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GANDHIJI'S TEACHING EXPERIMENTS AT SEVAGRAM ASHRAM, WARDHA

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Abstract

Before independence, command of education was in the hands of foreign government. The education they were providing at that time to the Indians was not appropriate to cater the need of Indian society. At that time Gandhiji was not satisfied with the prevailing condition of education that encourages rote learning and create discrimination among people of India on the basis of manual work and intellectual work. Gandhiji believed that this type of education was producing literate people but they are not educated. They cannot use the acquired knowledge for the betterment of society and nation. Therefore, he decided to introduce NaiTalim as the method of imparting education which is also known as basic education. Gandhiji believed that there is no other teacher than Mother Nature and therefore, education should not be given in the four walls of the classroom rather it should be done in the direct contact with nature. In this, students are taught in the lap of Mother Nature. He gave emphasis on manual work or skill development as he believed inkinaesthetic activities lead to the intellectual development. He also believed that more the senses involved in learning more will be the output of learning and this type of knowledge last long. In this, students are assigned some kinaesthetic activities for the concerned concept of the curriculum. He did various experiments at Sevagram ashram, Wardha like education of botany in the forest, cooking, economics and balanced diet through community kitchen, use of story for emotional development and imagination, use of music for cooperative learning and introduction of mathematics by construction work are some of the experiments by which students are taught in the ashram. In this paper we will discuss about different experiments of Gandhiji at Wardha ashram to empower the children.

Keywords: Basic education, Naitalim and kinesthetic work.

INTRODUCTION

We are living in 21st century and it demands some new skills in the students to address the demand of this changing world. We know that our country is not performing well at global level. In many international examinations our country secured unsatisfactory positions. One of the reason for this may be the present education system in which children have to study in the boundary of four wall only. We have numerous ways in which content of book can be connected with the real life work. But most of the schools discourage it. It indicates we need to make our children educate rather than literate. Today’s education system producing literate person who have degrees but don’t have knowledge of that field. For example we are preparing civil engineers but they are not able to make a building, electrical engineers are not able to repair the fuse at home, a student of economics is not able to make their home expenditure economic. So, these are some examples that encourage us to create a teaching methodology by which we can give some meaningful experiences to the students and “skill for life”. But can you tell me which method we need today? Do we need to create new method? Do we need a great resources for this? Do we need great minds for it? I think no. our national father and some great minds of our country already have given such method but we are ignoring that i.e. *basic education*.

Mahatma Gandhiji was the proponent of basic education and he gave emphasis over the skills and manual work. Gandhiji worked on basic education and he took help of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore (the Nobel laureate). Both of them were the believer of naturalism they thought that education should be given to the children in the lap of the Mother Nature as nature is the best teacher. In the pre-independence era when Britishers were ruling our nation and also our education system, Gandhiji realised that education provided by Britishers was not good and appropriate

enough for Indians. We need to train Indian students in some skills. And then he decide to give skill oriented education to the Indians. Which is popularly known as Basic education. Sevagram Ashram, Wardha was the centre for it. Where students were taught with very interesting methods in the direct contact of nature. Gandhiji believed that involvement of maximum senses in an activity leads to the growth of our brain. As emphasised by Avinashilingam T.S. (1960) “Psychologically, it is desirable, because it relieves the child from the tyranny of a purely academic and theoretical instruction against which its active nature is always making a healthy protest. It balances the intellectual and practical elements of experience, and may be made an instrument of educating the body and mind in coordination. The child acquires not the superficial literacy which implies, often without warrant, a capacity to read the printed page, but the far more important capacity of using hand and intelligence for some constructive purpose. This, if we may be permitted to use the education, is the literacy of the whole personality.” So, herewe will discuss some of the teaching techniques and examples of teaching in the Sevagram Ashram, Wardha.



Figure.1: Components of Teaching at Wardha Ashram

1. Science teaching

Science is nothing but the nature. We can learn science from nature directly. In the Sevagram ashram, Wardha pupil were taught various disciplines of science through nature. The principle behind it is when we learn in such way it will last long. For example a teacher in ashram was teaching botany. He set on the tree and describe about plants. Pupils were instructed to arrange different leaves of different plants to understand structure of leaf. For this, students prepare a herbarium. Similarly students collect different types of fruit and compare their internal structure. For example mango, banana, apple, orange, all are fruits but their structure are different. So, by this students come to know the structure as well as the taste also that cannot be forgotten in the future. Another example is students make group of the plants according to the plant height and strength of the stem and classify plants into trees, herbs and shrubs. In the ashram students learn botany by visiting a near garden or forest. Teacher in the ashram tried to introduce the plants with their common name and then provide the scientific name. As we know when we learn anything in our local language it is quite easy. So, students prepare the list having two names of each plants. In the ashram botany was taught by the teacher in this interesting way with the nature where students can touch, feel and taste the plants.

2. Agricultural practices

We know India is the agricultural economy and therefore, development in this sector is very important. To teach the students and to bring their interest in this field Sevagram ashram used a wonderful method. In this each student is allotted a piece of land over which they have to grow the crop. They were instructed to use organic manure for the growth of the crop but many a time it happens that they need chemical fertilizer also. For the use of chemical fertilizer they have to meet

the farmers and also study about the specific fertilizer for the specific crop. By doing this, they know about agricultural practices like ploughing, weeding, threshing, use of fertilizer and manure, amount of water needed and texture and preparation of the soil. By studying the above discussed component students become perfect in agriculture and they can select farming as their profession in the future or become agricultural scientist also. This method is important from the point of view of giving respect to the farmers who cultivate crops for the whole nation. So, Wardha ashram did wonderful experiment to teach agricultural practices to the students.

3. Teaching of mathematics

Wardha ashram made mathematics a live subject. Normally students learn mathematics at normal school but when they have to apply the acquired knowledge they get fail to use it. They learn about area of different shapes but are unable to calculate the area of their own house and number of tiles will be required for the floor. Similarly, the volume of the water tank at their home and time required for the particular motor to fill it. Or we can understand it with the example of basketball player who uses trial and error method or using mathematics to find relation between height, angle and energy which make it easy. So, these are some examples of the present day teaching who produces only parrots. But basic education can help to get rid of this problem where students in the Wardha ashram were given live project to complete. As one of the student of ashram Dr. Bang shared his experience that his mathematics teacher gave the task of cowshed where a new cowshed is under construction. He had to find amount of water a cow drinks a day. How much water will be needed for all the cows in cowshed? Then construct the water tank with the capacity to satisfy the thirst of the cows. Find out how many bricks will be needed and bring that many

bricks from the market. By this problem student was able to learn real life application of volume, area, and economics also.

4. Community kitchen

In the ashram students had their meal at the community kitchen where group of students are allotted for the particular days to arrange the food in the kitchen. Students need to cook the food by themselves for all but before doing this they need to understand the ratio of nutrition and economy. They need to buy food items having high nutrition value with low price and then make the tasty food. This exercise helped students to understand the real meaning of balanced diet, economics and the art of cooking. This exercise is also useful to know nutrition component in the vegetables and other food items.

5. Story telling

Gandhiji focused on story telling as a method of teaching. Gandhiji always said that stories should be simple, live, and in mother tongue. Stories used for the teaching should have action, and bring imagination of children. Stories should have some messages. Then only stories have some meaning in teaching. If students accept the message of story passively it means it is difficult for him to make meaning from it. Therefore, teacher should select a story from the context of student, and present it in mother tongue.

7. Use of music

Gandhiji believed that music has direct impact on our mind and therefore he believed in bhajan. In the ashram students life start with the bhajan at each day. He never said that singing should be done alone rather singing should be done in group i.e. chorus. Chorus singing is the method to integrate social and emotional value in a community environment. We can say that it is the way of cooperative learning.

8. Handicraft

Gandhiji was the strong believer of manual work. He gave importance to the manual work in the education of the child. He believed that kinaesthetic activities help in the quickening of intelligence and therefore can be used for the intellectual growth of the children. In the Wardha Ashram he implemented skill development and manual work like spinning and craft work.

DISCUSSION

The main focus of the Gandhiji was on to train the manpower of our country as that time there were discrimination among people on the type of work they do i.e. manual work or intellectual work. Gandhiji wanted to give emphasis on manual work to give respect to it and he took the help of introduction of basic education as a teaching method. He believed that this method is important to make people of India a responsible citizen who can take decision about their rights and problems. But at today Sevagram ashram, Wardha is just like a visiting place and museum. We need to find the reason behind its failure. I think the success of basic education lie in the two points. Whatever productive work we are selecting for students should have high possibilities of educational experiences and productive work should be oriented around school curriculum.

CONCLUSION

By looking into the method of imparting education at Sevagram Ashram, Wardha we can say that Gandhiji was not only a spiritual kind of person who devote his life for peace but also he had a broad vision on scientific method of imparting education. He always encouraged students to draw conclusion from their own work. For this basic education have tremendous opportunities to the children for learning through manual work. Other than this he laid emphasis on music, story, craftwork and use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction. Gandhiji had

the wonderful vision and today we need this teaching method to address the demand of this changing world. I hope the world would be inspired from this method and integrate it with the curriculum for the betterment of the students and world as well.

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