

## ELEMENTARY EDUCATION AND AGRICULTURAL IMPROVEMENTS\*

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I thank you very sincerely for the opportunity you have been pleased to give me for reading a paper on "Education and Agricultural Improvements." I prefer not to confine agriculture to elementary classes alone. I am aware of the fact that I am addressing a large gathering of educationists. The diffidence becomes greater as I am an old trained teacher myself. However, my claim to speak on the subject is that the man in the forest sees only trees while the one outside can see the forest as a whole. I therefore venture to place before you some of my observations and experiences quite as a lay man and allow you to form your own ideas about them.

2. Education has been defined in various terms and it is not for me on this occasion to go into the details of its definition. Suffice it to say that any education, if it be real, must enable the educated to live as independently and well, as possible. I should consider this as the practical purpose of education. If the educated man is also able to benefit his fellow beings around, he must be considered to be living a useful life. In the attempt to study many things or the most important and prominent things in this world a student becomes enamoured of them. The sky scrapers of America, the Niagara falls and the enormous electric energy they give out, the electric trams and trains in towns all remain vivid in his mind. He is prompted to go and see and enjoy those wonderful things in the towns, relegating his own surroundings to the background. As a result there is a rush of the educated man from the rural to the urban areas. Many an educated youth has asked me why we do not use engines and pumps for irrigation, tractors for ploughing and so on and spare our poor animals from hard work. I attribute all such questions to the utter ignorance of the poor educated youth of his own surroundings. We cannot afford that standard of life until we are able to increase our production.

3. The three important means of production are mining, fishing and agriculture including pastoral farming. Mining is confined to the areas particularly blessed with underground mineral wealth and fishing is confined to the seaboard areas or banks of big rivers. Agriculture is the only productive industry that can be carried on anywhere man lives. It alone is able to produce the food requirements of man and raw products needed for most of the industrial undertakings. A general increase in production must evidently be through agriculture and that is more so in India of which over 70% of the population depends upon this industry. Any attempt at industrial

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revival without increasing production through agriculture will be like the erection of a big building without adequate foundation.

4. The educated man, with his urban tastes, leaves this important industry into the hands of the uneducated and illiterate villager. This process has been going on long, with the result that Agriculture as an industry has nearly fallen into disrepute. This is particularly due to the fact that the illiterate farmer has been found devoid of the outlook needed to imbibe new ideas of improvement in farming and much more so to adopt them as he happens to be more a fatalist than a materialist. His economic position is consequently unsound and he is always found to be needy as he is quite unable to compete with the farmer of the civilized countries, all the world over, in point of production. He has now to sell his produce in the world market when the difficulties due to time and space have been mostly overcome by the advance made by science.

5. What is needed to improve the situation is to increase the productivity or in reality the wealth of our country. The income from Agriculture cannot be improved or production increased until farming as a business is at least partly taken out of the hands of the illiterate villager and handed over to the educated man, in whom a taste has to be created in village life. Many an educated man has now found it impossible to live in towns as he failed to secure a footing there. He is always on the alert to find out something in the town for himself and run away when possible. He is also unfit to become a farmer as he can have no abiding interest in the business.

6. The only remedy under these circumstances is that the boy as he gets educated must be made to develop a taste in farming and village life. In the early stages of his career as an infant the child must be helped to develop its natural love for flowers and later on in their production. A teacher was once found to be taking great pains to draw a paddy plant with coloured chalks on the black-board when the school was situated in the midst of a paddy flat with crops all round. The idea must be different from this. The actual plant must be grown and shown to the child to satisfy the real inherent curiosity and make the child take part in the growing of it. The wonderful changes the seeds undergo when planted and the greater wonder evinced by plants as they grow and produce flowers and seeds of the same kind, must all be considered as practical lessons; one should get at the school. Their requirements of food and drink and ventilation as we require them must all be taught in an interesting manner; so too animal life and their usefulness to man. There must be some field crops, fruit plants and vegetables grown in the school garden itself with the labour of the boys. Showy plants like crotons that now make the best school garden must be fewer and less prominent though I do not recommend to exclude them. The aesthetic aspect of the school garden or farm can very well be maintained by proper lay out given to growing crops. A chilly plant is as beautiful as any showy plant in a flower garden. The only defect with it is that it will bring in profits. So also a brinjal or a ladies' finger plant.

Amarantus of various hues can easily take the place of crotons. There are very many beautiful fruit plants which can form an avenue on the roadside in any school farm or a shade plant in the school premises. They are as the Begonias, Caesalpinias, Tecoma or Thevetia or the most poisonous Nerium (oleander) that now predominate in a school garden and are liable to endanger the life of the child. A grape vine or passiflora can make a bower as beautiful as any Aristolochia. The Moringa (Drum stick) plant grown along the margin can be a constant source of income while it beautifies the garden or serves as a wind break. Mango bushes, roseapple, jack trees, sapotas, pomegranates and guavas are but a few of the productive and harmless plants that can thrive well in a school garden or within the school compound. Pets like cows with calves, goats and kids, poultry, pigeons etc. may also be reared in a school where facilities can be provided for them. A few good fishes in the school well will be a useful adjunct to the garden; so also honey bees or silk-worms. Cows or goats may be reared in larger number as a source of profit and to supply the necessary food of pure milk for children in the school. They will form great object lessons and serve to prove their worth as profitable and necessary side lines to the growing of crops. Their study should not be theoretical if they should appeal to the young minds. Therefore I am forced to recommend that most of it has to be practically shown to them in the school and done by boys themselves. One cannot have a taste for swimming if one is not allowed to enter water. So long as the study of the surroundings remains optional, it is likely to be neglected. I should like to place all the emphasis at my command when I say that these lessons must be made a compulsory part of the elementary education as much as the three R's.

7. The great need for making the children realise the dignity of labour cannot be exaggerated. They must also be able to have a liking for the many useful domestic animals. The failure of the boy to realise it and to know the usefulness of domestic animals may be the probable reason for the educated villager becoming unagricultural in his outlook. You can very often see a European going under his car and soiling his fingers when there is a need for it, while many an educated Indian awaits the arrival of the mechanic. This is obviously the result of the better opportunities the European had of realising the dignity of labour in his early life.

8. There have been misgivings in certain quarters where guardians began to grumble at their children being put to manual work in a school. This is the outcome of their ignorance or imperfect education. It seems necessary to enlighten the objectionist guardians in the great utility of their children realising dignity of labour. Then alone the future generation of guardians may be amenable to this great need of the country. It must also be got over by instilling interest in the minds of the pupils to do manual work. The teacher has to lead the boys by commencing to work himself and continuing to do so in a way till such classes are over. Once at the Agricultural College boys revolted against the cleaning of the cattle shed. This was



easily got over when the Principal himself commenced the work and all the boys joined him. Under the authority of an experienced officer of the Educational department I may add that the teacher's unwillingness to tuck up his sleeves and to enter the field with the boys militated against the popularity of field work in schools. The higher market value of manual labour as it is at present can be very well understood when we compare the present day wages of a good labourer though illiterate he be, with that of a literate writer in an ordinary trader's shop. We can allow our boys to stand in the midday sun for hours together in the cricket field. Is it not a real sin to object to the boy exposing himself in the evening sun for a shorter period to put in labour of a productive kind? Let the training given in schools help to make field labour as dignified or more so as the work in the cricket field.

9. In the higher classes the boys must have become fully conscious of the dignity of labour and must be able to do the very ordinary farm operations. An idea of the life of a farmer and his requirements must be made clearly understood by the boys. The great advantages of village life must be well impressed on the adolescent youth by showing him happy examples in local villages. Later on, the economics of farming, emphasising prevention of waste and the prospects of a good farmer to live a self-sufficient and contented life in the village, may be well impressed on his mind. Prevention of waste combined with sanitation can be very well demonstrated to the pupil by the way in which things thrown out from the school garden and the droppings of animals are composted together as harmless material. It can be used for manuring plants in the garden. The remnants of victuals thrown out or spilt grain etc. can all be fully made use of by poultry with advantage. The drainage from the school urinal may be turned to manure a clump of plantains or specimens of fodder crops. Once a Japanese lady was travelling with an Indian lady in a 3rd class compartment. Both of them purchased sugar canes for chewing on their way. The Indian lady threw off all the parings of the outer rind of the cane stem, while the Japanese lady kept them safe in the compartment. After she finished the chewing of the canes worth 3 pies, wove the rind pieces into two fancy baskets and sold them each for one anna. The Indian lady had half a mind to purchase one of them but felt ashamed to do so. Thus the idea of prevention of waste is possible in our everyday life.

10. The student must be trained to do certain items of work meant to occupy the spare time of a farmer. Spinning, weaving, basket making, carpentry or other items of manual training can be useful this way. They can be given only secondary importance and may be allowed to be taken up according to the taste of the boys. But the idea must be well impressed that spinning is possible only after producing cotton. Preparation of jams, fruit preservation and canning, converting the grain into flour or desiccating vegetables and fruits will naturally be the appropriate side lines of production in order to facilitate marketing of produce. They can be given greater prominence as items of manual training. Purely industrial training may be

suitable to the urban people but all education in rural areas must be organically connected with farming and devoid of the sense of unmaking a farmer.

11. In case there are facilities to obtain sufficient lands adjoining the school either as property of the school or on long term lease, gardening work or farming can be made a real source of profit to the school. If the reserve fund needed for the maintenance of a school is invested in lands a school farm is at once a practical proposition. A generous donor may place lands at the disposal of a poor school. Another may provide funds for equipment. Thus in a regular way a school farm may become a reality and may support the school if sufficient lands are available for cultivation. The strong controversy now going on in the newspapers as regard's Gandhiji's 7-year scheme of making a school financially self-sufficient with a school farm may be quite a practical idea worth a trial. If in a school, farming is taken up for its academic interest devoid of its economic aspects, improvement in the general trend of events can hardly ever take place. Many an educated youth has been found to criticise the improved methods of farming as costly. This is due to his ignorance as in reality it is only the other way about. It seems necessary to go a step further and assert that an economically run school farm is the only means to impress the business aspect of farming in the minds of the growing generation and the villagers in the locality. Farming which is the most important productive industry may thus be redeemed from the disrepute it has gained among educated people of this country.

12. The question of getting useful hands as teachers for such a course of study is the real problem. Of the two years' course in a secondary training school, one year is mostly spent in making the student up-to-date while the other year is devoted to train him as a teacher. If resourceful candidates with good education are selected for training they can be made to devote one year for the study of farming and village life and get trained in the next year. They will certainly be better fitted to become teachers.

13. The educated villager of the future with a real interest in farming should thus be able to stick to his own village, carry on farming most economically on improved lines and demonstrate a higher standard of life in the village. He must be able to give a lead to his unfortunate neighbours who were unable to obtain the benefits of education. This is the only way to introduce lasting improvements in the methods of farm-life so as to make the country wealthier or to make "the villages smile" to put it in the language of our esteemed Premier.

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