

NCERT

"The first principle of true education is that nothing can be taught. The teacher is not an instructor or task-master, he is a helper and a guide. His business is to suggest and not to impose. He does not actually train the pupil's mind, he only shows him how to perfect his instruments of knowledge and helps and encourages him in the process."

–SRI AUROBINDO

"In the right view of both life and Yoga, all life is either consciously or sub-consciously a Yoga. For we mean by this term a methodised effort towards self-perfection by the expression of the potentialities latent in the being and a union of the human individual with the universal and transcendent Existence we see partially expressed in man and in the Cosmos."

–SRI AUROBINDO

"The education of a human being should begin at birth and continue throughout his life. Indeed, .it should begin even before birth; in this case it is the mother herself who proceeds with this education by means of a twofold action: first upon herself for her own improvement, and secondly, upon the child whom she is forming physically."

–THE MOTHER



राष्ट्रीय शैक्षिक अनुसंधान और प्रशिक्षण परिषद्
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND TRAINING

ISBN 978-81-7450-947-5

Memorial Lecture Series

Second Sri Aurobindo Memorial Lecture – 2009

BY JASODHARA BAGCHI



1872-1950

To Prepare for the Future

“All the studies and in any case the largest part of the studies consist of learning the past in the hope that it will make you understand the present better.

“But if one wants to avoid the danger that the students remain clinging to the past and refuse to see the future, it is necessary to take good care to explain to them that all that happened in the past aimed at preparing that which is happening now and only prepares the way for the future which is truly the most important thing, for which we should prepare ourselves.

“It is by cultivating the intuition that one prepares oneself to live for the future.”

–THE MOTHER

Two Poles of Discernment

“From the point of view of education, this would be very important: to see the world as it is, exactly, unadorned, in the most down-to-earth and concrete manner; and to see the world as it can be, with the freest, highest vision, the one most full of hope and aspiration and marvellous certitude – as the two poles of discernment.”

–THE MOTHER

The True Basis of Education

“The true basis of education is the study of the human mind, infant, adolescent and adult. Any system of education founded on theories of academic perfection, which ignores the instrument of study, is more likely to hamper and impair intellectual growth than to produce a perfect and perfectly equipped mind. For the educationist has to do, not with dead material like the artist or sculptor, but with an infinitely subtle and sensitive organism. He cannot shape an educational masterpiece out of human wood or stone; he has to work in the elusive substance of mind and respect the limits imposed by the fragile human body.”

–SRI AUROBINDO

Yoga and Education

“The key to knowledge is within, for it is the awakened soul within that observes, records, sorts out, omits, unites, transmutes, and turns facts and information into knowledge, knowledge into wisdom, and wisdom into the dynamo of right aspiration and action. The spark is indeed within, albeit often obscured by the thick fog of the egoistic prison-house. It is the true task of education to provide the atmosphere, the friendly help or guidance, the leverage that will release the spark and make it flame forth into a blaze of consciousness characterised by an ever increasing intensity and wideness. The physical, the vital, the mental, all will be drafted into this adventure of consciousness, but still the soul will be the rider of the chariot that is the body, with the vital and mind as the twin horses of the race. Sri Aurobindo has defined Yoga as ‘a methodised effort towards self-perfection by the expression of the potentialities latent in the being, and a union of the human individual with the universal and transcendent Existence.’ In its far aims as also in its essential processes, education coalesces with Yoga..”

–DR. K.R. SRINIVASA IYENGAR: SRI AUROBINDO (A BIOGRAPHY)

The Hidden Splendour

“Every human being carries hidden within him the possibility of a greater consciousness beyond the frame of his normal life through which he can participate in a higher and vaster life. Indeed, in all exceptional beings it is always this consciousness that governs their life, and organises both the circumstances of their life and their individual reaction to these circumstances.

“What the human mind does not know and cannot do, this consciousness knows and does. It is like a light that shines at the centre of the being radiating through the thick coverings of the external consciousness. Some have a vague perception of its presence; a good many children are under its influence which shows itself very distinctly at times in their spontaneous reaction and even in their words.”

–THE MOTHER

ISBN 978-81-7450-947-5

First Edition

March 2009 *Phalgun* 1930

PD 5T BS

© **National Council of
Educational Research and
Training, 2009**

Rs 25.00

*Printed on 80 GSM paper with
NCERT watermark*

Published at the Publication
Department by the Secretary,
National Council of Educational
Research and Training, Sri
Aurobindo Marg, New Delhi 110 016
and printed at

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NCERT MEMORIAL LECTURE SERIES

Second Sri Aurobindo Memorial Lecture
Presidency College, Kolkata

27 March 2009

JASODHARA BAGCHI



राष्ट्रीय शैक्षिक अनुसंधान और प्रशिक्षण परिषद्
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND TRAINING

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Speaker : Professor Jasodhara Bagchi	

OUR OBJECTIVES

The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) is an apex organisation, assisting and advising the Central and State Governments by undertaking research, survey and development training and extension activities for all stages of school and teacher education.

One of the objectives of the Council is to act as a clearing house and disseminator of ideas relating to school and teacher education. We have initiated the Memorial Lecture Series in order to fulfil this role and to commemorate the life and work of great educational thinkers. Our aim is to strive to raise the level of public awareness about the seminal contributions made in the field of education by eminent men and women of India. We expect that such awareness will set off a chain of discourse and discussion. This, we hope, will make education a lively subject of inquiry while simultaneously encouraging a sustained public engagement with this important domain of national life.

The memorial lecture series covers public lectures commemorating the life and work of nine eminent Indian educational thinkers and practitioners.

Title	Venue
Gijubhai Badheka Memorial Lecture	Madras Institute of Development Studies, Chennai
Rabindranath Tagore Memorial Lecture	Regional Institute of Education, Bhubaneswar
Zakir Hussain Memorial	Regional Institute of Education,

Lecture	Mysore
Mahadevi Verma Memorial Lecture	Regional Institute of Education, Bhopal
B.M. Pugh Memorial Lecture	North East Regional Institute of Education, Shillong
Savitribai Phule Memorial Lecture	SNDT, Women's College, Mumbai
Marjorie Sykes Memorial Lecture	Regional Institute of Education, Ajmer
Sri Aurobindo Memorial Lecture	Presidency College, Kolkata
Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Lecture	National Institute of Education, New Delhi.

We invite men and women of eminence from academia and public life to deliver these lectures in English or any other Indian language. Our intention is to reach a large audiences consisting of teachers, students, parents, writers, artists, NGOs, government servants and members of local communities.

The annexure (Memorial Lectures organized in the year 2007- 2008) provides a summary of the lectures organized in the year 2007-08.

In due course the lectures will be made available on Compact Discs (CDs) and in the form of printed booklets in languages other than English or Hindi in which it is originally delivered for wider dissemination. Each booklet consists of two sections : Section one highlights the purpose of the memorial lectures and provides a brief sketch of the life and work of the concerned educational thinker and Section two gives the lectures in full along with a brief background of the speaker.

We hope these lecture series will be useful to our audience in particular and the public in and outside the country in general.

ANUPAM AHUJA
Convenor

SECTION 1

On Sri Aurobindo: His Vision of Man and His Lights on Education

Manoj Das*

AN INTRODUCTION TO HIS LIFE AND VISION

A GOLDEN PARADOX

Calcutta a hundred years ago was a far cry from the Kolkata of 2008. A public speaker had no opportunity to ring out a resounding voice courtesy the microphone. The public transport system was in its infancy and the greater part of the would-be audience had to trek miles to hear its leaders and often pass the night on pavements after the event, under blinking kerosene lamps. Population of the city was less than that of an average town of today. Keeping this perspective in mind, let us appreciate the report that follows, reproduced from *The Times*, London, from an issue of August 1909:

“As things were, the audience of August 7 consisted of about 5,000 persons, of whom about half was youthful...The sole orator of the Calcutta boycott meeting, Babu Bhupendranath Bose, excited no enthusiasm whatever, partly because his speech was too moderate and partly because it was audible to a small number. The Bengalis have primitive ideas as to the organisation of a meeting and Babu Bhupendranath was expected to harangue an open-air audience, numbering some thousands, from the top of a small dining table. Mr. Bradlaugh or Dr. Clifford would have failed under such conditions. The remarkable fact was, however, that damped

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as the crowd was by a lone essay, it burst into loud cheering when Mr. Aurobindo Ghose was seen standing near the dining table aforesaid. He was unquestioningly the hero of the meeting.”

What the report does not say – rather could not have said – how the “hero of the meeting” who was never given to histrionics, who spoke in a soft voice and, last but not the least, in English with chaste British accent, could be the object of such adoration. With the historic Surat Congress and the famous Alipore Conspiracy Case behind him, he was a legend non-pareil. Even years after he had disappeared from the British India, this was what Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose had to say: “When I came to Calcutta in 1913, Aurobindo was already a legendary figure. Rarely have I seen people speak of a leader with such rapturous enthusiasm and many were the anecdotes of this great man, some of them probably true, which travelled from mouth to mouth.” (*An Indian Pilgrim*)

Leaders of those days, in the popular perception, were made of special stuff but even among them Sri Aurobindo was outstanding. Let us see the impression of the renowned statesman M.R. Jayakar, then a young delegate to the Calcutta Congress of 1906: “I then had my first opportunity of observing from close quarters the Congress leaders of those times with some of whom my contact increased later. I then saw Aurobindo Ghose and his associates. What struck me were his great earnestness and dignified appearance. He had not then developed, so far as outside appearance could show, into a complete *Yogi*, but I got from a distance, an indication that his political philosophy was different from that of those who surrounded him.” (*The Story of My Life*)

One’s life story or biography is constructed with events in which one was involved, and events galore mark the life of Sri Aurobindo. No wonder that by now volumes were written on his life. But he had discouraged the very first writer proposing to write his life story, saying that no one could write about his life, for it had not been on the surface for men to see. In other words he considered the external aspect of

his life of no much consequence when compared to his inner life devoted to the pursuit of a hitherto unexplored truth, the destiny of man in terms of spiritual evolution – a vision to which the world is lately waking up slowly but steadily. The struggles and experiences he went through in the realms of consciousness were far more formidable than the storms and tumulus marking his life on the surface.

Nevertheless, following the tradition of biographical accounts, we can have a bird's eye-view of the objective phases of his life.

Sri Aurobindo was born in Calcutta on the 15th of August 1872, in the very house that is well-known today as Sri Aurobindo Bhavan, on the south side of Shakespeare Sarani. He was the third child of his parents, Dr. K.D. Ghose and Swarnalata Devi. Dr. Ghose, a highly qualified physician trained in the West, served as the chief of the district medical services of those days and was famous for his kind and charitable dispensations on one hand and for his thoroughly anglicised life style on the other. Even though, Sri Aurobindo's maternal grandfather Rajnarayan Bose was revered as a Rishi as well as "the Grandfather of Indian nationalism", the veteran had no chance to exercise his influence on Sri Aurobindo who at the age of five, was admitted to the Loretto Convent at Darjeeling, run by an Irish Christian mission and meant for European children. Then, at the age of seven, the boy, along with his two elder brothers, was led by his parents to Manchester and left under the care of a Latin scholar Mr. Drewett. In 1884 boys were shifted to London and Sri Aurobindo entered the St. Paul's School. In 1890 he was admitted as a probationer for the Indian Civil Service. Also a scholarship offered by St. Paul's helped him to enter the King's College, Cambridge. In 1892 he passed the first part of the classical Tripos in the first class, bagging all the prizes for Latin and Greek, as well as the I.C.S. examinations, achieving excellence in all papers.

But by then he had decided not to join the bureaucracy set up by the colonial masters to rule India. His father, no longer enamoured of the British masters or their conduct,

used to mail him clippings of newspapers carrying stories of the colonial misgovernment. Sri Aurobindo got himself disqualified by not appearing for the riding test, even after he was given fresh chances for it.

His well-wishers having no idea that Sri Aurobindo had manoeuvred his own disqualification were upset. G.W. Pothero, a senior Fellow of King's College, wrote to James Cotton, the brother of Sir Henry Cotton, "He performed the part of the bargain as regards the college most honourably and took a high place in the first class of the classical Tripos, Part 1, at the end of the second year of his residence. He also obtained certain college prizes showing command of English and literary ability. That one should have been able to do this (which alone is quite enough for most under-graduates) and at the same time to keep up the I.C.S. work, proves very unusual industry and capacity. Besides his classical scholarship he possessed knowledge of English literature far beyond the average of under-graduates and wrote much better English than most young Englishmen."

Such efforts could have probably succeeded but for this young scholar's role in the formation of a secret association of Indian students, named "Lotus and Dagger", its members taking a solemn vow to dedicate their future to the cause of their motherland's liberation. (Incidentally, barring Sri Aurobindo, the vow did not seem to have meant much for the members in the later phase of their life.) Sri Aurobindo had also spoken at the Indian Majlis at Cambridge, of which he was the Secretary, criticising the British rule in India.

It so happened that the Maharaja of Baroda, Sir Sayaji Rao Gaekwad, was on a visit to London and James Cotton introduced Sri Aurobindo to him. The Maharaja lost no time in offering to the young man a position in his government.

On the eve of his return to India, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

Me from her lotus heaven Saraswati
Has called to regions of eternal snow

And Ganges pacing to the southern Sea,
Ganges upon whose shores the flowers of Eden blow.

Envoi

Such was the paradox; one designed by parents and circumstances to grow and live as a model of westernised life, was back in motherland, already filled with a profound love for her. Probably such a beginning had its purpose, for as savant like Roman Rolland saw, he was the greatest synthesis hitherto achieved of the wisdom of the East and the West.

A MULTI-DIMENSIONAL LIFE

Sri Aurobindo was back in India after fourteen years, in February 1893. A great peace embraced him the moment he set his foot on the Indian soil – a peace that never left him. But the quiet home-coming had been preceded by a tragedy. The ship he was scheduled to sail by sank off the coast of Lisbon. Dr. K.D. Ghose, who had no knowledge of his son having changed his plan at the last moment and chosen another ship, was shocked at the news. He died of heart-attack muttering his son's name. Sri Aurobindo's mother had been mentally ill and was residing at her parents' house at Deoghar.

Hereafter began a new phase of Sri Aurobindo's life. He wrote, in a letter to a seeker much later: "Since I set foot on the Indian soil on the Apollo Bunder in Bombay, I began to have spiritual experiences, but these were not divorced from this world but had an inner and infinite bearing on it, such as a feeling of the Infinite pervading material Space and the Immanent inhabiting material objects and bodies."

From Bombay Sri Aurobindo proceeded to Baroda and was assigned different portfolios in the princely government before his appointment as the Professor of English and later also of French in the Maharaja's college. His students found in him a most inspiring guide, as some of them recollected. During this period, extending from 1893 to 1905, his interest and activities outside his official functions, as we can perceive, flowed along four different

streams simultaneously. He delved deep into the heritage of Indian literature, the spiritual lore in particular, mastering Sanskrit, Bengali and developing a knowledge of several other Indian languages. Secondly he continued with his creative writing that he had begun while in England. But very few knew about the third stream of his activities carried on in secrecy. He keenly observed the political situation in the country and decided to give it a radical new turn. With the help of his younger brother Barindra and some other trusted lieutenants he organised and inspired numerous secret revolutionary societies in Bengal and several other provinces of the country. Fourth, he began practising Yoga.

He used to visit Bengal from time to time and in 1901 he married Mrinalini Devi, the daughter of Bhupal Chandra Bose. Although she lived for a while in Baroda and accompanied Sri Aurobindo to Nainital and a few other places, hers was mostly a quiet life, devoted to reverentially watching her husband's travails and praying for him. She died in Calcutta in 1918.

The Indian National Congress launched in 1885 more or less under the British patronage, had begun to arouse greater expectations among the intelligentsia, but its moderate leadership never dared to take steps beyond submitting petitions to the authorities that mostly went in vain. For the first ever time a powerful call was given to the organisation by Sri Aurobindo, through a series of articles in the journal *Indu Prakash* of Bombay, for shedding its lacklustre stand and boldly voice the aspirations of the people. He wrote, using a pseudonym, "I say of the Congress, then, this – that its aims are mistaken, that the spirit in which it proceeds towards their accomplishment is not a spirit of sincerity and whole-heartedness, and that the methods it has chosen are not the right methods and the leaders in whom it trusts not the right sort of men to be leaders – in brief we are at present the blind led, if not by the blind, at any rate by the one-eyed."

A noted Bengali litterateur, Dinendra Kumar Roy, lived

with Sri Aurobindo for some time to help him learn Bengali. Sri Aurobindo of course rarely needed any guidance, but the memoir of those days left by Roy is a valuable document. Callous towards food and sleep, Sri Aurobindo, Roy writes, sat absorbed in his studies for three quarters of the night, oblivious of swarms of mosquitoes around him. The Gaekwad depended on him for writing for him important documents and speeches and once in a while required his company probably for the sake of it. Roy was shocked that Sri Aurobindo would casually say that he had no time and the vehicle would go back, at a time when so many Indian as well as European dignitaries waited for days to have a brief interview with the Maharaja. "He was alone and he did not know what it was to run after pleasures. He did not spend even a pie in the wrong way, yet nothing was left with him at the end of the month."

Roy concludes his impression thus: "He was not a man of this earth; he was a god came down from heavens..."

STORM WITHOUT: TRANQUILLITY WITHIN

The Baroda phase of Sri Aurobindo's life came to an end in the wake of the mighty popular upsurge against the infamous move by Lord Curzon, the Governor-General of India, to partition Bengal, when before a huge gathering the affluent patriot Subodh Mullik announced a donation of a lakh of rupees for founding a national college, free from any control by the foreign government – and Sri Aurobindo was requested to come down to Calcutta to head it. (The people hailed Mullik as *Raja*, an appellation that became permanently affixed to his name – a solitary event of its nature.)

Sri Aurobindo readily responded to the call and resigned his well-paid Baroda job for a symbolic allowance that before long dwindled to nothing. He became the centre of the college, the unfailing source of inspiration for the students and the staff; a new orientation to the philosophy of education that would strengthen the student's faith in himself and his motherland, prepare him to derive joy from

sacrifice for a noble cause, teach him to view things globally with due attention to progress in any field anywhere in the world and absorb the lessons into the national genius, was in the making when exigency obliged him to stand aside from the experiment.

It happened like this. In March 1906 a weekly newspaper was launched by Barindra Kumar and his team, with Sri Aurobindo's blessings. Entitled *Yugantar*, it became a phenomenal success in terms of both circulation and influence. It presented the ideals of freedom in no uncertain terms and several of its lead articles were written by Sri Aurobindo. The renowned nationalist Bipin Chandra Pal now decided to bring out an English newspaper of the same kind and his scheme materialised in August 1906. He sought Sri Aurobindo's help. In the backdrop of an atmosphere charged with anti-British sentiments because of the move for the partition of Bengal, such a journal was the need of the hour and Sri Aurobindo joined hands with Pal right from the start, but without in any way revealing his association with the publication. Whose masterly hand wrote those surprisingly powerful articles? No other person than Bipin Chandra Pal himself paid this tribute to Sri Aurobindo later, in *Swaraj*: "The hand of the master was in it from the very beginning. Its bold attitude, its vigorous thoughts, its clear ideas, its chaste and powerful diction, its scorching sarcasm and refined witticism, were unsurpassed by any journal in the country, either Indian or Anglo-Indian...Morning after morning, not only Calcutta but the educated community almost in every part of the country eagerly awaited its vigorous pronouncements on the stirring questions of the day...Long extracts from it began to be reproduced in the exclusive columns of *The Times* of London."

Even the then Editor of *The Statesman*, S.K. Ratcliffe, recollected later how the paper was "full of leading and special articles written in English with brilliance and pungency not hitherto attained in the Indian Press...the most effective voice of what we then called nationalist extremism."

While the readers were mystified about the author of the main articles in the *Bande Mataram*, the British intelligence found it out. Sri Aurobindo also knew that it will not be possible for him to steer clear of the hostility of the authorities if he had to play his role in the political upheaval of the time, however sincerely he may try to keep himself in the background, and that the inevitable should not happen while he headed an educational institution, the first of its kind. Thus he resigned his position as the Principal of the National College.

The inevitable of course happened sooner than expected. In 1907 the government prosecuted the *Bande Mataram* and, as its editor, Sri Aurobindo. Despite his total reluctance to come to limelight, this case made him a legend overnight. It was at this time that Rabindranath wrote his celebrated poem, "*Rabindra, O Aurobindo, salutes thee, O friend, O country's friend, the voice-incarnate of India's soul...*"

The Prosecution failed to prove that Sri Aurobindo was the editor. His acquittal was almost a national jubilation, making the government even more anxious to remove him from the public scene. The anxiety turned into determination before long, because of his role in the historic 23rd session of the Congress at Surat at the end of 1907, where the Moderate leadership received a death blow from the Nationalists led by Sri Aurobindo and Bal Gangadhar Tilak.

In the previous year, at the Calcutta session of the Congress under the Presidentship of Dadabhoy Naoroji resolutions quite radical in nature, demanding Swaraj and upholding Swadeshi, Boycott and National Education had been passed for the first time and they were to be endorsed and some more resolutions along that line were expected to be passed in the next session of the Congress scheduled to take place at Nagpur. But the Moderates, who were in no mood to antagonise the rulers managed to change the venue to their stronghold, Surat. As if that was not enough, they chose Rash Behari Ghose to preside over it whereas Lajpat Rai, just released from jail, had been the choice of not

only the Nationalists but also the greater body of the Congress.

A showdown at Surat was inevitable. The session began before an audience over ten thousand strong. The President-elect, Dr. Rash Behari Ghose, followed by other leaders, ascended the decorated dais amidst cheers from the moderates. Dewan Bahadur Ambalal Desai proposed him. But as soon as Sir Surendranath Bannerji stood up to second the proposal, his words were drowned in an ear-splitting roar of protest. The greatest orator of Bengal had the jolt of his life. Let us have a look at the first hand record left by the veteran British journalist and author, Henry Nevinson:

“Waving their arms, their scarves, their sticks and umbrellas, a solid mass of delegates and spectators on the right of the Chair sprang to their feet and shouted without a moment’s pause...the whole ten thousand were on their feet, shouting for order, shouting for tumult. Mr. Malvi (Chairman of the Reception Committee) half in the chair, rang his brass Benares bell and rang in vain. Even a voice like his was not a whisper in the din. Again and again he shouted, unheard as silence. He sat down and for a moment the storm was lulled. The voices of the leaders were audible, consulting in agitated tones...Again Surendranath sprang on the table and again the assembly roared with clamour. Again the Chairman rang his Benares bell and rang in vain. In an inaudible voice, like a sob, he declared the sitting suspended.”

The next day was no different. Once again the session ended in turmoil. Two different conferences were held the day after. The Nationalists held theirs in a large courtyard – and they came in a most orderly and quiet manner. Observes Nevinson, “Grave and silent, I think without saying a single word, Mr. Aurobindo Ghose took the Chair and sat unmoved, with far-off eyes, as one who gazes at futurity. In clear, short sentences, without eloquence or passion, Mr. Tilak spoke till the stars shone out and someone kindled a lantern by his side.” (*The New Spirit in India*)

Nevinson travelled with the delegates by train. At every

halt he heard thunderous shouts hailing the Nationalists, Sri Aurobindo and Tilak in particular. The young Aurobindo became the object of adoration of the masses. A year later, during the Alipore trial, the prosecution witnesses narrated how Sri Aurobindo's carriages used to be drawn by his youthful admirers who gave the horses a holiday. The redoubtable Counsel for Prosecution, Barrister Norton complained, "Aurobindo was treated with the reverence of a king wherever he had gone. As a matter of fact, he was regarded as the leader not merely of Bengal but of the whole country."

Though the Moderates, by the virtue of their wealth, personal influence and blessings of the powers that be continued to be active for some more years, they were a waning force. The Surat Congress marked the No Return point in the nation's march towards its goal and Sri Aurobindo was the first leader to declare openly "complete and absolute independence" as that goal.

PRELUDE TO THE STRUGGLE FOR A DIFFERENT LIBERATION

In a pre-dawn swoop on the 2nd of May 1908 a group of young men, "all educated and belonging to respectable families" according to the investigating report, residing in a garden at Murari Pukur in Calcutta, the property of Sri Aurobindo and his brothers, were rounded up, accused of secret revolutionary activities. Simultaneously another police party surrounded Sri Aurobindo's residence at Grey Street and arrested him. The 'dangerous materials' discovered in the house were some letters Sri Aurobindo had written to his wife from Baroda and a lump of earth collected from Sri Ramakrishna's place at Dakshineswar that someone had given to Mrinalini Devi, considering it sacred.

Famous as the Alipore Conspiracy Case, the trial in the court of the Session Judge, Mr. Beachcroft, Sri Aurobindo's Cambridge classmate and a brilliant scholar second only to Sri Aurobindo in several subjects, continued more or less for a year, 1908-1909. An eminent lawyer of

the time, Mr. Norton, was specially brought from London to serve as the Counsel for the Crown. The young Calcutta lawyer who voluntarily came forward to defend Sri Aurobindo was the future celebrity, Deshbandhu Chitta Ranjan Das. His inspired and prophetic words at the conclusion of his argument have become immortal: "My appeal to you is that a man like this who is charged with the offences imputed to him stands not only before the bar in this Court but stands before the bar of the High Court of History and my appeal to you is this: That long after this controversy is hushed in silence, long after this turmoil, this agitation ceases, long after he is dead and gone, he will be looked upon as the poet of patriotism, as the prophet of nationalism and the lover of humanity. Long after he is dead and gone his words will be echoed and re-echoed not only in India, but across distant seas and lands..."

While the newspapers of the day did their job very well in carrying the reports of the trial to the people agog with excitement, while political leaders and intellectuals waited with bated breath for its outcome, Sri Aurobindo took no interest in the sensational proceedings. He was in a different world:

As he spoke later, "I looked at the jail that secluded me from men and it was no longer by its high walls that I was imprisoned; no, it was Vasudeva, who surrounded me. I walked under the branches of the tree in front of my cell but it was not the tree, it was Vasudeva, it was Sri Krishna whom I saw standing there and holding over me His shade... I looked and it was not the Magistrate whom I saw, it was Vasudeva, it was Narayana who was sitting there on the bench. I looked at the Prosecuting Counsel and it was not the Counsel for the Prosecution that I saw; it was Sri Krishna who sat there and smiled." (*Uttarpara Speech*)

Sri Aurobindo was acquitted once again. The *Bande Mataram* had ceased publication. He launched the *Karmayogin*, a weekly in English, followed by a Bengali weekly, the *Dharma*. The rulers, however, could not be in peace with Sri Aurobindo at large. The one most eager to

deport him was Lord Minto, the Governor-General of British India. Unfortunately for him, Lord Morley, the Secretary of State for India, vetoed the gentleman's fond resolution again and again, stating categorically, "As for deportation I will not listen to it."

While they were debating on the issue in great earnestness and confidentiality, Sri Aurobindo, in obedience to an *Adesh*, a direction from above, suddenly left Calcutta for the French pocket of Chandernagore and thence to Pondicherry, where he arrived on the 4th of April 1910. Even then in his last but one letter to Morley, Minto wrote on 26 May 1910, "As to the celebrated Aurobindo...I can only repeat what I said to you in my letter of April 14th that he is the most dangerous man we have to now reckon with ... and has an unfortunate influence on the student class and Indians who know him quite well have told me he is quite beyond redemption."

Sri Aurobindo of course had figured several times in the House of Commons, but on the 28th of April 1910, that exalted forum witnessed a stormy debate on him – the first ever of that length and lively exchange on any Indian leader. Earlier Sir Ramsay MacDonald, the leader of the Labour Party and the future Prime Minister, had demanded to know, on the basis of some news in the *Times*, why a warrant had been issued against Sri Aurobindo, and he had been told that it was for a seditious article in the *Karmayogin*. Twice thereafter Sir Ramsay wished to see that article, but when the Treasury Bench failed to produce it, he flashed a copy of the magazine himself and read out the article concerned passage by passage and challenged anybody to point out where lay any element of sedition in it. The Members heard with amazement, only once Mr. J. King interrupting the speaker asking him if the original article was not in Bengali and if the author was not a Bengali, to which Sir Ramsay replied, "The article is in the most excellent English. Mr. Aurobindo Ghose could no more write an article in Bengali than I could."

This series of debate ended on the 21st of February

1911, nearly a year after Sri Aurobindo had settled down at Pondicherry, when Mr. O'Grady asked "whether the publisher of the *Karmayogin* was prosecuted for issuing the article by Mr. Aurobindo Ghose, for writing which a warrant was issued against Mr. Ghose; whether that trial resulted in the acquittal of the publisher on the ground that the article was not seditious; and whether the Government has now withdrawn the warrants issued in connection with the article?" To which Mr. Montagu, the Under Secretary of State, replied: "The answer to the first part of my Hon. Friend's question is Yes, to the second, Yes; and to the third, Yes."

THE EVOLUTIONARY CRISIS AND BEYOND

India, for Sri Aurobindo, was not just a piece of earth, but a godhead, a consciousness that had a unique role to play in the destiny of mankind and for that Her freedom from bondage to an imperial power was indispensable and in his seer vision Sri Aurobindo had seen it a *fait accompli*. It was a different freedom he must struggle for thenceforth – humanity's freedom from its bondage to a colossal ignorance, the cause of its manifold suffering. At Pondicherry he plunged into an exploration of the spheres of consciousness embracing everything as well as at the root of everything, determined to unravel the future that awaited man.

The Mother, French by birth but of Middle-Eastern ancestry, first met Sri Aurobindo in 1914. The *Arya*, a monthly, was launched under her initiative. Several of Sri Aurobindo's major works were serialised in this publication. The Mother had to leave for France a year later, but the magazine continued publication. She returned to Pondicherry in 1920 and the Ashram took shape under her loving supervision. From 1926 Sri Aurobindo remained totally engrossed in his Yoga, leaving the Ashram and the ever-increasing demand for help from innumerable seekers, to the Mother's care.

Sri Aurobindo's realisations and his vision, as put forth in his works like *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *The Human Cycle*, *The Ideal of Human Unity* and the epic *Savitri*, invite us to an adventure in consciousness and help us transcend several narrow concepts that prevail widely about yoga, spirituality, education and, last but not the least, the significance of evolution. There are certain basic truths that man is trying to find through all his activities, consciously or unconsciously. Says Sri Aurobindo: "The earliest preoccupation of man in his awakened thoughts, and, as it seems, his inevitable and ultimate preoccupation, for it survives the longest period of scepticism and returns after every banishment, is also the highest which his thought can envisage. It manifests itself in the divination of Godhead, the impulse towards perfection, the search after pure Truth and unmixed bliss, the sense of a secret immortality. The ancient dawns of human knowledge have left us their witness to this constant aspiration; today we see a humanity satiated but not satisfied by victorious analysis of the externalities of Nature preparing to return to its primeval longings. The earliest formula of Wisdom promises to be its last, – God, Light, Freedom, Immortality." (*The Life Divine*)

Can this primeval quest of man find its fulfilment? For ages those who were seriously looking for that goal broke away from the so called mundane life and sought it in a state of ascetic other-worldliness. Was the world then doomed to remain only a field of travails or a simple illusion as any number of wise mystics would look upon it – without any spiritual culmination?

Says Sri Aurobindo, "If a spiritual unfolding on earth is the hidden truth of our birth into Matter, if it is fundamentally an evolution of consciousness that has been taking place in Nature, then man as he is cannot be the last term of that evolution; he is too imperfect an expression of the spirit, Mind itself a too limited form and instrumentation; Mind is only a middle term of consciousness, the mental being can only be a transitional being." (*The Life Divine*)

Once we appreciate the truth that “Evolution is nothing but the progressive unfolding out of the density of material consciousness and the gradual self-revelation of God out of this apparent animal being,” (*The Hour of God and other Writings*) our attitude towards all problems and issues of life cannot but radically change.

About evolution Sri Aurobindo observes further, “We speak of the evolution of Life in Matter, the evolution of Mind in Matter; but evolution is a word which merely states the phenomenon without explaining it. For there seems to be no reason why Life should evolve out of material elements or Mind out of living form, unless we accept the Vedantic solution that Life is already involved in Matter and Mind in Life because in essence Matter is a form of veiled Life, Life a form of veiled Consciousness. And there seems to be little objection to a farther step in the series and the admission that mental consciousness may itself be only a form and a veil of higher states which are beyond mind.” (*The Life Divine*)

We could very well be in the threshold of an evolution taking a stride beyond mind. In fact, “At present mankind is undergoing an evolutionary crisis in which is concealed a choice of its destiny; for a stage has been reached in which the human mind has achieved in certain directions an enormous development while in others it stands arrested and bewildered and can no longer find its way.”

Sri Aurobindo visualised the next stage of human evolution possible with the descent of a gnostic power, the supramental, capable of transforming the life of man as it is today into a life divine. And here comes the relevance of Yoga. It is not a business of dabbling in bizarre feats of achieving some supernatural powers. “In the right view both of life and Yoga all life is either consciously or subconsciously a Yoga. For we mean by this term a methodised effort towards self-perfection by the expression of the potentialities latent in the being and a union of the human individual with the universal and transcendent existence we see partially expressed in man and in the

Cosmos. But all life, when we look behind its appearance, is a vast Yoga of Nature attempting to realise her perfection in an ever increasing expression of her potentialities and to unite herself with her own divine reality.” (*The Synthesis of Yoga*)

Over the ages Yoga had taken diverse courses, one major line giving great emphasis on *Jnana* or Knowledge, another on *Bhakti* and *Prema* (Devotion and Love) and yet another on *Karma* or Action. But since all the disciplines had a common goal, Sri Aurobindo culls out their salient features and makes a synthesis of them. There was no dichotomy between spirit and matter, between a life spiritual and the world. “World is a becoming which seeks always to express in motion of Time and Space, by progression in Mind, Life and Body what is beyond all becoming, beyond Time and Space, beyond mind, life and body.” (*The Upanishads*)

While analysing the history of human aspiration, the great endeavours towards perfection man had made through the ages in different areas of his activity, social, cultural, scientific and political and presenting a picture of the destiny of man through his integral vision in his immortal works, Sri Aurobindo never cut himself off the current national or world events. During the World War II he announced his support for the Allies as he could foresee the devastation the civilisation would have suffered had the victory gone to the Nazi camp. On the eve of India winning independence he sent an emissary to the leadership of the day suggesting that the Cripps proposal be accepted. His counsel went in vain; but looking back several of the leading figures of the day, K.M. Munshi for example, agree that the division of the nation could have been avoided had the leadership heeded the advice. Instances are so many; but one thing is certain, Sri Aurobindo did not expect much from the present humanity in terms of harmony and light of wisdom, though he was the greatest optimist known to us because of his faith in mankind’s inner capacity to transcend his present limitations.

Sri Aurobindo passed away on the 5th of December, 1950.

LIGHTS ON EDUCATION

It follows, in the light of the evolutionary vision of Sri Aurobindo that the true process of education should help the child to bring out the best inherent in his being. But that must be accomplished not through any imposed curriculum, but through an environment and system that can spontaneously bring out the hidden splendour in every child's consciousness. We conclude this section with a few passages from Sri Aurobindo:

“The first principle of true teaching is that nothing can be taught. The teacher is not an instructor or task-master, he is a helper and a guide. His business is to suggest and not to impose. He does not actually train the pupil's mind, he only shows him how to perfect his instruments of knowledge and helps and encourages him in the process. He does not impart knowledge to him, he shows him how to acquire knowledge for himself. He does not call forth the knowledge that is within; he only shows him where it lies and how it can be habituated to rise to the surface. The distinction that reserves this principle for the teaching of adolescent and adult minds and denies its application to the child is a conservative and unintelligent doctrine. Child or man, boy or girl, there is only one sound principle of good teaching. Difference of age only serves to diminish or increase the amount of help and guidance necessary; it does not change its nature.

“The second principle is that the mind has to be consulted in its own growth. The idea of hammering the child into the shape desired by the parent or teacher is a barbarous and ignorant superstition. It is he himself who must be induced to expand in accordance with his own nature. There can be no greater error than for the parent to arrange beforehand that his son shall develop particular qualities, capacities, ideas, virtues, or be prepared for a prearranged career. To force the nature to abandon its own *dharma* is to do it permanent harm, mutilate its growth and deface its perfection. It is a selfish tyranny over a

human soul and a wound to the nation, which loses the benefit of the best that a man could have given it and is forced to accept instead something imperfect and artificial, second-rate, perfunctory and common. Everyone has in him something divine, something his own, a chance of perfection and strength in however small a sphere which God offers him to take or refuse. The task is to find it, develop it and use it. The chief aim of education should be to help the growing soul to draw out that in itself which is best and make it perfect for a noble use.

“The third principle of education is to work from the near to the far, from that which is to that which shall be. The basis of a man’s nature is almost always, in addition to his soul’s past, his heredity, his surroundings, his nationality, his country, the soil from which he draws sustenance, the air which he breathes, the sights, sounds, habits to which he is accustomed. They mould him not the less powerfully because insensibly, and from that then we must begin. We must not take up the nature by the roots from the earth in which it must grow or surround the mind with images and ideas of a life which is alien to that in which it must physically move. If anything has to be brought in from outside, it must be offered, not forced on the mind. A free and natural growth is the condition of genuine development. There are souls which naturally revolt from their surroundings and seem to belong to another age and clime. Let them be free to follow their bent; but the majority languish, become empty, become artificial, if artificially moulded into an alien form. It is God’s arrangement that they should belong to a particular nation, age, society, that they should be children of the past, possessors of the present, creators of the future. The past is our foundation, the present our material, the future our aim and summit. Each must have its due and natural place in a national system of education.” (*“A System of National Education”: The Hour of God and other Writings*)

SECTION 2

Sri Aurobindo Memorial Lecture 2008-09

EDUCATION FOR WOMEN AND WOMEN FOR EDUCATION: THE CASE OF BENGAL

JASODHARA BAGCHI

ABSTRACT

Women's education was one of the major signifiers of Social Reform in colonial Bengal. Perhaps, originally conceived as a programme for providing the indigenous elite with suitable 'helpmeet', the educational impulse soon crossed the stipulated boundaries of such an agenda.

The momentum generated by the initial endeavour of a male Social Reformer, such as Pandit Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar was very soon picked up by women themselves. Women's attempts at building different types of associations in order to make education sustainable among the deprived sections of women will be seen as contributing to an awareness of the need to educate women in order to make them self-reliant. Women's active exercise of their educational privilege in picking up their pen and writing both fictional and non-fictional writings throwing light on the diverse areas where women needed to assert themselves, were significant features of the movement. As Women's Studies has contributed to a greater understanding of

gender inequality in education, the insights provided by the fellow practitioners in Women's Studies will be used to throw light on the complex issue of women's agency in the movement for women's education.

It is these insights which have helped us to recognise that the role of the author, editor and educator coalesced in towering figures like Begum Roqueyah Sakhawat Hossain and Swarnakumari Devi.

The 'colonial bind' had prevented a wider spread of formal education among the deprived mass of labouring women. Unfortunately, the trend has continued to haunt the 'underprivileged section of the Bengali society even after Independence. The thwarting of the educational aspirations of the children belonging to poor and depressed families will be examined from various studies undertaken in more recent times in West Bengal. The road ahead will be indicated through some of the recent movements for women's autonomy that are now visible in Bengal.

EDUCATION FOR WOMEN AND WOMEN FOR EDUCATION: THE CASE OF BENGAL

I am honoured to give this lecture at the invitation of the NCERT, which has been named after Sri Aurobindo in West Bengal. I would like to remind this audience that the contribution of a section of his family to the cause of women's education in Bengal was considerable. His elder brother Sri Manmohan Ghose was closely associated with the movements for women's education in Bengal. I would, however, like to begin with a poem by Sm Lotika Ghosh, the redoubtable niece of Sri Aurobindo, and the daughter of his elder brother Sri Manmohan Ghose:

Dedicated
To Our First Champions
"Daughters of Ind, awake!" The call
Went ringing through the silent night. No voice

Replied. The mighty champion fought alone,
The prisoner hugged her chains condemned to die.

On Ganges' sacred banks pyres crimson flamed,
One walked alone the pyres among to save
The trembling victim, intoxicated, drugged,
Deep pity in his heart and burning shame.
Dark superstitions veiled our ancient faith,
None dared to question and custom turned to law

Ruled tyrannic crushing human rights
Till one Sovran voice shattered the freezing spell.
Then doughty champions rose on every side,
Long years the marathonian battle raged
As one by one they came and stood around
The captive lady hammering at her chains.
Of oceanic wisdom one stood there,
There stood the rebel bard with epic pen,
And one with prophet-gaze and wizard tongue
Who won men's hearts to champion women's weal.

He named the good with constant heart and pure,

Who the ample page of knowledge spread,
The friend of women cast in heroic mould
Both stood firm, a hundred more unnamed
All cried, "The captive lady must be free!"
The mist dispersed and to their awed sights revealed

The Mighty Mother, captive, bleeding, chained
Men knelt repentant, till one cried aloud
"Hail Mother Supreme! Mother to thee all hail!"

Bande Mataram (Nag ed. *Bethune Centenary Volume*, n.p.)

Let us listen to the voice of Lotika Ghosh carefully. *Captive Lady* is the name of the English poem written by Michael Madhusudan Dutt. Lotika Ghosh makes this the trope of the Indian women held captive in the inner quarters of the respective households (*andarmahal*), deprived of education and possibilities of interacting with the wide world outside as well as the motherland held captive by the British. So, in order to commemorate the champions of women's education, she thinks of the emancipation of both India and the women of India. Hence, the Social Reformers like Raja Rammohan Roy, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, the Reformer poet Michael Madhusudan Dutt are unproblematically related to a Nationalist thinker-novelist like Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay. Women's education in Bengal was wrapped in this Reforming and Nationalistic zeal.

A confirmation of the title of my present lecture may be had in the long and painstakingly produced chapter entitled "Social and Educational Movements *for Women and by Women* 1820–1950" that Lotika Ghosh contributed to the goldmine of documentation of women's secular education in Bengal, viz. *The Centenary Volume of Bethune School* that Lotika Ghosh herself co-edited with Kalidas Nag. In it she expands on her cryptic references made in the poem quoted, to present the struggle for women's education as a seamless continuity with the steps taken up for Social Reform in the three decades that preceded the proper launching of the Bethune School, the pioneering institution for secular, modern education for women in Bengal. In her account of the **Samajonnati Bidhayini Suhrid Samiti** (Society of Friends of Implementing Social Improvement) Lotika Ghosh draws our attention to the two major resolutions taken in the first meeting presided over by Maharshi Debendranath Tagore, the much revered father of Rabindranath Tagore.

Moved by Kishory Chand Mitra and seconded by Akshoy Kumar Dutt:

“That the association will do what it can towards the spread of female education, widow remarriage and the elimination of polygamy and child marriage.” (Nag, p.132)

Moved by Debendranath Tagore and seconded by Kishory Chand Mitra:

“That the association will send a memorial to the Legislative Council for the removal of hindrance of widow remarriage and for the present in a limited way try to establish girls’ schools in towns, suburbs and other localities.” (Ibid)

The beginning of women’s education in Bengal, therefore, was perceived as co-terminus with Social Reform. For women’s education took on a priority, it was conceived as very central to the agenda of Social Reform, as Lotika Ghosh’s poem as well as her long article makes clear. As a more recent account of the coming of women’s education as a part of India’s modernising agenda, prepared from a Women’s Studies perspective makes it clear, ‘most of these reformers did not envisage women’s education as an equal right with men, or as a human right’. The authors quote Narmad, a reformer from Gujarat, who had put it like this, ‘By educating the women, the men will benefit.’

The newly modernising *Bhadraloks* needed their suitable ‘helpmeet’ in the *Bhadramahilas*. As the Bengali reformer Koilashchandra Bose had said in his writing ‘On the Education of Hindu Females’, on the eve of the start of the first secular school for elite girls in Calcutta, in 1846, ‘she must be refined, reorganised, recast, regenerated’. This quotation provided the epigraph of one of the most celebrated books that has opened out gender as a subject of serious study, two decades ago, *Recasting Women* edited by Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, published by the first feminist publisher of India *Kali for Women*.

As the celebrated essays in the collection make it very clear, the process of 'recasting' women is not a simple, unilinear process, it has to negotiate many complex twists and turns, as the process is bound up with the very process of social transformation. Similarly, the social process envisaged in education for women, however simple an emancipatory journey it may look like, will invariably have to deal with built in ambiguities. One of the most inevitable ambiguities is built into the two parts of the word 'education' itself. The two parts, as claimed, point at two different directions, producing tensions which are often very generative. To quote Dr. Bagchi,

The tensions in the notion of education that I have been describing are found in the very etymology of the word education—the emphasis on '*ducare*', or leading, on the one hand, and on '*ex*', or the movement outwards towards freedom, on the other. This was a dialectic between control and freedom... (p.7).

The ambivalence of control and freedom that remains inscribed in the word education will be made to play out the many dimensions of the problem which I hope to touch upon, viz. the important aspect of women's agency in the aspiration and struggle for women's education. I have to begin with a serious apology. The area suggested by my talk is vast. Within the limited scope of this lecture, I will only be able to skim the surface and in the process, will not be able to spell out the full acknowledgement of my debt to other scholars and activists in the field, both older and younger than me.

Let us go back to Lotika Ghosh's celebrated account "Social and Educational Movements for Women and by Women 1820–1950" that, as I had said earlier, had spelt out the implications of the poem with which I had begun. It tells you something about these movements that twenty-nine out of this forty-page essay are devoted to the aspect of the movements *by* women! I would like to acknowledge

my debt of gratitude to this stalwart elder, that she had celebrated the completion of one hundred years of modern Indian girl's secular education in Bengal by making full acknowledgement of the numerous organizations and associations that dotted this thorny terrain that is still perceived by many as a predominantly male one. In fact, if we look at the poem itself, it highlights the male pioneers, but in her carefully researched essay included in the same volume, she has introduced us to many of the different types of organisations and institutions that women had spearheaded under the dynamic impetus emanating from education. What Lotika Ghosh succeeded in doing was to bring out women's agency in this entire complicated process. (Nag, pp. 129-169)

Despite the fact that the field had to negotiate many contestations such as separate curricula for boys and girls, or, whether women should be trained primarily as good homemakers or not, whether women under the influence of education were going to disrupt the traditional society or not, women continued to organise around the theme of capacity building of women in this new type of organisation of the colonial society, a theme which is encapsulated in the current buzzword 'empowerment'.

Along with mushrooming of schools, and, later, colleges for women, what is noteworthy about this movement is the spawning of women's associations. To take one of many such instances, an organization like *Bama Hitaishini Sabha* was established in 1871. Through, as Lotika Ghosh says, 'the enthusiasm of the pupils of Native Female Normal School and Adult School.' Though Keshub Chunder Sen was the President, Smt. Radharani Lahiri was its Secretary. The deliberations they undertook were regularly reported in *Bamabodhini Patrika* founded by Umesh Chunder Dutt a liberal Reformer. An important edition of the essays pertaining to women's education published in *Bamabodhin Patrikai* brought out by one of the two pioneering Women's Studies Centres, that of Calcutta

University by its Director, Professor Bharati Ray, brought out the multi-dimensional nature of the problems that were being considered.

The coming of women's education in Bengal had this history of being an integral part of the Social Reform movement in Bengal and yet outside it.

WOMEN'S WRITINGS

If we examine the women's writings in particular, in *Bamabodhini Patrika's* writings on women's education in the collection mentioned above, we find the same motif as in the Social Reformer's critique of the oppression in the name of Hindu Brahminical orthodoxy. The critique, as may be expected of Reformers veered towards a greater awareness of the distressful condition of what they call 'desh', which is a combination of country and society. Take, for instance, this passage from a series of letters from mother to daughter.

You definitely need to be educated. You are not in a position to comprehend the degradation/ disaster to which our country has fallen because our women have not been educated; just as a man cannot see anything if he has no eyes, similarly it is not possible to discern what is harmful if the eyes of knowledge are not opened with the help of education. When you have acquired education you will understand the sufferings of our country and will work hard round the clock to alleviate them. (Ray, 1994, p.16)

Published in *Bamabodhini Patrika* in 1864, this letter, though, perhaps, composed artificially to argue a case, makes it clear that the argument for women's education was not only for serving women better but for a greater service to society in general.

One such area of general interest was the eradication

of superstition. The new wave of Reform specially targeted the superstition that was built around the theme of women's education itself. **Since** the sufferings of upper caste Hindu widows was a by-word for the inhuman injunction of the Hindu *Shastras*. True to its name, *Bamabodhini Patrika* (the periodical for the understanding of women) carried in its very first edition, a dialogue between two women Jnanada (the knowledge-giver) and Sarala (the straightforward/innocent one) on the necessity of education for women. The *Shastras* came to be discussed:

Jnanada : I am happy to listen to your straightforward innocent speech, just as your name is Sarala. What is your objection?

Sarala : My dear, I have heard there is objection in the *Shashtra* (Hindu Scriptures). Shall I sin by giving up the *Shastras*?

Jnanada : This is typical of womankind! We silence others by referring to the *Shastras*. Have you read anything? A famous pundit of our society has discovered scriptural sayings to prove that women should be educated. Listen to one of these: "father will nurture and educate girls with care." (Ray, 1994, p.2 my translation)

Thus referring to the sloka from *Manu* which *Vidyasagar* inscribed on the carriage that was sent out to girls for bringing them to Bethune School.

A little later comes up the question of widowhood.

Sarala : I think there is something wrong in women's education. I hear that women became widow as a result of this.

Jnanada : You are still full of such errors! What is there in education that the husband will be killed?...If someone becomes a widow after having been educated, why should it be the fault of education? (Ibid p.3 my translation)

This is certainly the voice of the Reformer trying to indoctrinate the women, particularly girls and their families to enable the girls to enter the portals of education.

It was, however, not merely the voice of the Reformer that spoke of the loss suffered by women. Even in the post 1857 period, usually designated as the period of Nationalism, when, according to Professor Partha Chatterjee, the 'women's question' had been 'resolved' (Sangari and Vaid, p 237). These impulses towards education and the sense of deprivation that women suffered from being denied the opportunity had become an integral part of women's narrative in the twentieth century. The first fruit of education for women was made visible by women writers who bombarded the public sphere from within the four walls of the domestic privacy. Women's education, which was the immediate cause of women's writing, became quite central to women's narrative. Thus, in the twenties of the previous century, we hear the angry voice of Jyotirmoyee Devi, a Hindu widow in a traditional family:

Men feel insecure at the prospect of women's education, in case the oppressed learn to understand their oppression. Hence the ploys used against western-style education that is supposed to pollute the pure ideals of sacred India. Is it not our good fortune, they say, that women have been saved from such contamination so that, at least the skeleton (skeleton indeed!) of old Hinduism has not disappeared? Do not, therefore, spoil the

purity of the inner domain by encouraging self-willed assertiveness.

**(Jyotirmoyee Devi, *The River Churning*,
My Introduction, p.xxvi, 1995)**

The most interesting sequence in the novel *The First Promise* (*Pratham Pratisruti*), the first of the inter-generational trilogy written by Ashapura Devi, an author whose centenary is being celebrated this year, is one that describes the experience of the heroine Satyabati (lit. Possessed of Truth) whose daring extends to teaching herself to write. Since she has no pen and paper she writes on palm leaf with plant juice. The elderly women treat this as a transgression comparable to elopement of a widow. Among the younger generation Satya's announcement "but do you know I can write too" produces stupefying fear. One of them asked:

Where did you learn Satya? Who taught you?

Who'll waste time teaching me? I've learnt by myself. Just by looking at it carefully.

...Where did you get your leaves and quill?

Who'll give me ink and quill?...I made a holder out of bot leaves and filled it with plant juice for ink.

...And the quill?

Don't ask such naïve questions. As if all the palm leaves in the world have been locked up! Any wretch will find a reed if they looked for one!

When Satya is told "Isn't it a sin, since you're a girl", "Why should it be a sin?" Satya blazed forth spiritedly. "If it isn't a sin when women fight and argue all day and curse away, how can it be a sin to learn? And isn't the goddess herself a woman? Doesn't she hold the four Vedas in her hands?" (Ashapura p.126). When Satyabati is challenged by her unsympathetic father as to why she wants to learn

to read and write, since she is not likely to become a rent-collector or a cashier, once more Satya's vehemence returned. She could suffer anything except taunts. "Why should they become cashiers? They'll learn to read the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas*. Then they'd not have to keep waiting for the Kathak to come round." (p.131)

If this is fiction, the first celebrated autobiography of a woman to be published, viz. Rashsundari Devi's *Amar Jibon* (My Life) reiterated the same motif for attaining literacy. It is a wonderful text full of the details of the labour women put in within the four walls of a family. In the Sixth Composition of the book there occurs a miraculous turn of events. I would seek your permission to quote portions of this wonderful text translated into English by Professor Tanika Sarkar.

I was immersed in a life of labour, I hardly knew how time went by. Little by little a desire took shape in my mind and I came to be possessed by a single wish: I will learn to read, and I will read a sacred text.... Women do not read, how will I do it, and why does this bother me so! I didn't know what to do. It isn't as if all our ways were evil those days, but this certainly was. Everyone got together to deprive women of education.... So how was I to learn anything? But my heart would not accept, it was forever yearning. (Sarkar, 1999 p.168)

Ultimately, putting together her memory of students reciting, that she heard as a child, her eight-year old boy's writings on palm leaf and a page hidden from the *Chaitanya Bhagabat*, a sacred text of the Vaishnava's, Rashsundari succeeded in crossing the Rubicon. She learnt to read. Thereby she did not consider herself a mere *sakshara* (literate) but *jitakshara* (won with words)!

Tanika Sarkar in her section on Women's Education or Streeshiksha explains how the two myths that

circulated against the transgression involved in women's education, viz. the immoral woman and the widow, both short-circuit the husband, thereby demonising any autonomy that education may confer on women. She quotes the title of a play published in 1897 which may be translated as *Educate the Women and You are Digging Your Own Grave* (pp.76–77)

Not all narratives, however, are so savage on the husband, as, in fact, Rashsundari's was not. In the novel *Raibari* (the Ray Household) we see the two faces of socialisation of a child bride. In an autobiographical novel Giribala Devi depicts the painful yet exhilarating socialisation process whereby the girl child Binu, symbolically named Banalata (the wild creeper) is moulded by the multifarious rituals of domestic life in a Brahmin zamindar household, and the call of letters that ultimately fashions her as a fully fledged writer. Parallel to the ritual *bratas* and proverbs that moulds her domestication in this orthodox household is the other vital process of education that links her on to the world of print culture. Among the upper class male elite who usually married girls who did not have a chance to go to school, the husbands often took on the role of educators. Since it had to be fitted into the strict code of the much extolled Hindu joint family, it had to be done in secret in the depths of night when husband and wife at last had the chance to come together in the intimacy of a bedroom. In *Raibari* we see this process brought to life with the young husband of Binu. The upright eldest son of the household takes on the formal education of his child bride late at night. Reading and writing provides an open sesame to the world outside. (pp.12–13). This is an addition to what has been researched as 'Antapure Steeshiksha' or 'women's education in the inner chambers' (Roy 1998) where women did not have to absent themselves from the *andarmahal*, i.e. the inner quarters, and yet could partake of the fruit of education which ultimately resulted in women capturing the public sphere of print culture.

WOMEN'S ASSOCIATIONS

Not all of women's agency in her entry into the contested field of education is confined to the emergence of the women writer. It grew in tandem with other forms of associationalism that enabled educated women to carve out a niche in public life. This informed the efforts of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, the great Muslim woman educator and writer of undivided Bengal. To quote editor and translator of *Padmaraag*:

Education is for Rokeya, as it has been for women writers all over the world, the key to breaching the public and private domains. Couched on one level, in a private, refining idiom, education entails, on another, a whole range of public issues such as women's vocations and professional occupations, the purpose of their education, the independent intellectual life that educated women aspire to and, indeed, in the widest sense of the term, knowledge as a tool for women's empowerment in civic and political spheres as much as in the domestic and private ones. (Bagchi, 2005, p.xxiii)

Hence we find a parallel effort on the part of women, once they had crossed the threshold of education, to form major associations through which they created the ambience for keeping education alive and on the ground. Thus **All India Women's Conference** (1927) that formed the first major all-India platform for women started around the theme of women's education. (Basu and Ray, 1990) **Women's Education League**, likewise, was an organisation with international links, when women themselves took on the activity of debating and disseminating issues relating to women's education. (Southard 1984). If we go back to the original essay by Lotika Ghosh, "Social and Educational Movements for

Women and by Women 1820–1950”, we find the account of women’s own efforts in creating the right atmosphere for making women’s education an institution of lasting significance not merely in the lives of women but in the life of the society by and large. Apart from the attempt to inculcate Hindu values to preserve the orthodox life of the Indian society intact in the mould of Revivalist Nationalists such as Mahakali Pathshala and the Nivedita School or Saradeshwari Ashram (Nag, pp. 145–147). Now we have a number of major institutions spearheaded by the educated New Women who had been at the vanguard of the secular educational movement in Bengal.

The series that we would like to consider was led by **Sakhi Samiti** by Swarnakumari Devi, the elder sister of Rabindranath Tagore, the formidable littérateur and the editor of the literary journal *Bharati*, in 1896. Ten years later her daughter Hiranmayee Debi started the **Bidhaba Asram** (the Widow’s Home) which appears to have grown up from the ashes of *Sakhi Samiti*. Originally intended to train the Hindu widows and orphans to take up Janana education indoors, it was meant to spread women’s education and simultaneously provide sources of income for the impecunious widows and orphans of the Hindu society. In order to raise funds to sustain this, a *Shilpa Samiti* was founded in order to curate handicrafts exhibition by some of these women and from different parts of India.

When *Sakhi Samity* could not sustain itself, Hiranmayee Debi stepped in with her Widow’s Home which would provide home to homeless widows and to train them up in handicrafts which would enable them to become self-supporting. Skills taught included spinning and weaving, making of stockings and vests, making laces, tailoring and cutting down to elementary nursing, health and hygiene and home-doctoring.

Thus we see the model of vocational training to help the less advantaged sections of our society access education in order to become self-reliant, emerge as an ancillary to

making education viable for most women. It was emulated in many of the later associations formed by women. Later in the life of Bengal we have seen associations like Saroj Nalini Dutt Memorial Association, more specialised institutions like All Bengal Women's Union that was entrusted with the rehabilitation of victims of sexual abuse who have emulated this particular model of training women to earn their living, which alone can complete the process of education for women of less advantaged sections of society. This is the model that proved to be of great social efficacy during the great calamity of the Partition that accompanied the political independence of Bengal. Nari Seva Sangha came up to take up the challenge under the able guidance of Sja Seeta Choudhury when it helped to train many women who had been rendered homeless due to Partition. Similarly, we have to remember the contribution of Sja Phulrenu Guha who revived, on a national scale, the art of *nakshi-kantha* to ensure the livelihood of many women who had lost everything during Partition. Among the organisations she had been responsible for, **Karma Kutir** and **Association of Social Health in India** still train many women and make their lives economically viable.

Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain in her novella *Padmarag* brings to life the gendered social capital accrued by an organisation like Tarini Bhaban in which women all across the religious denominations come together to build their broken lives, broken, because most of them are 'B.A. fail' or 'biye (the Bengali word for 'marriage') fail'. In other words, marriage, which was signaled as the be-all and end-all of women's lives, had not worked in their cases. As the translator of the text says very pertinently, in her Introduction:

...The education of young girls in a school, the lessons women imbibe from the school of adversity, their mutual enlightenment from sharing each other's past, the empathy they

develop for each other as a result and the all-embracing universalist vision embodied in a huge array of activities, enrich a work that deals with familial and sexual oppression of women, personal narratives of growth and development, education feminism and the creation of female utopias. (Bagchi, 2005, p.xxiii)

THE CHALLENGE AHEAD

As Dr. Radhakrishnan, the first Vice-President of the Republic of India in his foreword to the Bethune Centenary Volume wrote:

When we were struggling for freedom in the great days of the Indian National Congress we had women presidents, Mrs. Annie Besant and Mrs. Sarojini Naidu. After the advent of freedom we have had a Cabinet Minister, an Ambassador and a Governor of a province...

Complacency in the matter will be most unfortunate and steps will have to be taken speedily to increase facilities for women's education. (Nag, p.v, italics mine)

Bengal, which had seen such high points in the movement for women's education made both by men for women and women for women had to admit defeat when it came to the spread of women's education along the barriers of class, caste and religious community. The main obstacle was diagnosed as gender and women's studies opened the wider portals of education to locate the real barriers that stood in the way of the spread of women's literacy and, thereby, her entry into education. Prof. J.P. Naik with his characteristic social concern, has said:

In my opinion, the lower priority accorded to elementary education is done mainly to the fact that the intelligentsia which came to power

at the end of the British rule is now tending to transform itself from a service group to an exploiting group. (Bagchi ed., 2005, p.50)

Despite all the heroic efforts made by women that we have been tracing so far outside the limited space of the newly emerging middle class, education failed to make a dent on the stranglehold of the major stratifications, viz. gender, class, caste and religious minority. If I may be allowed to quote from what I have myself written,

In a stratified society like ours, education, we must remember, has been a reinforcing agent of privilege. In a state like West Bengal, where the Partition saw a large scale exodus of the Muslim middle-class, the spread of mainstream education entrenched the divide between the Hindu majority and the Muslim minority. Compared to the elite aspirations about the efficiency of education as a transforming agent that might lead to windows opening out to the world, the ground level reality of spreading education among the masses ran into rough weather. Certain major divides continued not only in the total population but also in the underprivileged categories of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes more effectively described in today's parlance as the 'dalits'. It is with the 'disprivileged' that the school education has run into its worst challenge in West Bengal. (pp.49-50)

In studying the problem of the girl child in her family dynamics we come to recognise the obstacles placed in her way from the constraints of the family. Unlike the affluent orthodox Hindu families who put up ideological barriers in the name of Shastric injunctions, in the poorer families girls are made to drop out of school in order to help the

mothers going out to work, in their household chores and the supervision of the siblings.

Inadequate numbers of junior secondary schools means that girls are actively discouraged by the family from travelling long distances for getting to school after they have completed the Primary School on reaching Class IV. For girls to be suddenly out of school between the ages of 10 to 14 makes them vulnerable to inimical social pressures like trafficking or early marriage.

The noxious spread of dowry has impacted negatively on the continuation of girl's education. By a complete travesty of social entitlement it is widely perceived in Bengal that the more you educate a girl the more dowry she will need to be married off!

Since 2005 three studies were conducted by three universities in West Bengal on Early Marriage, Dowry and Trafficking. As part of Women's Commission in West Bengal we have launched a booklet and documentary film against trafficking. In the name of dowryless marriage or greater job prospects, minor girls are taken away from their classrooms into unknown destinations which may be marriage or domestic service under very unfriendly conditions or brothels. In either case the school drop-out does not even feel her economic independence, as she is made to migrate with facts suppressed.

Since the nineties the delivery of education in schools has also come under attack. A study conducted by the IIMC and one by West Bengal Education Network have exposed some of the major lacunae in the spread of girl's education. After the active campaign by the Pratichi Trust under the leadership of Professor Amartya Sen it is now being widely canvassed that the family and community of the girl child need to be involved in the educational process. Both the state and the familial setting need to learn to own girl's education as their very own concern.

Another vibrant movement which arrived late in West

Bengal, i.e. the Self Help Groups formed by women, is also determined to bring more women into the fold of education. The decentralised Panchayati Raj institutions have gone into training programmes imparting marketable skills, resulting in their economic self-reliance, which will, some day, flower into fully fledged educational opportunities for women. All the harrowing efforts of our foremothers should be made to bear fruit in a level playing field for women and men throughout our society. In order to attain this goal, we have got to **Dare to Know**.

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ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Professor Jasodhara Bagchi

Jasodhara Bagchi is a leading Indian feminist and activist. She was born in 1937 and educated at Presidency College, Kolkata, Somerville College, Oxford, and New Hall, Cambridge. The larger part of her working life was spent at Jadavpur University, where she was Professor of English. She is married to the economist, Amiya Kumar Bagchi. In 1988 she became the Founder-Director of the School of Women's Studies at Jadavpur University and led the activities of the centre until her retirement in 1997. She is also one of the founder members of the feminist organisation Sachetana in Kolkata. She has been Research Professor in Women's Studies at the Asiatic Society, Calcutta, and Visiting Professor at the Department of English, Calcutta University and University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur. She was Honorary Chairperson, National Resource Group, Mahila Samakhya, an innovative programme on gender and education of the Government of India, from 1998-2002. She was formerly Chairperson of the West Bengal Commission for Women.

Her focus areas of research include women's studies, women's writing, 19th century English and Bengali literature, the reception of Positivism in Bengal, motherhood and the Partition of India. She initiated and spearheaded the pioneering Bengali Women Writers Reprint Series edited by the School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University, which continues to bring out new editions of writers such as Jyotirmoyee Devi.

She has been an invited Fellow and given lectures in numerous academic institutions in India and abroad, such as Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, Paris, Clare Hall, University of Cambridge, Roskilde University, Denmark, Curtin University, Australia, Tufts University, USA, York University, Toronto, Canada, and Ontario Institute of

Studies in Education, Canada. She was UGC National Lecturer in English and a member of the UGC Standing Committee on Women's Studies. Her honours include a D.Litt. honoris causa awarded by Burdwan University.

Her authored, edited, and co-edited books include *Literature, Society, and Ideology in the Victorian Era* (1992), *Indian Women: Myth and Reality* (1995), *Loved and Unloved: The Girl Child in the Family* (with Jaba Guha and Piyali Sengupta, 1997), *Gem-like Flame: Walter Pater and the 19th Century Paradigm of Modernity* (1997), *Thinking Social Science in India: Essays in Honour of Alice Thorner* (co-edited with Krishna Raj and Sujata Patel, 2002), *The Trauma and the Triumph: Gender and Partition in Eastern India* (with Subhoranjan Dasgupta, 2003), and *The Changing Status of Women in West Bengal 1970-2000: The Challenges Ahead* (2005).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF SECTION I

Shri Manoj Das

SRI AUROBINDO INTERNATIONAL CENTRE OF EDUCATION PONDICHERY

Born in 1934 in a remote coastal village of Orissa. Manoj Das grew up amidst loving rural folks and Nature's splendours – evergreen meadows containing primeval lakes abounding in lotuses and the sea – but also had the horrific experience of a devastating cyclone followed by famine crushing his locality. At the age of eight he stood witness to his affluent home on the sea being plundered by savage gangs of bandits, not once but twice.

In town for study, writing came to him spontaneously and his first book in Oriya was published when he was fourteen. At fifteen he launched *Diganta*, which, in course of time grew into a significant literary journal in the state. In search of some panacea for human suffering he became a revolutionary youth leader while in college, leading several agitations, courting jail, becoming unopposed President of the University Law College Union, General Secretary of the Students Federation and playing an active role in the Afro-Asian Students Conference at Bandung, Indonesia, in 1956.

His quest, however, led him to mysticism and, after serving as a lecturer in English at Cuttack for four years, he, along with his wife, Pratijna Devi, a scion of the Raj family of Kujang whose parents were renowned freedom fighters, joined the Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry in 1963 which became their permanent abode. He teaches English literature as well as the works of Sri Aurobindo at the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education and Pratijna Devi teaches psychology.

His research in the archives of London and Edinburgh in 1971 brought to light some of the significant glimpses of India's struggle for freedom led by Sri Aurobindo in the first decade of the 20th century. He received the 1st Sri

Aurobindo Puraskar for this pioneering work, by Sri Aurobindo Bhavan, Kolkata (the birth place of Sri Aurobindo), supported by the Government of West Bengal.

Though outside his home state he is widely known as one of the best-loved and serious among the Indian writers writing in English, he is also probably the foremost successful bi-lingual writer in the country, with about forty books in English and an equal number of books in his mother tongue. He had been a regular columnist for some of the major newspapers in India such as *The Times of India*, *The Hindustan Times* and *The Hindu* and major Oriya dailies like *The Samaj* and *The Dharitri*. He was the editor of a prestigious English monthly, *The Heritage* (1985-1989), and an author-consultant to the Ministry of Education, Government of Singapore (1981-1985), visiting the island nation twice a year for taking classes of a hundred teachers.

He was the leader of the Indian Writers' Delegation to China in 2000.

A number of his short stories have been translated into major languages of the world apart from those of India and they are highly appreciated in the academic circles in the West. The numerous accolades he has received include India's national award for creative writing – *the Sahitya Akademi Award*, *the Orissa Sahitya Akademi Award (twice)*, *The Sahitya Bharati Award (by now Orissa's premier award which began with him)*, *the Bharatiya Bhasha Parishad (Kolkata) Award*, *the Sri Aurobindo Puraskar (Kolkata)*, the BAPASI (Booksellers and Publishers Association of South India) Award as the best writer in English in the South for the year 1998 and Rotary's 'For the Sake of Honour'.

The President of India decorated him with the *Padma Shri* on the Republic Day, 2001. This was followed by India's most prestigious award for literature, the *Saraswati Samman*. Utkal Sahitya Samaj, the hoary literary organization of his home state, Orissa, bestowed on him *Utkal Ratna*. While the Berhampur University offered him

the status of Professor Emeritus, the Utkal University of Culture, in its very first convocation in 2004, chose him alone to receive the D.Litt. (Honoris Causa). Once again, the Utkal University, the oldest university in the state, bestowed D.Litt. on him in its 2006 convocation. For the third time, the Fakir Mohan University of Balasore conferred D.Litt. on him in 2007.

Lately, the Sahitya Akademi, our national academy of letters, has conferred on him its highest honour, Fellowship, which, according to its constitution, is “reserved for the immortals of literature”.

While his admirers in the West included Graham Greene and H.R.F. Keating, scholars have found in his short stories and novels the Indian ethos at its authentic best. His latest publications are: *Selected Fiction* (Penguin), *The Escapist* (a novel) (Institute of Languages), *My Little India* (National Book Trust, India) and *The Lady Who Died One and Half Times and Other Fantasies* (Rupa) and *Chasing the Rainbow* (Childhood memoirs) (Oxford University Press).

Two of his novels are translated into Bengali. They are *Amrita Phala* (Mitra & Ghose) and *Tandraloker Prahari* (Sahitya Akademi)

He is acknowledged as one of the ablest interpreters of India’s literary and cultural heritage.

Annexure

Memorial Lectures 2007- 2008

NAME	DATE	VENUE	SPEAKER	THEME	CHAIRPERSON
Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Lecture	17 January 2007	India International Centre, New Delhi	Prof. Christopher Winch, Professor Educational Philosophy and Policy, Kings College London, U.K.	Individuals, Workers or Citizens Reflections on the Limits of School Based Educational Reform	Prof. Mrinal Miri Former Vice-Chancellor NEHU, Shillong
Zakir Hussain Memorial Lecture	19 January 2007	Regional Institute of Education Mysore	Dr Radhika Herzberger, Director Rishi Valley School Chittoor Andhra Pradesh	Religion, Education and Peace	Prof. B. L. Chaudhary Vice-Chancellor Mohanlal Sukhadia University, Udaipur Rajasthan
Mahadevi Verma Memorial Lecture	17 August 2007	Regional Institute of Education Bhopal	Prof. Karuna Chanana Former Professor at Zakir Hussain Centre of Educational Studies School of Social Sciences, JNU	Women in Indian Academe; Diversity Difference and Inequality in a Contested Domain	Prof. R.S. Sirohi, Vice-Chancellor, Barkatulla University Bhopal
B. M. Pugh Memorial Lecture	11 March 2008	Laitumkhrak Women's College Shillong	Shri Ratan Thyiam Chairperson, Chorus Repertoire Theatre Shillong	Theatre Language and Expression	Prof. T. Ao Dean, School of Humanities, NEHU Shillong

NAME	DATE	VENUE	SPEAKER	THEME	CHAIRPERSON
Marjorie Sykes Memorial Lecture	8 April 2008	Jawahar Rang Manch Lohagal Road Ajmer	Ms. Medha Patkar Social Activist	Socialisation vs. Politics of Education	Prof. M.S. Agwani Former Vice-Chancellor, JNU
Sri Aurobindo Memorial Lecture	2 July 2008	Dorozto Hall Presidency College Kolkata	Shri Manoj Das International Centre of Education Sri Aurobindo Ashram Pondichery	Education for a Faith in the Future	Prof. Sanjib Ghosh Principal, Presidency College, Kolkata
Rabindranath Tagore Memorial Lecture	19 July 2008	Regional Institute of Education Bhubaneswar	Prof. N.R. Madhava Menon, Member Commission on Centre State Relations	Realising Equality of Status and Opportunity: Role of Government, Judiciary and Civil	Professor Chandra Sekhar Rath Eminent Writer
Gijubhai Badekha Memorial Lecture	Dropped due to ill health of Speaker	MIDS, Chennai	Prof. U.R. Ananthamurthy <i>Gyan Peeth</i> Awardee	Society Learning to be a Writer in the School of Life	Prof. S. Janakrajan Officiating Director MIDS, Chennai
Savitribai Phule Memorial Lecture	12 December 2008	Mamiben Nanawati Women's College Vallapi Road, Vallapi West, Mumbai-56	Dr. T. Sunderaraman Director, State Health Resource Centre	School as a Centre for Health Promotion and Health services: The case of conversion between health and education sector	Professor Vidhu Patel Professor and Head Director, PGSR SNTD Women's College Churchgate, Mumbai