

An Experiment with True Education

Dr. Geeta Shetty^[1]

Abstract:

Education has taken great strides from being a passive process of information transmission to becoming an active phenomenon of development of knowledge. Educationists take great pride in the progressive pedagogies developed by them to facilitate meaningful learning. What remains to be seen however is, whether there really is a dramatic change in the way society views education. The book 'Divasvapna' presents the stark reality of Indian society of the 1930's and the challenges that existed then. However on analysis, we would say that nothing much has really changed now. The conditions of society, the attitude towards education and learning, the essence of true education are major issues that influence educational practices even now. The book is an inspiration to true educationists who take risks and try innovations to make learning more insightful and purposeful to the learners.

Keywords: *perspectives, philosophical, social, educational*

TITLE OF THE BOOK : Divasvapna – An Educator's Reverie
 AUTHOR : Gijubhai Badheka
 ORIGINAL LANGUAGE : Gujarati
 TRANSLATOR : Chittaranjan Pathak
 FIRST PUBLISHED YEAR : 1931 – 32
 ISBN NO. : 978-81-237-1237-6

I. ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gijubhai Badheka (1885 – 1939) was a renowned educationist who predominantly worked in the area of primary education. He was way ahead of his contemporaries in his educational thoughts and views. He began his career as a lawyer but when on to be a revolutionary in the field of pre-primary education.

II. THE GIST OF THE BOOK

The book is an original contribution to world class pedagogy. The book is divided into four parts showing the progression of the experiment conducted by a teacher (a fictitious character) in order to do away with the dull, drab and monotonous ways of transacting curriculum. The first part 'The Experiment Begins' opens curtains on the protagonist, a very enthusiastic and creative teacher Mr. Laxmiram, who is full of hope and conviction that he can make a difference in education. His efforts begin with convincing the Education officer about his experiment, who agrees quite reluctantly. With the support of the Education officer and much to the chagrin of his principal and colleagues, Laxmiram ventures to teach the class IV children, who also won't buy his ideas. The second part as the name suggests 'The Progress of the Experiment' reveals the efforts of Laxmiram in teaching the children through songs, stories, drama and games. He uses indigenous ways to educate the children of his class. The Education officer is still quite skeptical as the results are yet

to be seen. The parents do not want these experiments, yet Laxmiram continues.

The third section of the book 'At the End of the Term' is about the real test of Laxmiram's experiment. At the end of the term the syllabus has to be covered. Yet Laxmiram achieves even this through his creative ideas. The final section of the book 'The Last Gathering' brings out the artificiality and hypocrisy of educational practices. It is only education to impress rather than express. Laxmiram shows the Education officer, his colleagues and also his principal the true nature of education and assessment. In the end all of them subscribe to the views of Laxmiram.

III. PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVES OF THE BOOK

The book is based on the school of thought Realism, where Laxmiram dwells on the real nature of learners and educates them through that. He creates real situations, teaches through real life objects and also works on authentic assessment strategies. The author lashes out vehemently on the meaningless hypocritical exhibitionism that education has been reduced to. This he says in the context of the preparations being made for the visit of the Commissioner. Children were selected and trained to speak pre-determined words before the Commissioner to impress him. Laxmiram presents the Commissioner with an unedited magazine as an extreme attack on the hypocrisy of education.

Gijubhai's views also reflect Dewey's activity oriented teaching. The book also emphasizes the significance of self-discipline as against externally enforced discipline. Gijubhai advocates personal cleanliness and hygiene as one of the influential factors for developing internal discipline. He also is sure that this discipline paves the path for true education. Perspectives are also presented regarding religious beliefs. The book strongly puts forth the thought that religious beliefs should not be enforced on children. The tenets of religion

^[1] Associate Professor, St. Xavier's Institute of Education, 40-A, New Marine Lines, Churchgate, Mumbai-400020, E-mail: geetashetty2002@yahoo.co.uk

should be simplified and made comprehensible to children. They should be taught through stories and parables.

IV. SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES OF THE BOOK

The book is set in that period of rural India where traditional modes of education were appreciated. Society was struggling with poverty which is seen in the section where children as well as schools did not have enough educational resources. The learners in the book have to struggle for books and schools do not have a library. Against this backdrop too, the experiment is successful. Gijubhai clearly emphasizes that teachers need to use available resources to the optimum in order to make education meaningful to the learners. The book while emphasizing the importance of cleanliness says that personal habits determine the quality of a society. The book battles against filth and squalor. It trains the youth to keep their surroundings clean.

V. EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVES OF THE BOOK

The book throws light on the **educational system** in those days and it is really appalling that nothing much has changed even now. Gijubhai highlights the following features of the educational system;

- **Exhibitionism, artificiality and pretense** as seen on pg. 53 when the protagonist Laxmiram says in the context of the show put up during the Commissioner's visit, "This is sheer hypocrisy on your part. Besides, we're cheating the Commissioner."
- **Rigidity and exam-orientation.** This is seen not only in the behaviour of the principal and the other teachers, but also the Education officer who keeps reminding Laxmiram about the examinations and the syllabus. Also the teachers resist change of any kind and also try to create obstacles for Laxmiram. Rote learning is encouraged and promoted.
- **Text books that don't match the context and needs of the learner.** Text content is seen as divorced from reality, due to which children cannot relate to it. (pp. 44 where History text books are referred to).
- **Leaders and policy makers in education** are themselves resistant to change. They lack vision and conviction and also prevent creative and maverick teachers from doing their bit. Many instances in the book reveal the nature of the headmaster as the one who is not at all convinced about Laxmiram's ideas. It is only due to the support of the Education officer that Laxmiram could go ahead with his experiment. Thus this shows the importance of openness and risk taking attitude among educationists to ensure progressive education.
- **Corporal punishment,** as Laxmiram says, "Everyone has been resorting to beating while teaching". Laxmiram points out that this only result in greater indiscipline, disinterest in school and disrespect for teachers.
- **Indifference of parents** towards true education. They simply want the schools to be information disseminators and not temples of character formation. They revolt against the protagonist Laxmiram, when he insists on cleanliness and personal hygiene.

Gijubhai highlights through his protagonist the features of **progressive pedagogy** that are as follows;

- Teaching with love, happiness, cheerfulness as the basis of true education. It is essential for teachers to maintain rapport with the students and create a non-threatening atmosphere.
- An atmosphere of freedom and independence. Here the book emphasizes the freedom of mind, intellect and the spirit.
- Striving after true and authentic learning
- Using art, craft, riddles, puzzles, songs, drama and stories for teaching (similar to Gandhiji's Basic Education)
- Using real time travel (visits and field trips) as well as virtual travels to teach through imagination.
- Focus on functional usage of language. The book advocates the Communicative approach to teaching languages.
- Importance of the habit of reading and comprehending
- Developmental assessment. Gijubhai Badheka strongly opposes the discriminatory grading system. Through his protagonist, Gijubhai proposes fun-filled, authentic, creative assessment modes that is more developmental than discriminatory (pp 73 -83)

Gijubhai highlights the qualities of a good **teacher** by placing the model of Laxmiram before the reader. Though the protagonist is considered to be an "impractical fool" by his headmaster and teachers and also at a point by the education officer, he continues with his experiment. There are times when Laxmiram even spends his own money to bring about the changes he was convinced about. Laxmiram's character reflects the following qualities;

- Innovative and indigenous
- Courageous and working with conviction
- Patient
- Enthusiastic
- Diligent
- Committed
- Risk taking

It is the teacher and his/her attitude that is of paramount importance in the imparting of true education. A true teacher inspires even others to take up creative and innovative ventures as is seen how other teachers wish to follow Laxmiram in the end.

VI. CONCLUSION

The book is highly recommended for in-service and pre-service teachers, headmasters and policy makers. We need to check if we have made any progress in our educational practices from 1932. The book needs to be revisited and reflected upon in order to revive the innate qualities of teachers and develop an attitude of service and sacrifice. The end of the book has the protagonist heaving a sigh of relief of an experiment well conducted and saying, 'I came home'. The word 'home' signifies a more profound meaning than merely his residence. It signifies the destination of a true teacher that should be aspired for. As is said on pp 102, "Not that the same pupils are unfit for school, but some schools are unfit for some pupils." Educationists and educational institutions would need to work towards making every school fit for all pupils. Only then would the dreams of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and complete Inclusion be fulfilled.