

**Extracts from, commentary and background to a speech by the late Sir Bernard Ledwidge, KCMG, of UNICEF UK, on the occasion of his visit to Sri Atmananda Memorial School, Malakkara, November 8th, 1991:**

In 1990, a brochure of Atma Vidya Educational Foundation came to the attention of the United Kingdom Committee for UNICEF (the United Nations Children's Fund). Sir Bernard Ledwidge, for many years Chairman and in 1991 Vice-President of the Committee, was particularly struck by the foreword to the brochure, which gives the essence of the Foundation's guiding ideal:

*"There is a latent push in any man which is only a search for perfection. Rightly pursued, one finds this in one's awakening experience to one's real nature through the atmosphere between the real teacher and the taught. Education is only an attempt towards this. Atma Vidya Educational Foundation strives to perfect this aim."*

Sri Adwayananda (Sri K. Padmanabha Menon)

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Drawn to see this ideal in action, Sir Bernard and his wife, Lady Flora Ledwidge, visited Atma Vidya Educational Foundation and Sri Atmananda Memorial School in India for several days in early November 1991. In a speech given at the school on 8th November, Sir Bernard explained his interest in the school.

Like other educators throughout the world, Sir Bernard was searching for a better way of education. As part of the World Conference on Education for All, which was sponsored by UNICEF in Thailand in 1990, Sir Bernard had joined the representatives of many nations in asking for an education that would:

*..... develop a child in accordance with its own inner nature, through a better relationship between the real teacher and the taught .....*

Such an education would give:

*.....more consideration of the wishes of the child and its talents, so that a full development can be assured in later years, so that children will leave school full of curiosity to learn more and develop still more towards that perfection.*

The work that Atma Vidya Educational Foundation had begun in 1983 already pointed in this direction. Sir Bernard found that the:

*.....revolutionary developments in educational thinking about the position of children are producing this great change that is already so well exemplified in the working of your school here.*

Sir Bernard went on to recall:

*Now, as soon as I read the brochure, I was struck by the convergence of ideas which I observed in it with the ideas that had been expressed at the United Nations World Conference on Education for All which was sponsored by UNICEF and by other specialized agencies and which was held in Thailand in March, 1990... ..I found that the ideas in both documents were new—although respectful of tradition—and original, and I said to myself at once that Atma Vidya Educational Foundation and its school were impressive establishments.*

During this visit to the school, Sir Bernard observed the teaching approach which the Foundation is developing. In his speech, he said:

*We have been looking at your school in action and, I must say, that we have been delighted by what we have seen.*

He particularly noted:

*The good humour of the children, the friendly and affectionate relationship that they have with the teachers, their freedom to move around from room to room, to choose what they want to do, the skill in which, discreetly, the teachers guide them in useful directions...*

Looking ahead to the future, Sir Bernard said:

*This school has made a very good start but the great question which will decide its future and how much influence it has on the development of education will be how well it works.*

He added:

*Well, it's early days to be certain but, I must say, I know many experts in education over the world who advise UNICEF and who are convinced that it can be done and ought to be done and that this is the way ahead... .. So, the conclusion that I have reached is that this school is moving in the right direction and that UNICEF ought to know about it and be aware of what is being done down here... .. You deserve success and, if you achieve it, the world will be, in some tiny sense, a better place for children. And that will be quite in the spirit of our times because now, a brave new world is opening up for the children in this school of yours and all other children, and a brave new world in which they will be treated with more dignity than ever before.*