

Swadeshi project catching on in several schools -The Hindu.Feb.8,2004.

By G. Hari Sundar

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, FEB. 8. An innovative programme through which school children in the district are taught to manufacture and sell swadeshi soaps and thus earn while they learn, is catching on in several upper primary as well as high schools in the district.

The swadeshi soap manufacturing scheme, which was launched in 2001 as part of the Gandhi Darsan Project in about 400 schools in the district, has reportedly enabled several schools to mobilise funds for the development activities without collecting funds from students.

The idea had been mooted by the Gandhi Darsan Samithi with the aim of inculcating service mentality in students by highlighting the examples set by Gandhiji, according to Jacob Pulickan, director of the Centre for Gandhian Studies, who is also the resource person for the project.

"We decided to use coconut oil and natural perfumes such as lemongrass, 'ramacham' and 'tulasi' for making the swadeshi soaps, avoiding synthetic ingredients as far as possible," he says.

One period every week is set aside for each division for teachers to train the students in soap and detergent powder making. Once the training is completed, the students start making soaps, pack and store them in their own schools. Part of the amount earned is deposited in the Sanchayika scheme in the name of these students, another part goes to the Gandhi Darsan Fund and yet another to the School Development Fund. Products such as hair oils, shampoo and liquid blue are also made under this scheme.

B. Usha Devi, who is in charge of the programme at the Carmel Girls' High School in the city, says the school authorities voluntarily took up the programme as they felt it would help teach valuable lessons in self-reliance as well as self-respect. "We plan to set up a counter for the sale of soaps at the school from next year," she added.

In the SKV Upper Primary School at Kallara, near Karette, which was declared as the first self-dependent school by the Gandhi Darsan Samithi, the programme has helped the students to mobilise Rs.12,000 for the school development fund, also Rs.15,000 for the Gandhi Darsan Fund and Rs.20,000 as Sanchayika deposit, all from soap-making.

The Principal, K. Ansari, said there was good demand for the swadeshi soaps from among the students as well as the community. While the 85 gram toilet soaps are priced from Rs.7 to Rs.9 each, soap powder is priced at Rs.40 a kg and dish-wash solution and toilet-cleaner at Rs.20 a litre.

The Chief Minister, A.K. Antony, has reportedly promised all help for the popularisation of the swadeshi project in schools after discussions with the authorities concerned.