

The Montessori Movement

Joosten, A.M., The Montessori Movement.

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Montessori, Maria: The Formation of Man, T. P. H. Madras-20

The Montessori Movement

BY

A. M. JOOSTEN

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Dr. Maria Montessori

31-8-1870 — 6-5-1952.

The Montessori Movement

1. Dr. Maria Montessori and her Work :

On 31st. August 1870 there was born in a small Italian town a girl who was destined to become one of the most outstanding and best known personalities of our century. Soon her family moved to Rome where she grew up and at an early age revealed the great qualities of her mind and heart. She was one of the first girls to follow a full course of secondary education and thereafter applied for admission to the medical faculty of the University of Rome. There, in 1896, she graduated as a doctor in medicine and surgery, the first woman in Italy to do so. Two years later she focussed national attention on her person by a stirring address at the first National Conference for Education by pleading for moral education and, though herself a doctor, claiming that the problem of mental, social and moral deficiency was one that concerned pedagogy rather than medicine. This speech made such an impression that the then Minister of Education invited her to deliver a course of lectures on the subject and soon afterwards placed her in charge of an experimental institute for training teachers for mentally deficient children. During a period of two years she worked herself with a group of these children and achieved most impressive results. Some of the children actually equalled normal children when appearing at a comparative examination. This convinced Dr. Montessori (who was at the time also professor of hygiene and pedagogical anthropology and took a prominent part in the movement for the emancipation of women and the abolition of child labour), that the education of normal children hindered rather than assisted their development. A profound study of

pedagogy, experimental psychology and philosophy strengthened this conviction and she looked forward to an opportunity to start an educational experiment with normal children of primary school age.

This opportunity failed to materialize in this form. Instead she was approached by the Director of a building society who requested her, at the end of 1906, to organize and direct a kind of play-room for children below 6 years whose parents were day-labourers and could not look after them so that they were a danger to the dwellings recently renovated, and to themselves

On January 6th. 1907 there was opened the first "Children's House" as the primitive institution was called. With about 40 to 50 small children between 3 and 6 years of age, living almost like savages in the midst of the most squalid poverty, Dr. Montessori started this work. It was to reveal the foundation of a new psycho-pedagogical method of education; new not only because of its technical contents, but even more because of its origin which was formed by psychological revelations given by children, not by ideas and theories thought out and applied by an adult.

Within a few years its fame had spread all over the five continents. Enthusiastic adherents had come to visit this first institution and had started similar ones amongst people of all races, creeds, social conditions and the most divergent degrees of culture and civilization. Its tremendous influence on all modern trends and methods of education was acknowledged in 1950 in the most impressive terms by the then General-Director of the UNESCO at a function organized in honour of Dr. Montessori.

The "Montessori Method" distinguishes itself from all other educational methods of recent origin by its continuous development and increasing expansion. There are so many methods of education which are like shooting stars, blazing a trail

of light across the pedagogical horizon and then disappearing again, superseded by others. Not so for this method which goes on gaining ground in all countries, but also to cover wider fields in its application to education as a help to life. It started with children from 2½ to 6 years of age, now there are institutions inspired by its principles and technique which assist the development of the child from before birth (viz. the Training Centre for Child Nurses and Maternity Clinic which was founded under the auspices of the "Opera Montessori" at Rome in 1948) until maturity, as demonstrated by the primary Montessori schools in many countries and the secondary Montessori schools specially in Holland. How many adults, too, have sought its guidance by attending Montessori Training Courses, not as a professional training only, but in order to enrich and perfect their life in its relation to human life at its beginning and to penetrate into the meaning and hidden wealth of human nature and its manifestations!

There is something mysterious about this work which has assumed an importance far beyond that of education alone. It has created a social movement around the child as a personality of immense value for human uplift. It takes its place among the many efforts for "human reconstruction". Recognition of this fact was shown universally when, on her 80th birthday, Dr. Montessori was the recipient of decorations from several governments and her candidature for the Nobel Prize for Peace was supported on a large scale both by governments, private bodies and individuals. Thanks to her untiring apostolate the world has begun to realize that no attempt at solving social and moral problems, no effort at coming closer to so urgent and vital a realization as that of peace, can ever hope to succeed unless it concentrate on man himself, instead of merely considering the manifestations and expressions of adult human activity. Man has a beginning, when a child is born, nay before that when the germ of a new human being comes to life. It is at this beginning that the future begins to be determined—the

future of an individual and that of the society he will one day help to form. Yet this beginning is neglected, its inner possibilities are violated, it is deprived of the assistance it needs.

There is something very impressive about the turn given by this great woman to her amazing gifts of mind and heart. She, who in her country was the first woman-physician of the body and later on of the mind too, gave up her academic career, which had already made her name famous beyond the boundaries of her own country, in order to serve the young child in all humility and yet with scientific methods, starting without any of the prejudices common to the adult in his role as educator, open for anything the child itself might reveal. Thus, as many afterwards said and wrote, she "discovered" the child and its hidden powers, revealed when helped to grow and develop as a personality according to the laws of life. The child became her guide and helped her to re-discover the values of human life and civilization. Instead of having to be forced upon him, often brutally with threats and punishments or through the bribes of material reward, the child proved that the very contents of culture were an answer to his most vital needs of development on condition that they be offered to him in the right form and at the right time. Thus there came into existence terms as "the spontaneous explosion into writing and reading" at an early age, "culture as a help to development," the "social and moral construction of the child in successive phases of growth" and others which were often misunderstood as expressing "ideas" or "principles" of an educational method. The secret of Dr. Montessori's person and work is precisely that she made a discovery and applied her genius and scientific training to the penetration and application of this discovery. That is also why she ever and most energetically disclaimed to have "invented" a method of education, not out of modesty only, but as a statement of fact. She shook the conscience of the world towards the unexplored and neglected

wealth hidden in human nature and proclaimed the urgency of "educating the human potential", of allowing this hidden treasure to come forth and stabilize a world shaken in its very foundations, because its real foundation-man himself-was trampled upon from the beginning of his existence. She, too, on the basis of an experience vaster both in time and in space than that of any other educationist, could proclaim the reality of human nature being one, whatever its form, colour or convictions, of all human beings needing the same fundamental help during their development. Thus she made an essential contribution towards the ultimate emergence of "one world": "the new world for a new man", based not on ideas or ideals, but on facts and realities to which we were all too blind. Thus it was that she could declare that "the seed we sow is the seed of hope". The world needs this hope, now more than ever. If the anxieties, the horrors and contradictions, the climate of near despair of our times can help us receive this seed more eagerly, more actively and to assist the realization of this hope on a universal scale, we may feel, indeed, that this great and long life of untiring and arduous labour for human reconstruction, for the valorization of man, was lived at the right time and prolonged to meet its fulfilment.

When, after a life-time of incessant efforts to awaken consciousness for the child as a "forgotten citizen" and the depository of as yet untapped regenerative human energy, she died, active up to the moment of her death at the age of almost 82 years, she had received world-wide recognition and distinction. Unanimously it was felt that through her work she would continue to be among us and to help us save humanity from ever more threatening disaster through the child and a cultivation of the human potential. (cf "Maria Montessori, her life and work" by E. M. Standing, B.Sc. Dip. Ed. "Mentor Omega MQ 425" pocket-book Rs. 7-80)

Association Montessori Internationale :

In 1929, on the occasion of the 1st. International Montessori Conference, when already there had come into existence many national societies to spread and implement Dr. Montessori's message and experience in most European and many overseas countries, there was established the Association Montessori Internationale in order to co-ordinate and stimulate the Montessori Movement in all its manifestations. Among its objects as stated in its Constitution there are "the maintenance, upholding and promotion of children's rights; the spreading of knowledge concerning the physical, mental, moral and spiritual development of the child at home, in school and in society and the need to have regard for the great social importance of childhood; the spreading and the protection of the integrity of the educational method initiated by Dr. Maria Montessori to develop through independent activity the self-reliant personality of children; the creation of the necessary environment including opportunities for the normal development of childhood in order that the younger and the elder may strive together in harmony for a higher and more peaceful civilization; the launching of a social movement independent of any particular religious and social movement in order to obtain the recognition of the rights of children by all people of every race and religion all over the world; the collaboration with other societies or organisations which aim at upholding human rights, progress of education and promotion of peace."

Dr. Maria Montessori was elected its Founder—President which function she occupied until her death in 1952. Her adopted son, Mr. Mario M. Montessori, whose whole life had been spent with her at the service of her work, was elected its General—Director and still occupies this charge. Branches are functioning in many European, Asian and American countries. All authorized Montessori Training Courses are held under its auspices and it has already organized 13 International Montessori Conferences attended by official representatives of

many Governments and individual members from all over the world. Its headquarters are situated at Amsterdam, Holland, (161, Koninginneweg) where, after Dr. Montessori's death, a small museum has been arranged in the house where she lived during her last years and which has now become the international centre of the Montessori Movement.

3. **The Montessori Movement in India :**

The Montessori Movement in India has a history almost as old as that of the movement itself. Two phases can be clearly distinguished : (1) the phase before Dr. Montessori herself came to India, (2) the phase after her arrival and her ten years' residence and activity in this country. From the first International Montessori Training Course given by Dr. Montessori in 1913 at Rome up till 1939 Indian delegates were always amongst her students. On their return to their country they spread the Montessori idea and many started schools and applied the method. Even before Dr. Montessori's arrival her work had a notable influence on educational theory and practice in this country and enjoyed the interest and patronage of eminent Indian personalities, especially among the leaders of the National Movement of whom it may suffice to mention Mahatma Gandhi who met Dr. Montessori several times both here and abroad, and Dr. Rabindranath Tagore. The late Sri Jawaharlal Nehru and Dr. Zakir Husain were and Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, Smt. Vijayalakshmi Pandit and others are honorary members of the Association Montessori Internationale. Smt. Saraladevi Sarabhai is one of its Vice-Presidents. The influence of Dr. Montessori's work has also been seen in endeavours and movements which, though not organically connected with the Montessori Movement nor entirely representative of it, were inspired by it and tried to apply its principles according to their own light.

When, in 1939, Dr. Maria Montessori and Mr. Mario M. Montessori arrived in this country, they conducted regular training courses for teachers and others in various Indian towns

(Madras, Ahmedabad, Srinagar, Kodaikanal, Poona and Karachi). The movement was naturally greatly stimulated by their activity. Schools, applying her method in its integrity or in part only, were opened all over the country for children of all social conditions and not only in the towns, but in several rural areas as well. Public opinion was aroused and a general awareness of the fundamental importance of child education and care, specially during the basic years of early childhood, began to take shape. The conquest of independence and the resulting opportunity to take full responsibility for the life and future of the nation, which so essentially rest on the care given to the development of its citizens, provided a further impetus. Today, therefore, the Montessori Movement has a definite place in India and in recognition of this fact and as a token of their keen interest, when they returned to Europe in 1949, Dr. Montessori and Mr. Mario M. Montessori appointed a Personal Representative to remain in India and promote the movement.

As the movement grew in extension and more and more people took training, it was soon realized that not all the schools started were conducted with sufficient selflessness and fidelity to the Method, the name of which they used as if it were an advertisement. The vast expanse of the country and the difficulties to maintain close and regular contact also contributed to much superficial and misleading use of Dr. Montessori's name. A "Montessori-School" was often not more than a place for small children, sometimes conducted by people who had taken no training at all, possessed no authorized Montessori-qualification or had followed training courses run "along Montessori lines" but not recognized nor affiliated to the Montessori Movement and its official organ, the A.M.I. (cf. "Communique of the A.M.I."). It was therefore decided to affiliate Montessori institutions, which had given evidence of maintaining satisfactory standards to the A.M.I.. Affiliated schools exist at Hyderabad-Dn, Bombay, New Delhi, Calcutta and elsewhere.

To further the stability of the movement and to protect the public against misuse of its name another important step was taken when in 1952 the Central Ministry of Education sent a circular to all State Governments recommending recognition of the diplomas awarded by the Association Montessori Internationale. This recommendation was accompanied by a memorandum drawn up by Dr. Montessori's Personal Representative to serve as a basis for such recognition and to suggest ways and means to protect the proper use of the name Montessori in schools and training institutions. 13 State Governments have responded favourably to this recommendation and others are considering the matter.

4. The Indian Montessori Training Courses:

Since Dr. Maria Montessori's and Mr. Montessori's arrival in India 33 such courses have been given under the auspices of the A.M.I. After their departure they are directed by their Personal Representative. These courses which are held in different places (since 1949 they were conducted at Gwalior, Bombay, Delhi, Hyderabad Dn., Jharia, Calcutta, Varanasi, Ranchi and Bangalore) attract many students Indian and foreign (an average of 150 to 180 each) among them can be found parents, teachers, members of the armed forces, of religious congregations, social workers, doctors, of all ages, languages, creeds, and social conditions. The minimum qualification for admission is matriculation and candidates must be at least 18 years of age, but a large percentage of students hold Indian or foreign degrees. The programme covers three main items: Child Psychology in the light of Dr. Montessori's experience and work, the Theory of the Montessori Method and practical instruction in the technique of the Method. The classes last 9½ months (from the middle of July until the end of April of the following year) and are generally held in the evenings so that those already employed may yet be able to take part. The work is of very intense nature and requires great and earnest zeal.

These courses can give special consideration to the conditions peculiar to the country and in particular to the characteristics of the regional and national languages with their own problems on which the child and experience in Montessori schools have thrown so much light. In this connection it may be mentioned that there has been worked out a complete method of presenting writing and reading in Hindi according to the Montessori Method. This implied a re-classification of the letters of the Devanagari script and their presentation on a psychological basis, the gradation of orthographical difficulties and corresponding material for children between 2½ and 6 years of age * This new approach has also aroused the interest of those engaged in adult literacy campaigns. Another interesting feature of these courses is the emphasis laid on the value of the Montessori Method as a practical means to ensure and foster the principles of non-violence which can only form an attitude of life if practised in the one field where it is as yet hardly taken into consideration: that of the relations between the child and the adult. The child still grows up and is educated by means of an attitude and methods conspicuous by violence, both physical and psychological. This is a problem of first importance of which we must become conscious as the survival and development of this superior moral way of life, of which India has become the world-protagonist, will depend on the future generations. If these are forming their personalities on a basis of violence applied to them under the disguise of education, both ancient and modern, a later adherence to the principles of non-violence cannot but suffer from inner conflict and superficiality, even to the extreme of mere lip-service. The Montessori Method represents the scientific application of the principles of non-violence to education during the most formative years of life. The advocacy of the social question of the child which plays such a

* This has also been done for Bengali, Marathi, Gujarati, Kanada and Tamil.

prominent part in these courses also stresses the home and the school as the two environments where these principles should be firmly established and where the adult can most easily train himself in their application to other fields as well. Of this urgent need the Montessori Movement has made itself the active champion and by means of its well-circumscribed technique it furnishes a practical answer to the question of how this can be achieved, further strengthened by the practical results obtained not only in India, but all over the world.

Among the more urgent tasks of the Montessori Movement in India there stands out the necessity to enable the rural and economically less favoured population to take advantage of this education. At different places steps in this direction have already been taken, but much, very much more remains still to be done. This requires that a large number of people come forward who are ready to devote themselves to this lofty task, to make sacrifices on its behalf and to discard all self-interested motives. Others again will have to make their contribution by making funds available for so eminently constructive and necessary an endeavour. Full expansion can naturally be given to such a programme only when not only private bodies and individuals, but also Government assumes responsibility, but none should wait for the other, all should be eager to take the first step and to help its development. Another urgent necessity is closer contact between the Movement and Montessori schools and teachers so that a mutual exchange of experience may benefit all and guidance can be made available where needed. Some sort of regular inspection by experts, for whom special training facilities should be made available, will also have to be organized and made obligatory. This will also prevent misuse of the name "Montessori" and discourage the opening of so-called Montessori schools with a staff either not trained or not in possession of the authorized Montessori diploma and of schools not or only partly equipped with the standardized Montessori apparatus manufactured, under guidance of the Associa-

tion Montessori Internationale, and sold by the authorized firm: Kaybee School Aids & Equipment Corp. C/3-C/4 Industrial Estate, Moula Ali, Secunderabad-17, A. P.

Ever increasing efforts should finally be made to help parents understand and respect the vital needs of childhood and to concentrate on education as a help to life rather than a training to produce external and superficial results.

A general mobilization of public consciousness and resources is needed to work for the reconstruction of humanity and human society from its very foundation in early childhood. In conclusion we may, therefore, quote what Dr. Montessori has written in her last book:

“It is possible to conceive a universal movement for human reconstruction which follows a single path. Its sole aim is to help man to preserve his balance, his psychic health and give a safe orientation in the present condition of our outer world. The movement is not limited to any one nation nor to any particular political trend, because it aims at the simple realization of human values and that is what is of primary interest.”

“Man must gather together all his values and energies, he must develop them and prepare himself for his liberation from the tyranny of the environment and a too technical civilization which ignores and crushes his spiritual nature. This is not the time to fight each other, to try and subdue each other. We must consider man alone striving to raise himself up, to strip himself of the useless bonds he created for himself and which push him downwards into the abyss of lunacy and crime. The real enemy is man's impotence against his own products; it is the arrest of development of humanity itself. To vanquish this enemy, man has only to react to and behave in a different manner towards the environment which, in itself, is a source of wealth and happiness. A universal revolution is what we need. This revolution

requires only that man raise his values and become master, instead of the victim of the environment he himself has created."

"Whoever works for this ideal must be actuated by a great idea, much greater than those political ideas which have promoted social improvements which concern only the material life of some group of men oppressed by injustice or misery. This ideal is universal in its scope. It aims at the deliverance of the whole of humanity. Much patient work is needed along this road towards the freedom and valorization of mankind." 1

(1) Dr. Maria Montessori : The Formation of Man, T. P. H. Madras-20

Only those diplomas or certificates, which bear the signatures of Dr. Maria Montessori and of Mr. Mario M. Montessori, or those of the President and the General-Director of the Association Montessori Internationale, and its emblem and were issued after 1939 are valid and qualify the holder to apply the Montessori Method to the education of children between the ages specified on the diploma or certificate. These diplomas or certificates do NOT qualify or entitle the holder to train adults in the Montessori Method.



MONTESSORI TRAINING COURSES:

Only those affiliated to the Association Montessori Internationale are authorized to train teachers in the Montessori Method and award the above mentioned Montessori Diplomas or Certificates. In INDIA they are: the INDIAN MONTESSORI TRAINING COURSES held directly under the auspices of the Association Montessori Internationale in different cities in turn, commencing by the middle of July and continuing until the end of April of the following year. For particulars apply to the Director, Indian Montessori Training Courses, c/o Messrs. Bindra, Choudhry & Co. Post Box 764, Bombay-1.

MONTESSORI SCHOOLS OR HOMES OF CHILDREN:

Only such classes, sections or institutions where all the staff-members in charge of the education of children are in possession

COMMUNIQUE

of the

ASSOCIATION MONTESSORI INTERNATIONALE (Regd.)

Dr. Maria Montessori—Founder President 1929—1952.

President:

J. EWART SMART
O.B.E., M.C., M.A., B.Sc., Ph.D.

General Director:

MARIO M. MONTESSORI

Headquarters:

161, Koninginneweg,
Amsterdam-Z,
Netherlands.



MONTESSORI DIPLOMAS:

Only those diplomas or certificates, which bear the signatures of Dr. Maria Montessori and/or Mr. Mario M. Montessori, or those of the President and the General-Director of the Association Montessori Internationale, and its emblem and were issued after 1929 are valid and qualify the holder to apply the Montessori Method to the education of children between the ages specified on the diploma or certificate. These diplomas or certificates do NOT qualify nor entitle the holder to train adults in the Montessori Method.

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MONTESSORI SCHOOLS OR HOUSES OF CHILDREN:

Only such classes, sections or institutions where all the staff-members in charge of the education of children are in possession

of a valid Montessori Diploma or Certificate (see above) for the age-groups specified on the diploma or certificate, and where all requirements concerning equipment, organization, constitution of mixed age-groups and age at admission set forth by authorized Montessori Training Courses are fulfilled and where the Montessori Method is applied in its integrity are entitled to use the name "Montessori" in any form (International registration No. 220723).

MONTESSORI ASSOCIATIONS:

In India the only authorized Associations are: Association Montessori Internationale; Association of Montessorians, Calcutta; Association of Delhi Montessorians; Montessori Education Society (Delhi); Hyderabad (A. P.) Working Committee of the A. M. I.; Maharashtra Branch of the A. M. I.; Chotanagpur Montessorians, Ranchi.

MONTESSORI APPARATUS (equipment):

The only firm authorized to manufacture and sell Montessori apparatus in India is: Kaybee School Aids and Equipment Corp., C/3-C/4 Industrial Estate, Moula Ali, Secunderabad-17, A. P. (Tel. 71264) with Showroom at "Firdous", 6-3-1089/B Somajiguda, Hyderabad-4, A. P. (Tel. 35808).

' AROUND THE CHILD':

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E. M. STANDING:

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A. M. JOOSTEN:

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For particulars about training facilities outside India, Montessori Associations outside India, literature etc., apply to the Director, Indian Montessori Training Courses, c/o Messrs. Bhaidas Cursondas & Co., Post Box 764, Bombay-1.

