primers, even when they try to avoid this pitfall, end by *donating* to the illiterate words and sentences which really should result from his own creative effort. We opted, instead, for the use of 'generative words', those whose syllabic elements offer, through re-combination, the creation of new words."⁴³

From his concept of literacy which leads to liberation, Freire clarifies the concept of authentic education and the role of educator and educatee. Freire writes: "Education as the exercise of domination stimulates the credulity of students, with the ideological intent (often not perceived by educators) of indoctrinating them to adapt to the world of oppression. This accusation is not made in the naïve hope that the dominant elites will thereby simply abandon the practice. Its objective is to call the attention of true humanists to the fact that they can-

not use banking educational methods'. Those truly committed to liberation must reject the banking concept in its entirety, adopting instead a concept of men and women as conscious beings. They must abandon the educational goal of deposit making and replace it with posing problems of human beings in their relations with the world."⁴⁴

Like the Einsteinian concept of space-time, Freire innovates a new concept in consonance with his concept of humanization and democracy. In the field of practical adult education, the validity of this concept cannot be questioned. He writes;

'The problem posing education, which breaks the vertical patterns characteristics of banking education, can fulfill its function as the practice of freedom only if it can overcome the above contradiction. Through dialogue, the teacher –of – the- students and students – of the – teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with student-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the one who teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. In this process, arguments based on 'authority' are no longer valid; in order to function, authority must be *on the side of freedom*, not *against* it. Here, no one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught. People teach each other mediated by

the world, by the cognizable objects"⁴⁵.

In an essay entitled "Extension or Communication" Freire stressed on dialogue. Elsewhere Freire says, "Dialogue is the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world. Hence, dialogue cannot occur between those who want to name the world and those who do not wish this naming – between those who deny others the right to speak their word and those whose right to speak has been denied them."⁴⁶

"Only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking. Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education."⁴⁷

While criticizing the so called 'extension' carried out by the development workers, Freire says, "Cultural invasion through dialogue cannot exist. There is no such thing as dialogical manipulation or conquest. These terms are mutually exclusive. Although I have said that not all agronomists who are called extension agents practice cultural invasion, it is not possible to ignore the ostensible suggestion of cultural invasion in the term extension."⁴⁸

Thus Freire could easily relate his ideas across diverse fields. Modern-day development communication owes much to this small essay.

Freire brought the illiterate on the center stage and developed all his concepts with this person in mind — who is oppressed, tortured, margina-

lized, ridiculed, traumatized and brutalized, everyday, in the continents of Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Concluding Remarks

I. Tagore, Gandhi and Freire worked in the colonial / post-colonial societies of the Third World fragmented by narrow domestic walls of racism, casteism and class-antagonism. All three of them deeply contemplated on the plight of the mute millions of their people and sought ways and means by which their economic, political and social conditions could be improved. Though Tagore worked only in India, Gandhi and Freire had their fields of activity spread out in diverse continents with different objective conditions. Most of the educational writings and experiments of Tagore and Gandhi centred on education of children and adolescents. Freire, though researched on education of children of the working class, concentrated on education of adults as his primary area of intervention. However, their thoughts transcended the specific domain and became rather universal.

If we consider the theories propounded by Tagore and Freire, we shall observe that both of them considered education as the practice of human freedom. Tagore called it 'Atma Shakti' or 'strengthening of the soul'. All his endeavours were geared towards fruition of this inner strength. For Freire, education is the process of *becoming*.

Tagore's concept of education called for an all-round development of the personality.

Culture played a very significant role in this process. Fine arts and crafts, dance and music, literature and science – all these he prescribed for the proper growth of the faculties of the child. Freire started his literacy process from the premise of culture and then broadened it in the realm of freedom.

Both Tagore and Freire opposed rote-learning. Tagore considered creativity to be the key to the development of personality of the child. For Freire creation and re-creation constitute the process of liberation Narrative concept of education was anathema to both of them.

Gandhi and Freire contributed two most significant concepts to humanity – *Satyagraha* and *conscientizacao*. Gandhi's social and political movements emanated from his concept of *Satyagraha*. Vehemently opposed to any untruth or falsehood, *Satyagraha* was the bedrock of Gandhi's philosophy.

Gandhi says, "The literal meaning of *Satyagraha* is to get hold of the truth and so the meaning of the word is strength of the soul. Violence has no role to play in *Satyagraha*." He explains elsewhere, "Satyagraha and passive resistance are as different as the two poles. Passive resistance is the weapon of the weak. Those who believe in passive resistance are not opposed to taking recourse to violence to meet the objective, should opportunities arise. On the other hand, *Satyagraha* is the weapon of the strong and there is no place of violence in it."⁴⁹ Gandhi used

Satyagraha to attain any goal, political, social or cultural. *Conscientizacao* is Freire's option. This term refers to "learning to perceive social, political and economic conditions and to take action against oppressive elements of reality." Freire explained, "I have encountered, both in training courses which analyse the role of *conscientizacao* and in actual experimentation with a truly liberating education, the "fear of freedom". Not infrequently, training course participants call attention to "the danger of *conscientizacao*" in a way that reveals their own fear of freedom. Critical consciousness, they say, is anarchic. Others add that critical consciousness may lead to disorder. Some, however, confess: why deny it? I was afraid of freedom. I am no longer afraid. In one of these discussions, the group was debating whether *conscientizacao* of men and women to specific situation of injustice might not lead them to "destructive fanaticism" or to a "sensation of total collapse of this world." In the midst of the argument, a person who previously had been a factory worker for many years spoke out "Perhaps I am the only one here of working-class origin. I can't say that I've understood every thing you've said just now, but I can say one thing – when I began this course I was *naïve* and when I found out how *naïve* I was, I started to get *critical*. But this discovery hasn't made me fanatic, and I don't feel any collapse either"⁵⁰. The people who participated in Gandhi's *Satyagraha* would also testify

how their whole vision changed as they practiced it.

Both Tagore and Gandhi were born in the same decade – 1860's – in colonial India. Both of them had very unpleasant experiences at school. Both of them visited England in their teens. Having seen the English system of education and participated in it in the English soil, they knew exactly what they should aim at for their own countrymen in India.

Both Tagore and Gandhi were of the opinion that the medium of instruction should be the mother tongue. Both of them favoured craft education. For Tagore, craft was one of the subjects to be taught to the students. However, for Gandhi, craft was the center around which all education should revolve. The differences in their opinion came into the open when Gandhi offered his concept of basic education to the nation in 1937. The interesting fact is that Gandhi borrowed heavily from Tagore's *Sikshasatra* experiment in which craft education played a major role. In fact, two of Tagore's lieutenants, Aryanayakam and Asha Devi, who worked at Santiniketan for ten years, left Tagore in 1934 and joined hands with Gandhi. They were instrumental in formulating the Basic Education Policy of Gandhi.

Tagore's view of education, compared to Gandhi's was definitely broader. Gandhi, in organizing the Indian masses however knew more intimately the rural colonial India. Gandhi could easily see that Tagore's concept could be im-

plemented in one or two villages. But 700,000 villages of India, lacking the most rudimentary material infrastructure and human resource could not achieve any progress under colonial system. Craft-centred education could be the only way out in the prevailing situation. Self-reliance was the only alternative open to Gandhi. In retrospect, it can be said that Gandhi's concept was more down to earth and realistic.

II. Synthesis

Denmark of the early nineteenth century has striking resemblance with the social, economic and political conditions of many countries of the developing world. Many of these newly emergent countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America have not been able to have a deep-rooted representative form of government. And many of those who have achieved this criterion, cannot claim to have an enlightened electorate. Most of the time, in majority of these countries, the poor and the oppressed do not even exercise this right out of sheer ignorance. And when they do, it is on the advice or coercion of others – very often than not, this right is purchased by the political parties through doubtful means. The net result is that although a vast majority of the people elect their representatives, in actual practice they elect their own rulers who immediately on assuming power use the verdict to oppress them more. A perusal of the voting pattern of the largest democracy in the world – India – will le-

ave no one in doubt that the big bourgeoisie in collusion with the landlords aided and abetted by foreign economic and political interests have perpetually retained their stranglehold on the nation. Although ruling parties have changed, the ruling class remains intact.

Grundtvig's idea of democracy was just the opposite. Formerly a supporter of benevolent absolute monarchy, he espoused democracy with the belief that Denmark could really flourish if the peasants, insulted and humiliated over centuries, could hold the reins of power. Meditating deeply on the issue, he came to the conclusion that only an enlightened electorate in a democracy could guide the nation properly. He also felt that the existing system of education was thoroughly inappropriate to shoulder the task. He, therefore, conceived of a different set of educational institutions the purpose of which would not be to offer degrees, diplomas or certificates but education for life. Youths of eighteen years of age and above would be admitted to these institutions which he termed Folk High School. They would be sensitized about national history, literature, mythology etc. A stint of six months to one year would instill in these youngmen and women the kind of patriotic fervour that would induce them to work for the country and the people. There would be no examination either at the time of admission or departure. Needless to mention that, Grundtvig wanted to prepare youths for

the challenges of the new democracy. History has shown how his ideas have been vindicated. These youths, coming out of the Folk High Schools, built up the strong cooperative movement which not only revolutionized Danish agriculture but also industry and paved the way for a peaceful transformation of the society.

In most of the countries of the developing world where governance is conducted through elected representatives, Grundtvig's concept of people's enlightenments is a worthwhile proposition for emulating. Denmark's example of cooperation can also inspire the peasants to experiment with self-employment by individuals and groups. In fact, many countries in the Asian subcontinent are now engaged in such endeavours. However, what is necessary is a holistic approach.

In this connection, it may be mentioned that Freire's cultural circles have many things in common with the Folk High Schools; conscientization, liberation of mind, education as the practice of freedom, - all these are extremely relevant for mental and physical emancipation of the people. This pedagogy of the oppressed can be incorporated in the Grundtvigian concept of enlightenment and can be imparted through some innovative mechanism.

In fact, we have proposed, in case of India where there is in existence a three-tier self-governing system from the district to the village level, an educational network of si-

milar type – a people's basic school at the village level, a people's college at the subdivision level and a people's university at the district level – each with distinct area of intervention and responsibility. These educational institutions, following Tagore and Gandhi should also impart education through craft, each learner specializing in the trade in which he or she feels attracted. In such a scheme therefore we can synthesize the thoughts and contribution of all the four thinkers.

Notes:

The author has used materials from a couple of articles on similar themes written by him.

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3. Ketaki Kushari Dyson, *In your Blossoming Flower garden, Rabindranath Tagore and Victoria Ocampo*, Sahitya Academy, New Delhi, pp 11-12, pp 14-15
4. Satyendranath Roy, *Thoughts of Tagore: Education*, Granthalaya, Calcutta, 1985, p.65
5. Thomas Rordam, *The Danish Folk High School*, Det Danske Selskab, Copenhagen, 1980, p.42
6. Prabhat Kumar Mukhopadhyaya, *Tagore's Life and Works*, Vol 2, Visvabharati, Calcutta, 1989, p.174
7. Prabhat Kumar Mukhopadhyaya, n.20, p. 568
8. Rabindranath Tagore, *Collected Works* Vol 14, Visvabharati, Calcutta, 1988, pp 299-301

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11. Uma Dasgupta, *Santiniketan and Sriniketan*, Visvabharati, Calcutta, 1988, p.16
12. Kathleen M.O'Connell, *Rabindranath Tagore : The Poet as Educator*, Visvabharati, Calcutta, 2002 p.142
13. Uma Dasgupta, n.25, p.9
14. Krishna Kripalani, n.16, pp.282-3
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16. Prabir Dasgupta, *Role of Sriniketan in Restoration of Cottage Industry*, Amar Kutir Society for Rural Development, Sriniketan, Year of Publication not mentioned, p.11
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22. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, n.34, p.233, pp.236-7, p.239
23. I bid p.238, p.242
24. I bid, p.253, p.256, p.262
25. I bid, p.234
26. I bid, p.235
27. I bid P.260
28. I bid, p.262
29. I bid, p.286
30. I bid, pp 329-31

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32. I bid, p.379
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41. Paulo Freire, n.37, p.45
42. Paulo Freire, n.40, p.30
43. Paulo Freire, n.39, pp 48-9
44. Paulo Freire, n 37, pp.59-60
45. I bid p.61
46. I bid, p.62
47. I bid.
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49. Mohandas karamchand Gandhi, n.35, pp.39-40
50. Paulo Freire, n.39, p.17