

A Study of the impact of the Indian philosophers on the perception of Peace on students of a teacher Training College.

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Abstract

In the current scenario when there is so much unrest, turmoil and violence due to cultural differences and terrorism the world over, there is a need of developing the need of peace among our students. Student teachers need to be made aware of the importance of peace education as they are the medium through which a peace culture can be built. In the B.Ed. course educational philosophy of Indian philosophers like Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore and Swami Vivekananda is a part of the Paper on Philosophical foundations of Education. They have stood for non-violence, international brotherhood and peace. Does discussing their philosophy have an impact on the perception of peace of the students? To seek an answer to this question a study was conducted to see the pre and post scores of perception of peace of student teachers. The sample selected for the study was the 100 students of the B.Ed. course of batch 2012-13 of Hansraj Jivandas College of Education. The tool that was used was a combination of open and closed ended questions in the form of a questionnaire. It was administered at the beginning of the year. At the end of the lectures the questionnaire was administered again. Percentages of the responses were calculated. A comparison of the both the test results were made to see if one can observe a change in the perception of peace of the students.

The purpose of the study was to throw light on the impact of Indian philosophers in helping build the right attitude towards peace culture among the future teachers.

Introduction

Gandhiji has shown the way to the world in terms of non-violence and Satyagraha. Through the example of his own life the- Satyagraha carried out for fighting for the rights of the Indians in South Africa, and leading the struggle of freedom in the country he not only succeeded in achieving his goals within the country but also inspired people like Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela to stand up for their own struggles and emerge victorious. He has given the world a very powerful tool of truth and non violence to fight injustice. Similarly Tagore has been a social reformer who used the medium of writing to voice himself against social evils of his times, whether it was status of women, caste system or religious conversions. The School and University that he started did concrete work for the upliftment of the farmers and

improvement of rural life. Viswa Bharati was established to bring a cultural understanding between all the nations. Swami Vivekananda through his fiery and spirited writing on nationalism and self belief tried to bring about a revolution in the social and economic structure of the country. They have epitomized peaceful co-existence, international brotherhood and fighting for just causes through peaceful means. Their philosophy and exemplary life is definitely going to impact young minds and if the lectures promote a lot of discussion and critical thinking their philosophy can definitely influence better understanding of peace and harmony.

Definition of terms:

Indian philosophers- A person who engages in the study of philosophy and who is of Indian origin.

Students- learners attending an educational institution

Teacher Training College- an educational institution for professional preparation of teachers, usually through formal course work and practice teaching.

Peace- freedom from or ending of war, freedom from noise or anxiety.

Perception- becoming aware of the world around you through your senses. T

Operational definitions:

Indian philosophers- For the purpose of this study the Indian philosophers are Gandhiji, Swami Vivekananda and Tagore.

Students- Students of the B.Ed. course offered by Mumbai University.

Teacher Training College- a B.Ed. College for professional preparation of teachers, through formal course work and practice teaching.

Peace- harmony among people, the absence of conflict, violence and war.

Perception- a personal understanding of a concept

Sample and sample size

The sample selected for the study is the 100 students of the B.Ed. course of batch 2012-13 of Hansraj Jivandas College of Education.

Objectives of the study:

To find out students perception on

- 1) Acceptance about living in an unjust society.
- 2) Standing up for themselves when faced with injustice by a) peaceful means only
b) Aggressive means if required

- 3) Avoidance of war in all circumstances
- 4) Accepting war is inevitable at times
- 5) India's policy of peace and non- violence.
- 6) Religion being a cause of discontent.
- 7) Violence.
- 8) Possibility of world peace.
- 9) Laying down of life for a cause.
- 10) Causes of inequalities in the Indian society.
- 11) Of Peace
- 12) To observe a change in perception of peace in the Post test results.

Method of Study: In the beginning of the year the tool was administered. The tool was a self made, 22 item questionnaire with yes, no and not sure responses, one multiple choice item and one open ended item. Every week in the assembly on Wednesday 'Sarva Dharma Prarthna' was conducted by the students. After practice teaching lectures on philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore and Swami Vivekananda were conducted in class. While teaching contribution of Mahatma Gandhi mention of how ideals of Satyagraha and non-violence evolved, it's the influence on people outside India like Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela was discussed. Generally a discussion on relevance of Gandhian thought in the current times was also taken. While teaching Swami Vivekananda and Tagore, their policy of international brotherhood and peaceful co existence of all nations was emphasized. Swami Vivekananda's Vedanta society established all over the world, the choice Of Swami Vivekananda as the youth icon for the National Youth Day was debated in class. The works of Tagore especially those on social causes and internationalism, his rationale of establishing Vishwabharati and educational philosophy were discussed in the class. The same questionnaire was then administered to see if there was any significant change in the perception of students about peace.

Tool

A questionnaire was constructed by the researcher. It had 27 items. 23 items had Yes, No and Not Sure responses, 1 item had multiple choice responses while 3 items were open ended questions.

Technique of data Analysis

Percentages were calculated and the percentages of the pre and post test were compared.

Limitations of the study

A control group could have been identified but due to constraints of time this was not done.

Findings

To find out students perception on

1) Acceptance about living in an unjust society.

i) I live in a society that is just and equal. Yes/No/Not sure

Pre Test			Post test		
28 %Yes	56% No	16% Not sure	18% Yes	64% No	18% Ns

ii) I believe that there are a lot of inequalities in our Indian society Yes/No/Not sure

Pre Test			Post test		
84%Yes	8% No	2% Not sure	84% Yes	8% No	2% Ns

iii) We all experience this injustice at some time or the other. Yes/No/Not sure

Pre Test			Post test		
94%Yes	0% No	6% Not sure	98% Yes	0% No	2% Ns

iv) I feel extremely angry and frustrated with the injustices. Yes/No/Not sure

Pre Test			Post test		
66%Yes	14% No	20% Not sure	66% Yes	22% No	12% Ns

There is no significant difference in the Pre and post test result for all the four items.

v) 3) The inequality is due to

a) Different languages b) religions c) varied economic levels

d) Cultural differences e) many other including these

A)1% b)9.6% c)10% d)9% e)95%

A percentage of what the students felt were the causes of inequality was calculated. No comparison was made of the responses of pre and post test, and students have marked more than one choice for this item.

No mention of the other causes was made by students even though they were asked to, verbally.

2) Standing up for themselves when faced with injustice by a) peaceful means only

i) I stand up for myself through peaceful means. Yes/No/Not sure

Pre Test			Post test		
84%Yes	2% No	12% Not sure	86% Yes	2% No	12% Ns

There is no significant difference in the Pre and post test result

b) Aggressive means if required

i) I don't hesitate to use aggression like using strong words and threatening to get my right.

Yes/No/Not sure

Pre Test			Post test		
24% Yes	66% No	10% Not sure	18% Yes	70% No	7% Ns

There is no significant difference in the Pre and post test result

3) Avoidance of war in all circumstances

i) War has to be avoided at all times and cost. Yes/No/Not sure

Pre Test			Post test		
68% Yes	14% No	18% Not sure	72% Yes	14% No	14% Ns

There is a rise by 4% in the students' perception that war needs to be avoided under all circumstances, in the post test. There is no significant difference in the Pre and post test result.

4) Accepting war is inevitable at times

i) At times a war is inevitable and India should take a strong stand if needed. Y/N/Not Sure

Pre Test			Post test		
54% Yes	24% No	22% Not sure	50% Yes	32% No	12% Ns

5) India's policy of peace and non-violence.

i) India's policy of tolerance and peace is a sign of weakness. Y/N/NS

Pre Test			Post test		
10% Yes	66% No	24% Not sure	18% Yes	62% No	20% Ns

There is no significant difference in the Pre and post test result.

6) Religion being a cause of discontent

i) I feel religion divides people more than bringing them together. Yes/No/Not sure

Pre Test			Post test		
56% Yes	26% No	18% Not sure	70% Yes	16% No	14% Ns

ii) World would have been more peaceful if there was just one world religion. Y/N/NS

Pre Test			Post test		
32% Yes	34% No	34% Not sure	54% Yes	28% No	18% Ns

Religion teaches God is one, but injured religious sentiments cause a lot of heartache and bloodshed.

In the post test there is an increase of 14% of students who feel that religion divides people and an increase by 22% who believe that the world would have been more peaceful if there was just one religion.

7) Violence

i) At times an extreme step like violence is required to stand up against injustice.

Yes/No/Not sure

Pre Test			Post test		
12% Yes	64% No	24% Not sure	16% Yes	64% No	20% Ns

There is no significant difference in the Pre and post test result.

ii) If people's religious sentiments are hurt it is fair to react violently. Yes/No/Not sure

Pre Test			Post test		
10% Yes	76% No	14% Not sure	6% Yes	88% No	6% Ns

There is an increase by 12% who believe that it is unfair to react violently if religious sentiments are hurt.

iii) When I read about atrocities committed on people by another group of people in the past or present, I am very disturbed. Y/N/NS

Pre Test			Post test		
74% Yes	6% No	20% Not sure	78% Yes	5% No	17% Ns

There is no significant difference in the Pre and post test result.

iv) I will never support violence even if it is against my enemies. Y/N/NS

Pre Test			Post test		
84% Yes	6% No	10% Not sure	86% Yes	4% No	10% Ns

There is no significant difference in the Pre and post test result.

8) Possibility of world peace

i) I don't think peace is attainable. Yes/No/Not sure

Pre Test			Post test		
14% Yes	52% No	34% Not sure	4% Yes	70% No	26% Ns

There is an increase by 18% in those who think that peace is attainable.

ii) Peaceful co-existence of all nations of the world is a necessity. Y/N/Not sure

Pre Test			Post test		
88% Yes	10% No	2% Not sure	92% Yes	2% No	6% Ns

There is no significant difference in the Pre and post test result.

iii) I firmly believe in peace and will use all my energy to give it a try. Yes/No/Not sure

Pre Test			Post test		
80% Yes	10% No	10% Not sure	84% Yes	6% No	10% Ns

There is no significant difference in the Pre and post test result.

iv) A world where all people enjoy equal rights is an impossible reality. Y/N/NS

Pre Test			Post test		
38% Yes	38% No	24% Not sure	32% Yes	44% No	24% Ns

There is no significant difference in the Pre and post test result.

9) Laying down of life for a cause

i) I can die for a just cause. Y/N/NS

Pre Test			Post test		
18% Yes	28% No	54% Not sure	30% Yes	42% No	28% Ns

There is an increase of 12% in those who believe that they can lay down their lives for a just cause, at the same time 14% increase in those who said that they will not lay down their lives.

10) Causes of inequalities in the Indian society

Pre Test			Post test		
%Yes	% No	% Not sure	% Yes	% No	% Ns

11) Of Peace

There was an open ended question that required students to write what peace meant to them.

The majority have quoted-*peace means-*

'to live and let live', 'live in harmony, unity and non violent manner,' 'absence of war', 'justice for all', 'tolerance of religions and other people's opinions and beliefs', 'liberty to express oneself fearlessly', 'freedom to do in what one believes is right, without hurting others', 'love and respect for all human beings', 'one world religion'.

Some also believed it to be 'mental satisfaction and contentment', 'being honest to oneself and everyone', 'self discipline, self reliance, self awareness and self analyses'.

Major Findings

On the basis of the significant differences the major findings are:

- 1) The students believed that religion divides people and that the world would have been more peaceful if there was just one religion. They acknowledge the religious plurality of the country being a cause of conflicts among people. It reflects that intolerance of religions among people is a major impediment to peace. Some also mentioned under this item that it was not religion per se but man's misinterpretation of the texts that led to division of people.
- 2) There is an increase in students who believed that it is unfair to react violently if religious sentiments are hurt. The students showed sensitization towards futility of violence over religions and religious texts being misinterpreted.
- 3) With an increase by 18% in those who think that peace is attainable it indicated that student's faith in ability to achieve peace was strengthened.

Other findings

- 1) While 85% say that they stand up for themselves in a peaceful manner when faced with injustice in one item, 66-70% also reported that if need arises they use aggressive means. It indicates that they perceive peace as absence of violence of action and not of words.
- 2) 50% sample believes that there are times when war is unavoidable and India should opt for it if need arises, in spite of the fact that 70% in another item agree that war has to be avoided under all circumstances. A possible explanation is that they perceive India at war with its neighbours as self defence.

Rather than as aggression.

3) While students significantly increased in the post test to laying down their lives for a just cause, there was also a significant increase of those who said that they would not. This finding was a bit contradictory. Perhaps students viewed laying down one's life as an act of violence can be a plausible explanation for it.

4) On the whole it was observed that there was not a significant change in the perception of the student teachers barring a few points after the post test. The student teachers are matured and as such aware of significance of peace for the well being of society, it also being a test of perception it was easy for the sample to choose the ideal responses. The above three mentioned findings under the heading 'Other findings' have been derived by observation.

Conclusion: In the current scenario when there is so much unrest, turmoil and violence due to cultural differences and terrorism the world over, there is a need of developing the need of peace among our students. Student teachers need to be made aware of the importance of peace education as they are the medium through which a peace culture can be built. The Indian society being pluralistic in nature is susceptible to a lot of conflicts. With violence in the minds of individuals and the environment being on the rise, there is a need of reinforcing the significance of peace and a conflict free society for well being of all.

In the B.Ed. course educational philosophy of Indian thinkers like Mahatma Gandhi- an apostle of peace and non-violence, Rabindranath Tagore and Swami Vivekananda- promoters of international understanding and peace, is a part of the Paper on Philosophical foundations of Education. Besides, there are certain programmes that are a part of the curriculum which contribute to develop values of peace such as the Morning Assembly, Speaking Tree, Elocution, Debate and Conflict resolution activities. The student teachers are the medium of social change. They need to be convinced about the importance of peace and the role of every individual in the contribution of peace, so that they pass on this message as teachers. Over the years the changes in society influence individual's beliefs and the tenets of Indian philosophy of non violence, peace and harmony lose their sway. Hence the need to ingrain in them the significance of peace becomes very essential.

If besides teaching the educational philosophy of these great thinkers their contribution to peace in society at large is also emphasized during the lecture, it brings about a sensitization of the student teachers. One observation of the researcher is that every year while discussing Gandhiji's philosophy of non-violence students exhibit their skepticism of it being relevant at all times and every situation. Strengthening their faith in peace seems very essential. Making them the torch bearers of peace is like achieving one of the ultimate aims of teacher training.

From this study the researcher wishes to suggest that sensitization of students towards peace is possible with an emphasis on discussing the Indian philosophers' holistic contributions and including related activities in the curriculum.

Discussion

The subject of Philosophy can be a very potent instrument to foster Peace Education among student teachers. While discussing the educational philosophy a discussion of important anecdotes from the life of the philosophers and a reference of the time and era of the struggle helps the students identify themselves with the situations and also inspire them to emulate their lives. Effective and in- depth discussions focus their thinking process in the desired direction. Inspiration is instrumental in turning thoughts to actions. If while studying philosophy devices such as debates, conflict resolution, simulations and discussions are taken up it brings about a more meaningful understanding of the concept of peace education. It also brings to the fore the complexities of pluralistic societies and also ways of dealing with the situation.

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