

## TO KNOW AND TO BE

A dialogue with PAULO FREIRE

(PROF. PAULO FREIRE was in New Delhi as the guest of the Vishwa Yuvak Kendra from 8th to 13th February 1979. In the course of his stay he met with several groups and individuals engaged in adult education programmes in different capacities. During these different meetings which were mainly devoted to a discussion of conscientisation programmes in a traditional society like India, Prof. Freire expressed his views on some of the issues. The Indian Journal of Youth Affairs is happy to reproduce the transcript of some of his interventions in response to points raised by participants.)

### Meaning of Conscientisation

First of all, since about seven years I have not used this word. I stopped using this word because the word was so corrupted in Latin America and in the States, so distorted that I felt at a certain moment never more to use the word conscientisation. It does not mean that I reject the process which the word means. Although I stopped using this word I tried to be less ambiguous in my texts in order to avoid the corruption of the word. This is one thing I would like to tell you. In the last article that I wrote about my experiences in Africa you don't find even one time this word. You will find the process described but not the word. The other thing concerning conscientisation

that I would like to explain is that the word 'conscientisation' in Brazilian comes from the word 'consciousness'. Then conscientisation has to do with consciousness. In my point of view, nevertheless, to understand what at least I tried to mean by conscientisation it is necessary to avoid some mistakes i.e. not to take as dichotomy, as subjectivity or consciousness from objectivity, from reality. In other words in order to understand what I tried to mean by conscientisation it is necessary to give to consciousness the power to transform reality. In other words not to be idealistic and think, for example, that objectivity is created by consciousness. If it was like this we could transform reality through speech only, through convictions. History has demons-



trated that it is not like this. I cannot transform the world inside of my consciousness. I remember when I was in jail in my country in a box one meter seventy centimetres long and sixty centimetres in width, I could think of the world outside in my imagination. I could think of my children, my wife walking. I knew that I was in prison. Nevertheless in order for me to be free it was necessary to open the door to go out. I was not free even though I could think of the world outside. Then becoming free from that envelope needed something more than my consciousness, something stronger than that and this is the first point to be emphasised.

The other point, the opposite of it is that we also cannot understand the word conscientisation if we think mechanically, i.e. consciousness is a mere reflection of the objectivity. Of course I cannot understand without the context. But I cannot admit that my subjectivity is a mere copy of the context. If it was a mere copy of the context I would not be able to transform the context because I would be exclusively a copy. This is one of the mistakes the Marxists committed. Marx's was a dialectical mind and not a mechanical mind. He saw both subjectivity and objectivity as a dynamism, a dynamic process and not in this dichotomized way. I think these points are necessary for at least to understand how I think about conscientisation. It does not mean nevertheless that when I started my first research I had the level of perception which I have today. In my first text I was naive. It does not mean that I am not naive today. I continue to have many naiveties. I have no pretext to be exclusively a critical mind.

## Education and Society

Another point which is important is that many people who have read my books, sometimes I think, do not understand them

very well some of my analysis and think, for example, that I have said apparently that education makes social transformation. I have reread my books to see whether I really said this. I never said this. Maybe I was not clear. Because of that I have tried to be clearer in my next texts. What I tried to say is that social radical transformation, revolution in itself, is an educational task. It is different. But I did not say that we can transform a society through its schools. I should be naive and angelical to think that the national system of education should be the element for the transformation of society. It is impossible. It is society which shapes education according to the interests of those who have power. For instance, it was not the bourgeois education which shaped the bourgeoisie. It was the bourgeoisie that by arriving at power shaped the system of bourgeois education. It is the opposite. The bourgeoisie did not shape itself through education before getting power through its revolution. After getting power through its revolution the bourgeoisie institutionalised the necessary education for the ideological multiplication necessary to it. It was what happened. It is what is happening in any society and I did not say that we would have to educate the mass of the people and secondly to make the transformation of society. I never said that. But, sometimes, people say that I said this but I did not say. It is necessary to reread my books. I accept other kinds of criticism but this I never said. I accept that the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* sometimes lacks clarity. For example, instead of emphasising social classes I emphasised the people. The concept of people is very abstract. It is another point.

## Education—An Act of Knowing

Another aspect is the problem of the theory of knowledge. I confess to you that it is something which touches me very strongly because I am convinced that revolution is



also an act of knowing, an act of knowing which takes place in the very process of the organisation and transformation of the masses of people and the transformation of reality. Of course, it is an act of knowing. It is also necessary for us to be more or less clear concerning the act of knowing. The act of knowing is not something neutral. Education also is an act of knowing and education is also not neutral. It is necessary for example concerning the act of knowing which has to do with conscientisation, to ask questions to ourselves like, for example, what to know and it has to do with the contents, the object to be known, for what to know and it has to do with the objective of the act of knowing. We also have to ask how to know and it has to do with the method of knowing and for me methods have to be a dialectical one and we also have to ask to know against whom, what also means in favour of whom. To the extent that the knowing is neutral, when I am engaged in the process of knowing I have to ask myself in favour of whom am I knowing now. This is something which sometimes the so-called intellectuals don't ask because they think that they are metaphysically free and they are working for the humanity. It is something vague. Humanity does not exist. What exists for me is Peter and Mary, people, classes, groups, nations, dominator dominated. Humanity is very vague. Then it is necessary for me to know in favour of whom I am trying to know and against whom, because of what and in favour of what and against what am I trying to know. All these questions have to be, in my point, asked concerning education. The education is also an act of knowing and conscientisation. Who knows, and for me it is a very important question which has to do with the methodology of knowing but which has also to do with cultural and historical elements. For example, from my point of view thinking is a liberating

frame of reference for me. First of all, known ledge is not a package. Knowledge is not some thing finished. On the contrary knowledge results, comes up from a permanent process in which the human beings act on reality. Secondly, because of this, knowledge cannot be transferred i.e. I cannot transfer knowledge to you as if I have the package in my hands and I open your head or your mouth and put it inside. Knowledge did not exist to be eaten. I cannot eat knowledge. I can create knowledge. I can recreate knowledge. If it is like this the role of the educator and the political leader (for me more and more both are the samething) is not to expand knowledge. I am against the concept of extensionism is agriculture. I have made very hard criticism of the concept of extension in rural development. It is something which came from the States in the 1920s, absolutely reactionary in my point of view. If our role is not to expand knowledge to the so called poor what do we do? If our role is not to expand knowledge to the poor people what is our role? It is to know and reknow with them and not to transfer our knowledge to them. If it is like this let us think for example, in a group of 25 peasants in a village with whom we are working on health education, adult literacy, in my point of view what we have to do for teaching them is to learn with them. It means our task is not to tell them what they must learn but discuss with them together to know better the realities in which we are. In other words it is to develop a process of reading and writing the reality. This is more important than to learn to read and write words but to learn to read and write reality that is to understand reality. It is an act of knowing. But in this act of knowing the students, the peasants, the people are as much a subject of the act of knowing as I am. As teachers, we are all subjects of knowledge, of knowing and not myself as teacher subject of knowledge while the others are objects.



## Adult Literacy

Another point, I think it should be necessary to emphasise in order to understand the process of conscientisation is that many people think that I developed some of these issues because I am a specialist in adult literacy. No, no, no. It is not. Of course, adult literacy is something which I studied very deeply, but I studied adult literacy as one moment of education. I studied adult literacy because of a social necessity in my country, as a challenge. Secondly I studied adult literacy in the frame of reference of education and in the same frame of reference of the theory of knowledge but not as something in itself because it does not exist and adult literacy is not something which many people think it is, a mirage, a kind of magical instrument which you distribute to people to save them. No, no, no. It does not exist. **we have to forget the concept of adult literacy in itself. I think that the only way is to increase our political clarity and also our commitment to the oppressed class.** Without that I think it is impossible to resist the temptations because in reality sometimes we do not know what is hope. I remember that when I came here in '72 in Bombay, when I went from Bombay to Bangalore I left the hotel at 4 O'clock in the morning and I could not recognise the street where thousands of people were sleeping. I was seeing people, people, people, sleeping on the road and I asked to myself what is the hope for them who have been born in the street, who have played as children in the street, who have run about in the street, who grew up in the street, who married in the street, who dreamt in the street, who worked in the street and who died in the street—what is the use of literacy for them. To live in a house is one of the fundamental rights of the human beings—to have some place to rest. Then the danger of despair is real but I must tell you please

don't accept it. Justify your presence in the world by trying to do something.

## Need to make one's choice

Another point is the need we have, if we want to work with peasants, workers, people in the slums, to be absolutely clear concerning our choice and it is a political question to the extent that education is always a political affair. The educators are also politicians and artists. Something which educators are not, in my point of view, is technicians. In my point of view they are politicians and artists. Then it is necessary for the educators to be clear concerning their political choice. It is absolutely important and necessary, not in order to tell, look my choice is this, if you don't accept this I will kill you. Of course not to do that. But in order to know very well what to do, how to do, to know the possibilities to do and because of that it is absolutely necessary for the educators to be very clear concerning the relationship between tactics and the strategy. If you are not clear about the dialectical relationship between tactics and the strategy we can disappear. In history we do what can be done and what we would like to do. It is very important to know what really I can do because sometimes we can do more than we are doing and sometimes we cannot do what we would like to do. Then clarifying the choice we have, in order to put into practice with the people is absolutely important. I cannot also be indifferent. In other words on the one hand we must avoid being manipulative but on the other hand we must avoid being spontaneous. I don't accept one or the other. Spontaneity always helps the Right. Spontaneity always helps right wing. Spontaneity is a means for example if I am a teacher in a class, I say, I will leave my students to themselves because I respect them. Then I never say who I am, I never speak about my preference, my choice, what is my political choice. No, no, no. I



don't accept this. I respect you nevertheless I say to you that I would very much like my country to have a socialistic structure. What I cannot do is to say that if you don't accept I will leave you now. No. It should be an absurdity but I can't deny my choice. Sometimes I become quiet for a question of tactics. I don't accept spontaneity on the one hand and manipulation on the other.

*The problem in India is that people are not interested to learn with the militant. The question of motivation of people comes in. Your theory assumes the willingness of people to learn with you. This is not the case here.*

I have had very large experience in this and many times I have committed mistakes in confronting problems. Nevertheless I think that I can tell you that tendency for the students to listen to the teacher and to say for example, I came to listen to you, please talk to us. First of all it has to do with the material conditions which also has to do with culture, with ideology but it is not something which belongs only to this country. I can tell you, I had this experience in Brazil with the students. I had this experience in other countries of Latin America and in the States. I never forget when I went to attend a seminar in Harvard I wrote two texts for students to read and discuss with me, one text on the act of knowing and in the other text I tried to explain the reason why I did not have a programme for them but only a draft in order to discuss with them and by discussing for them I hope to create the programme and I distributed these two texts to the participants of the seminar in which I asked them to say why they came to the seminar and at the end of the session there was silence. I said I am waiting for the starting of the seminar. I hope you have read the texts and one of them said: "Prof. Freire I think that I can speak on behalf of my colleagues. Your draft programme is an excellent programme. We

are here to listen to you". All Ph.D. students. I had the same experience in Africa also. At a certain moment when a teacher invites the students to adopt a different approach, they feel insecure. They need security. The moment the teacher says I did not come here to teach you without learning with you and the students are not prepared. They feel helpless. Even the students with very good political experience have this feeling in the beginning. They need a Professor.

When I am talking to you I am talking with centuries, not with a span of 20 years—you have centuries of civilisation. I do not know whether there is something more in the depths of this culture which could explain the need not to start immediately inviting the people to assume the position of subject of knowledge. Nevertheless I think that it is important. In order for you to transform your society it is important to have the critical participation of the people and the critical participation of the people in the process of transformation implies the critical participation of the people in the process of knowing. After committing my last mistake concerning this problem my suggestion to you would be that when we start working with a new group, if we find that they are expecting much more our word, it is better to start 50% as teachers and 50% as students in order in the process to die as exclusive teachers and to be reborn again as a teacher-student and to invite students to die also as exclusive students in order to be born again as student-teachers. In seminars when I say though I am a Professor I am a student also, they could not understand. This is what I think you can do.

*What has one to do to become 50% student and 50% teacher?*

It is a central question. It is a central question for all of us and in the depth of this question we can find the ideological source.



for example, in Latin America and also in Europe we have lots of young people, Marxists, petty bourgeois intellectuals. More Marxist than Marx. They have read Marx from the beginning but many many time they commit mistakes which has something to do with the ideological background, their position in the class of petty bourgeois. For example they say that the working class does not have class conscience. It is necessary for them to go to them to work with them to give their class conscience which they are supposed to have but they themselves are petty bourgeois. This paternalism, the revolutionarism of theirs does not have another source other than their petty bourgeois ideology. When Amilcar Cabral the great leader of Guinea Bissau made a reference to petty bourgeois intellectuals—he was a great agronomist—the said the only possibility for the petty bourgeois intellectuals to give a real contribution for the liberation is if they have the courage of committing class suicide in order to be born again as revolutionary workers and this is what we are not doing. How to commit class suicide. I am not saying that you should leave the university tomorrow and go to factories. If you do that in the actual circumstances you need to have another intellectual to work for you. I think what we have to do is to continue to have this ambiguity. **The only possibility for us to overcome this ambiguity is to emphasise, is to accept with humility that we have to try to die as intellectuals, as petty bourgeois in different ways according to different times, different activities and different possibilities.** How is it possible for me to stop being an exclusive teacher and to assume our responsibility vis-a-vis the students? It is not easy. The only thing I can tell you is that because of our ambiguity we are ambiguous and in order to overcome this we must have praxis. It is not an intellectual game. You have to learn

how to stop being an exclusive teacher by trying to become a student while you are teaching. This is the only way. The teachers always speak about their students, their seminars, their programmes, my students, my seminars and not our seminars. All these things I learnt by trying to do. I wrote about them afterwards and not before. I have the impression that the theoretical attempts I have made have really been obtained ten years after praxis. After doing that for ten years I began to write. I did not write before.

*Many of us come from what you called the class of petty bourgeois and how can we do what you are telling us ?*

The problem which touches me is that sometimes many groups are working without any connection with each other without knowing others working in the same area and the question which you must ask several times after this experience in which the people recognise the relationship between the masses is what to do afterwards. What to do, what should be the next step for action and at this moment the question of organising of people comes up. The political question becomes more important because you are not thinking to organise the people to become a certain branch of church A or B. How to do that. I cannot discuss this because it is a concrete question about your country. But one thing I think I can tell you because I also had this experience as an educator in this sense, working in villages as you are working. It is impossible to be a freelancer, politically speaking. It is impossible. If you are freelancers politically speaking we end up by trying to get self-satisfaction, a kind of Daughter of Mary in the Catholic church. This is what we become. We need to have some political affiliation in order not to be frustrated in order to know what to do afterwards. I mean political movement, something



which is not necessarily of a political party. What I say is that sooner or later if you don't join a kind of political movement, you don't have the channel to work. In some way you end up doing nothing. If you do education you are a politician. But you cannot be a politician by yourself. You cannot work alone. Preserving or transforming reality is a political act above all and how to make politics without being a politician. Maybe this is one of the differences in our approach.

As I told you yesterday I am from a very dramatic region of my country, from Recife, which is in North-East Brazil. I was born in the city. I grew up in the city. I thought how difficult it was for the mass of the people to start to be and I felt challenged since I was a child. More and more I felt the need to become engaged in the understanding of the situation the people were. Of course, my Christian formation, background, had something to do with this. I used to say that for me it was a serious contradiction to continue to say, to proclaim my Christian faith and to look at the situation of exploitation of millions of people without trying to do something. It was a contradiction and it continues to be, I could not sleep in peace. In my youth my position vis-a-vis the situation was, maybe, much more the attitude of being frightened without understanding very well. Then I began to study trying to understand the reason of the facts. Then I asked to myself what should be the role of education and more and more I perceived it not only in the history of my country but of other countries also that education never was a neutral instrument. It is not and it cannot be. This is my conviction. Education always was in relation with power. Those who had power in a society determined the ends of education, contents and not the philosophers but those who had power. Education then cannot be organised

to work against those who had power. It will be very very naive to think that if I had power I will organise the system of education against my own interests. I respect those who have power. I do not consider them so naive. The more I started all these things in my country, the more I perceived that if we had a separate education for domestication as I used to call you can have another education in antagonism with this kind of education which should be education for liberation and this kind of approach necessarily cannot be the same one—its methods, its contents, must be different. I never thought that we could transform social reality through schools. To ask the schools to do that is very naive but we cannot forget the role which such an education, when it can be developed, can have in a process of classification of the oppressed classes. I was convinced that the first step in adult literacy, it was absolutely necessary in trying to teach how to read and write words, to challenge the people in order to read their reality, to understand the reasons for the facts and to read and write and transform reality. This is conscientisation. Since the beginning I was absolutely convinced that the process of conscientisation is eminently political. We cannot escape from that. Sooner or later those who are working in education with the people at the grass roots have to clarify their political choice. It is impossible otherwise. It is necessary. Without clarifying what is the model of society which constitutes our dream, it is impossible to work. For me it is impossible. Not in order to impose on people our model but in order for us to discuss with the people the model of society and of course to convince people. Then it is very very interesting. I was not expelled from the university from my country because I was a specialist in adult literacy. No, no, no. The one who was expelled from Brazil was



the politician in Paulo Freire and not the specialist in adult literacy. In other words if I had developed in my country a programme of adult literacy angelical from the point of view of the people but very strong from the point of view of those who have power, of course I would be in Brazil even today. I would not have any problem. But to the extent that I put together reading and writing words with the reading and rewriting of reality, what means to them to have choice, to become politically engaged, I became dangerous.

In the last analysis, I think when we have to make a choice like this and when we try to do something, we have to pay in history by making history. History cannot be made free. You cannot cross the world free.

Some have to pay high costs. Others lesser costs. My cost is not so high though I am paying something so hard—fourteen years I have not been to my country. It is not very good. Yes, you cannot make history without paying a price. I will say to you that this conclusion came to me through my praxis. It was when I was a teacher (I was 17 years old) that I began to perceive that I was not a neutral person. For example, take the case of the bourgeois. It was not education which shaped the bourgeoisie but it was the bourgeoisie by arriving in power through revolution which shaped the bourgeois education. It is the opposite. Then look at history. We do not have in history any example in which people have been invited by the leaders and the leader has said to the masses of the people look, I have invited you to come here to discuss together what should be the model of human beings which we must create and what should be the education which should create this kind of being and the people after that would say the kind of profile and the kind of education

they want. This is hypothetical and impossible. We never have this kind of experience in history. Some people say that education is neutral. It is simply naive when people tell that. I arrived at the conclusion by being a teacher, by studying the history of education in my country.

*Do you always need an ideology?*

I am convinced that sooner or later by being a teacher you have to begin to think to exercise a kind of political reflection on your own former experience in order to perceive as if you always were a politician by having this kind of reaction. It does not mean that every time we start as an educator we start knowing that. Because of that I am sure that in a seminar for training teachers, educators, it should be absolutely necessary to have this kind of discussion the political nature of education—but what we see is the opposite. Emphasis is on the methods and techniques. The more we emphasise the methods and techniques the more we try to hide the political nature of the phenomenon and then we get the impression and the illusion that they are technicians and as such they are neutral and in order for them to be efficient they have to know how to use well the instruments, the technical instruments and because of that I always frustrate the American audiences. They always say, we want the methods and the techniques and I always tell them I don't have them and I don't know any. I have not come here to talk about methods. I have come here to talk about politics and talk about the political nature of education because I am also convinced that if you are becoming politically clear through praxis, the methods, the techniques and the instruments begin to be created not only by you but also by others who are working with you every day recreating and being recreated constantly and then you perceive the essence that what is important is not the techniques, the slides, etc. but the contexts, the objects



you have and all these things imply politics and ideology. But the other question what is my political ideology, what is the ideology with which I have to meet and my task here is not to tell you what it should be for you. That is your task in India. I did not come here to India to proselytise you. I did not come here to give the impression to you that I am a neutral. I am not. I think I am more or less clear concerning my option, not for India but for myself. I came here with a great respect to talk with you but I am sure that all of you will sooner than later will perceive that you need to be together in order to be efficient and for that you have attitudes and at this moment you will perceive that it is necessary to clarify your political choice.

The best way I would have answered your question should be asking the question to myself. Let us take the situation of Guinea Bissau, a former Portuguese colony for five centuries. One day, I think perhaps in 1959, a great man from there, Amilcar Cabral, started inviting some other people, five or six, to discuss together about the possibility of organising a party for pushing the liberation of the people. More and more Amilcar Cabral became a leader of the people. At the beginning great masses of the peasants could not understand. The question I now ask is could we consider him a bourgeois as also as a dominating person because he thought of convincing people to accept to fight for liberation.

The leaders many times can get the impression that they are manipulating but they are not. Manipulation for liberation is something which cannot be excluded. I think your preoccupation in some way is a moral one. I do not say that there is no morality in politics but I am saying to you that if you insist on this kind of preoccupation then we end up doing nothing. Then you are manipulating with people to the extent that you are trying to challenge them to know the

meaning of exploited. We don't have to go to the slums of Latin America to know that the people know that they are exploited. They know very well because they experience it. It is necessary to examine critically these for us to know because we have the scientific instruments to examine the reality scientifically in order for us to know because sometimes if we don't have the scientific instruments to examine the reality scientifically in order for us to know because sometimes if we don't have the scientific instruments to know the reality, we can lose our work. This is what sometimes the people don't have. It does not mean that we are trying to manipulate. At least I don't feel that.

*Sometimes those of us who go to work with the poor are unable to perceive their oppression from their perspective. Therefore it becomes our need and not their need. We are going there because we feel they are exploited. In India an outsider goes with all the good intentions and tells the people what changes they must make, what are the areas of exploitation and what model he should have.*

I think that I don't feel capable of giving an answer for how to work in India but I may have something interesting to tell you, something new and impressive about Brazil. Just today in Brazil one of the problems which are discussed is the creation of political parties and in this discussion the speeches of some of the leaders of workers have been fantastic. In the speeches the leaders of the workers are saying that it is time to tell you that we must put a stop in the pretensions of the intellectuals who come to us to tell us what it means to have social transformation in revolution. We don't accept. It is time to stop this business of the political parties speaking on behalf of the workers. We need now to create our party. It is interesting to



see how they react. Six years ago I received a letter from Sao Paulo from five workers who read together my *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and after that one of them wrote the letter on behalf of five. The letter came privately. I have kept that letter. Very interesting, the analysis made by them. It is very interesting because in many places in the world the intellectuals tell me that my language is very difficult to be understood and at least in the original these five workers read my book without any kind of a problem. On the contrary they started in the letter that in the last analysis you spoke about us. You analysed our situation. At the end of the letter they said something very interesting. Look, Paulo, our suggestion is for you to continue to write but write for your colleagues and not for us, to write for the intellectuals in order to tell them that they must stop coming in the evening to our neighbourhood to teach us what means revolution. We know that we got tired to be taught. I think it is very good for us. I think that first of all our task is very good in the process of transformation. Nevertheless we must ask ourselves whether we are really able to little by little stop being this kind of false intellectuals we have been and it is not possible by decree. It is possible through praxis with the people but as intellectuals if we continue to be inside universities or institutions may be we can develop a more and more complex language and very sophisticated but we cannot get communication with the people. I think it is very interesting to note this position of the workers. I think that many many people, very good people, intellectuals in Brazil, in the Communist Party, Marxists, revolutionaries, I think, they are being challenged now by the attitudes of this kind of workers and may be in India also you can have the same kind of reaction.

*What is the role of the intellectual in restructuring society.*

It is a very important question. Nevertheless I do not think we have the time here to discuss this. I have this kind of intellectual experience. I must know that in order for me to teach with them, I need simultaneously to learn with them and to learn about their reality, their way of understanding, my language for example. It is necessary for me also to know the syntax of the people, i.e. the structure of thinking of the people which is different from mine. It is a question of class. I have to understand more and more the syntax of the people i.e. the meaning of the words which the people use because if I don't have a minimum of knowledge of these how is it possible for me to start real communication with the people. For example, when I was in Chile working with national educators and peasants we made a research about the syntax of the people and we had experts in linguistics who tried to interpret the speech of the peasants, to analyse and we perceived through the analysis of the linguistic experts that the understanding of the peasants of the term 'work' was not the same as the one we had. For us work was the way human beings transformed reality and are transformed but for the peasants not working was some kind of a magical entity, something which was out from the human beings and because of that, for example, lots of expressions like "there are those who were born to work and those who were born not to work" and it is one of the things that we must be aware when we are working with people because without that we cannot understand, we cannot communicate with them and I am sure that if the intellectuals who relate with the people demonstrate these qualities, the people will accept. For example those five workers in Brazil. I perceived in that letter that they were not against me. They would accept me because by reading about me they understood that I was trying to understand with them and not to teach them. We must develop humility instead

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of arrogance and I think that a real revolutionary must be humble like Amilcar Cabral who was tremendously humble. Then it is possible to communicate with people.

*When we work with exploited people and help them to become aware often we do not know what to do afterwards. It is not fair to them to take them upto a certain level of awareness and then level them because it can do a lot of damage to them.*

First of all because of this humility the so called conscientiser must recognise that he or she must also be conscientised by those whom he or she is trying to conscientise. In other words I can say that nobody conscientises anybody. We become conscientised together by praxis, through action together, but of course it is possible that at certain occasions concerning certain subjects and issues you have more experience and knowledge than others. The question then is to change this knowledge but I never went to any region in my country thinking that I was going to conscientise people. I went to conscientise and to be conscientised and I have to tell you that really the people in Brazil with whom I worked conscientised me more than Marx. This is one of the differences I used to see between me and certain Marxist radicals who know Marx very well from the beginning to the end, who give seminars on Marx but who never went to a slum and who never talked with the peasants or workers. In my case I did not go to the slums of my country because of Marx. I went because of Christ. It is very interesting and I have nothing to deny this truth. But when I arrived there, the reality of my people sent me to Marx and when I went and met Marx and after meeting Marx I never had the need to stop meeting Christ. Many people say that I am a contradictory man and I say I have the right to be contradictory. Let me

be in peace with my contradiction. This is what I am till today. When some people ask what finally you are, are you a Christian or are you a Marxist, I say I am a man. I am a human being in permanent process of becoming and in this process I feel very well with Christ and Marx and I have my strong debt to Marx because it is because of Marx I could reach in a different way the Gospels. I made a rereading of the Gospels because of Marx and I discovered lot of things which were hidden because of the bourgeois ideology and this is what happened with me but it is not necessary that will happen with you and may be my Christian background has something to do with my capacity of understanding others and not to pretend to impose on them my convictions. In this way also I am not a good missionary. My perception of mission is different and because of that many many Christians say I am not a Christian. For me this is not a problem if they say I am not a Christian. The more I got relations, communications with the people not only with Brazilian people, the more I became radical but never a sectarian. I have said this in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. There is a difference between being radical and sectarian and this is why I say I am interested in the point you raised, in the structure of the party, of the movement, in the atmosphere of creativity, domestication, etc.

*If teachers are politicians what problems will arise from this in the context of India.*

Yesterday when I was talking to the journalist she said that I was making a reference to certain aspects of education which are political and I said no. I know in some of my writings I made reference to the political aspect of education but today no more. Today I don't make any reference to the political aspects of education because for me today education as a whole is political. Then it does not



have a political aspect because it is political. In this way educators are politicians independently whether they belong to any political party or not. Secondly systematic education reproduces the ideology of power independently whether the teachers know or not.

For example, when a teacher of arithmetic in a primary school proposes an exercise to the student and says like this:—"If you have \$ 100 and you put it in a Bank at 3% interest and how much you will get at the end of six months"—for many people it is only an arithmetical problem but really it is an ideological or political question. It is a capitalistic problem to the extent that you propose this question so innocently. You are introducing inside the children the capitalistic value. I ask where is the neutrality of arithmetic? I used to say that if you said that University of Havana was equal to the University of Harvard one of them is wrong. They cannot be equal. If they are the same things then one of them is wrong. To me it is very obvious but to many people it is not so obvious. Many people are afraid that the moment we have to accept that the teachers are politicians we lose the peace of the neutral formation of our children as if they were being neutrally shaped. Because of this some years ago an American journalist asked me how could you define yourself and I said I am a vagabond of the obvious. He did not understand and I explained that I walk around the world saying obvious things like for example education is not neutral. I also discover in my walks around the world that we need to break down the obvious in order to look at it inside and then we discover that sometimes the obvious is not so obvious as we thought before and then I recognise that for many people, also in India, to say that education is also political is not so obvious. It shocks them. In this frame of reference I situate my statement that teachers

are politicians and artists. We are not scientists. I don't believe that education is science.

*Sometimes it is stated that since people are not only exploited but hungry it is important to begin by helping them to be able to eat. On the other hand a hungry man is also an angry man and therefore he is better placed to fight exploiters.*

In certain situations the levels of the exploiters are so strong and different that the people, at least during sometimes, in spite of everything are incapable of reacting. I remember something which has to do with a statement of Amilcar Cabral. He said the people don't fight because of the beautiful ideas we can have in our heads. The people fight in order to get better situations, in order to live better. After that they begin to ask for something more. In a certain moment the people want to solve their material condition. It is not because of our speeches, our ideas that the people come to fight. The question nevertheless is how to approach the people with hunger without making them more afraid in their security and how to propose and ask the people in a very concrete way something which is possible to be achieved. Because of that I said 'yes' or 'no' depends on moments. I am convinced that there are many laws in favour of the people which are not being applied. I think that one of the fronts of struggle should be to put into practice some of these laws. First of all it becomes difficult to say that you are subverting. Secondly you will not have another argument to demonstrate in a critical way to the people that it is necessary to change the structures of power. In Latin America sometimes this was done with very good results. You have to start with the law for example here the question of water, the right to draw water. The law establishes that it is possible. Nevertheless in fact the people are not allowed to draw water. The question now is to put the

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into practice to make a demand against the owner of the land. In the last analysis it is necessary for the oppressed to begin to see and to recognise the vulnerability of the oppressor. While the oppressed don't see, don't know, are not convinced that the oppressors also are vulnerable, it is difficult for them to believe in themselves. They must get something and one of the tactics to help them is not to demand something which is very difficult in the beginning but to go little by little, concentrating their strength. If the people succeed once, twice, the people begin to believe that it is possible to fight. Because of that I have the impression that it is necessary that you need to know yourselves, you need to get contacts with others like you to organise. You need to have national planning, local planning, regional planning for action. May be for example one of the good ways will be to choose a good area for working and to concentrate your efforts in that area and taking the consequences as example for the rest of the area—studying the area scientifically as much as possible, begin to work and trying to give examples to other areas in the region and spreading little by little the same kind of action. Of course, at some moment you will have lots of problems but if you work well in the beginning without proclaiming too much but getting—the first condition is to act more than to speak—to learn how to be silent is fundamental. To learn how to use less this kind of instruments like tape recorders because even these can be used by police. Sometimes we use this for a free and frank discussion and the police get hold of these and use what we said against us. The police have ways of discovering and ways of getting the tapes. I remember I was in jail in my country in 1964 and I was interrogated by the police I was asked about the statements which I had made four years before. All these things we must be prepared. I think you can think of ways of working together and may

be you have to make concessions to others to make compromises. Think of the question of law; I hope it is very very important.

*What is the difference between tactics and strategy.*

I think in a very simple way we can explain this. When I speak about strategy I am thinking of the objectives—the final ends. When I speak about tactics I am speaking about ways to get the objectives. I can make compromises with regard to my tactics but not with regard to my strategy. From the point of view of the tactics we are inside of the system and from the point of view of the strategy we are outside the system and you can realise how difficult it is—tactically we are inside and strategically we are outside. When we are tactically and strategically inside the system there is no problem but to the extent that this is not my choice I have one foot inside and another foot outside. I think we must be very clear about the relationship between tactics and strategy. This also means that we do what we can do and not what we would like to do. Strategically I would like to go there but I discover that tactically it is not possible. Then I have to have other tactics to do that in order to go there and it is very important. When we lose clarity concerning this, when we no longer understand the relationship between tactics and strategy, I think we are lost. But I recognise the danger that in the name of tactics we can lose our sight. That is why it is so difficult. The game we have to play is difficult because if you go far giving concessions at the level of tactics you can destroy your strategy. Sometimes people say that they are not interested about the source from which money comes for working with people. I think you are naive when you say that. I respect your good intentions but if you go strongly in this direction you can lose yourself in certain moments. Suppose at a certain



moment a foundation came to you and said: "even though I don't agree with you but I think you are a serious man and you are doing a good job and I have so much of money to give you to help you in the work and I will not ask you even for the report about what you did with the money". In such a situation it is possible for you to accept and not to reject it from a capitalist foundation but if you accept the money without total freedom to apply it, in my point of view, you are completely naive. For example, if they give you money and say you have the freedom to spend but want to send one of their people to come here to analyse what you are doing, I think at this moment you begin to lose. Sometimes even the very fact of receiving the money can create problems for the profile of your group vis-a-vis the people and then you cannot receive this money. I can say this to you because I have personal experience of all these.

#### **Violence and change**

*(Prof. Freire expressed his views on the question of violence in bringing about change in the present socio-economic and political structure in economically backward societies. Unfortunately this part of his intervention on the last day could not be recorded. Hence what is given below is only a summary of what was said by him.)*

Prof. Freire said that at the outset he would like to clarify his own attitude towards

violence—he personally did not like violence at all. He was a non-violent person. He narrated an incident in his own life. Some years ago he and his wife were preparing a typical Brazilian chicken dish which had to be cooked in the blood of the fowl to be cooked. His wife handed over the fowl for killing and collecting the blood. However, he could not bring himself to kill and let the fowl off. Wanton violence made him sick. Having said this Prof. Freire went on to say that when the question of violence had to be discussed in the context of social change, then it had to be discussed in terms of the total existential reality. In most countries of the third world this reality itself was a violent one. He said that every human being had right to live and hence the right to self-defence. In the same manner in which a person had a right even in law to kill a person who was trying to kill him, every human being had a right to defend his right to live. When a situation was created by a class of people in a country which made it impossible for a person to live as befitting a human being, when a group of exploiters deliberately and knowingly exploited the poor people in such a way as to make life for the latter intolerable, that situation itself was a violent one. It was not a peaceful situation. It was a sinful situation. Therefore, if changing that kind of violent situation required a certain minimum use of violence, he could not apriori condemn it. Nevertheless it was necessary to study each case and make one's judgement.