

Course Swaraj 2004 - Understanding and Initiating Social Action

A Quick Update

SAMANVAYA's first SwaRaj course for Understanding and Initiating Social Action was inaugurated on the 1st of August, 2004 by Dr. P.L.T Girija and Sri. T.M. Mukundan, Sanjeevani Ayurveda and Yoga Centre.

We have with us 10 participants with serious questions about Indian society and the way it functions today. Five of them are working in the social sphere and have come with varying levels of field experience in health, environment, education, organic farming, rural technology etc., having questions on the conceptual framework for their work.

In the Introductory Session on August 1st, 2004, the participants met with each other, voiced and discussed their expectations from the programme. They were given an orientation to the structure and focus of the course and background material on Hind Swaraj, Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy and work.

Prof. M.D. Srinivas, Centre for Policy Studies talked on the fundamental tenet(s) of Indian Civilisation (dharma), the question of Modern western civilisation, the fundamental principles that Gandhiji lived for and articulated, and Gandhiji's take on this issue, followed by extensive discussions regarding this, and situation today related to issues of governance and development in the first module - 'Civilisation'.

In the second module - 'Swaraj - The Ideal', Sri. A.V. Balasubramaniam, Centre for Indian Knowledge Systems, talked about swaraj; that this is simply manifesting the Indian swabhava. He took the participants on an intense and fascinating journey in to the Indian swabhava, particularly in the area of science and technology, relating numerous instances, processes of swaraj that are still present all around us.

Soul Force Module Day One (4th Sept 2004):

We explored the meaning of the spiritual force that is unique to India; that is derived from the core of her civilisation - the force of Satya (Truth) or Ahimsa (Love). A short presentation on the idea of Soul Force as outlined by Gandhiji was made by SAMANVAYA along with the material given to the participants which consisted of extracts from Hind Swaraj and later works of Gandhiji from the Complete Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG).

Sri. T M Mukundan of Sanjeevani Ayurveda and Yoga Centre, Chennai shared his insights and understanding of Soul Force with the participants. His emphasis was that Ahimsa ("a greater love or charity", in the words of Gandhiji) is the supreme dharma of our civilisation and all our actions have to be thought of from this platform. A lively discussion on some of the contemporary scenarios and how ahimsa would apply in such circumstances followed.

Smt. Shashikala Ananth, Vaastu expert from Chennai, took the participants on an introspective / reflective journey into the Self. She made the participants do a small exercise through which she made them understand his/her 'self', its constituent values and influences, to become aware of their identity so that the individual can start the process of social understanding as an extension of the understanding of the within.

Dr. G Sivaramakrishnan, Head of Sociology Department, Bangalore University, gave the participants an insight into the working of Gandhiji's philosophy and thought on Soul Force - The Mahatma's dogged pursuit of Truth, which he explained is the ideal of India, and the path of Ahimsa.

Soul Force Module Day Two (11th September 2004):

Smt. Geetha Varadarajan, Editorial Director, TARA Publishing shared with the participants her understanding of Gandhi, the man. According to her, he was deeply maternal in all his dealings in both personal and public life, and at the same time a clear-headed strategist. She also took the participants through his political journey from the Satyagraha in South Africa till the last years explaining how he

used his ideals of Truth and Love and their mass-manifestations in political struggles (passive resistance, non-cooperation, civil disobedience etc.), to win national freedom.

India Today Module Day One (19th September 2004):

Sri. Ram, Chief, SAMANVAYA gave a brief summary of the earlier modules - Civilisation, Swaraj and Soul Force, emphasising the importance of understanding Hind Swaraj, its civilisational analysis and standpoint in today's international scenario. We then proceeded to discuss where we, as a nation stand today in terms of our achievements and analysed them from the context of Hind Swaraj and our understanding. Sri. Ram looked at the 'Development' scenario in the country today, who and what drives it and the interplay of myriad national and international factors that make 'development', their impact on us as a people etc., leaving everyone with questions as to what is really being 'developed'.

Field Trip (25th September 2004):

A visit to SEVALAYA, an organisation situated about 40 Kms from Chennai. SEVALAYA was founded in 1988 by a group of young individuals inspired by Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi and Subramanya Bharathi. Following this inspiration, their main objective is to serve the poor - this is the nucleus of their work and activities. They run a free school as well as medical centre at the Campus. Besides, there are about 150 children living there, they have an old-age home, a goshala, a library, and their own nursery. On small patches of land they grow vegetables, greens, herbs etc. In true Gandhian spirit, the children work hard on the lands, do their own cleaning, get involved in a fair share of games and outdoor activity besides academic pursuits, and manage themselves and their duties very efficiently.

India Today Module Day Two (26th September 2004):

Sri. Annamalai, Gandhi Study Centre, very clearly and succinctly showed how today, the Government's development and economic policies only serve to increase poverty, unemployment and inequality in society. Juxtaposed to this, he showed Gandhian Economics to be, where the central idea is not money and excess, but happiness and self-restraint. He also explained with the help of statistics and charts, how Khadi could employ millions in the country and be the nucleus of a flourishing, self-reliant economy.

Samanvaya SwaRaj Initiative – Course SwaRaj 2004

179 / 94, II Floor, R.H.Road, Near Luz Junction, Mylapore, Chennai - 600004

Ph: 24984422 | e-mail: knowledge@samanvaya.com | web: www.samanvaya.com