

Satyavadi School and Nationalism

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In the early part of the twentieth century where a number of organisations and notable personalities have started the movement against political and socio-economic ills of Odisha, a small open air school played a vital role in shaping the history of this region. It had come to the mind of a few intellectuals and educated class that much of the evil which has been eating into the vitals of our society could be eradicated through proper development, education and training and inculcation of moral values among the young. Their thoughts ultimately took the shape of a school where the students would be taught the values and essence of life which would make them fullerman, courageous, confident and ready to work for the upliftment of their brethren. Gopabandhu Das was the main brain behind establishment of this school who was influenced by Acharya Harihar Das, Poet Madhusudan and Pandit Nilakantha Das. They had recommended this new type of education i.e open air learning which would act as panacea for all types of ills of society.

Nilakantha writes 'one day we drove up to Satyavadi in an ox cart, took out our measuring tapes and set to work. The place was completely covered with scrubs. It was impossible to hold the measuring tape straight. There was no place to stack the bricks we had brought. But we could

not be bothered with obstacles. There was no time to waste. We got going'. That, he concludes, 'was the beginning of the great Satyavadi institution of learning'.

The Satyavadi School set up in the Gurukul pattern on the day of Kumar Purnima in the year 1909 reflected the lofty ideals and the spirit. Relief work and social reformation activities formed part of its mode of education. The scenic beauty and Churiana trees around Satyavadi was quite motivating and refreshing for the students. Initially Satyavadi School started with Upper-Primary classes and within two years time the School got the status of a High School. In reality, it was much more than just a school.

The method of education was mixture of Indian tradition and Western progressive ideas. It taught the students the importance of discipline, high moral value, simplicity and austerity and held as sacred the relationship between students and teachers. Apart from studies, physical training, social service and literary discussions were held among the students regularly. The teachers and students worked together and their work ranged from gardening to cremation of dead bodies during natural calamities. The dedication, missionary zeal and selfless sacrifice of the teachers was an example for others to emulate. The five

close associates of Satyavadi famous as Pancha Sakha were Gopabandhu Das, Nilakantha Das, Acharya Harihara Das, Godabaris Mishra and Krupasindhu Mishra. Under their supervision and guidance, Satyavadi School acted as beacon of light. Apart from these five eminent personalities, there were also other teachers whose commitment and devotion was exemplary. Among them, the names of Basudev Mohapatra, Ramachandra Rath, Haladhara Mohapatra, Madhusudan Mishra, Arttatrana Das and Dhaneswar Moharana were noteworthy whose contributions were also no less. A number of vocational subjects were included in the curriculum along with conventional academic courses. The basic philosophy was that the students were members of the society first and hence they should learn the various aspects of life in society. It is a fact that anyone who had breathed the air of Satyavadi in his younger days became somebody in the political life of Odisha in later years. By setting up of Satyavadi Bana Vidyalaya, Gopabandhu's aim was to produce heroes, patriots and dedicated workers from this school to free the nation and serve the suffering masses. Gopabandhu believed in an ideal system of education in the line of ancient Gurukul. In 1919 he remarked, 'Education is the means of building the hearts of the people.' By education, I do not mean the teaching in School, education is what was imparted in the ancient institutions and centres of religion throughout the province. There are three underlying reasons for setting up of Open Air Schooling by Gopabandhu. Firstly, he wanted that education should reach the poor masses. Secondly, he wanted to reduce the expenditure of the cost of education and thirdly, Open air natural atmosphere is conducive for the spontaneous growth and development of an individual's personality. Gopabandhu rightly remarked, 'Closed buildings are unsuitable for mental and physical development of the

students.....India is a land of villages and every village has groves of coconut and mango trees. In ancient times, old Gurukuls or perceptor's houses were located in natural settings and I see no reason why the same old practice should not be revived today.'

Satyavadi School drew nation-wide attention because of its uniqueness. It was visited by Chancellors, Vice-Chancellors, Scholars from different universities and great men like Mahatma Gandhi, Asutosh Mukharjee and many others.

Sir Edward Gait, the then Lieutenant Governor of Bihar and Odisha visited the School and wrote 'I was also greatly impressed by the system of teaching in the open air instead of crowded classrooms. In March 1921, Mahatma Gandhi visited the School and on 13th April he wrote about it in his journal 'Young India' declaring that with workers as selfless as Gopabandhu Das and his associates, it would not be surprising if the country achieved Swaraj within the year. He went on to say that the School was well worth a visit. Gandhiji passed entire day in the company of the students and teachers. Surendra Nath Banerjee on his Odisha visit in the year 1912 was all praise for this School. In its own way, Satyavadi School contributed a great deal to the cause of nationalism. It became an active centre of Non-Cooperation Movement rather than a model educational institution. Satyabadi School played important role in the life of the nation. The School became an institution and its fragrance spread all over the nation.

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