

Akshargyan Yojana

READ ON BOOK 3

Gijubhai

Translated by Mamata Pandya

Original Gujarati *Aagal Vaancho Treeji Chopdi*

First Published: November 1930. Fifth edition: December 1955

Publisher: Narendra Gijubhai Badheka. Dakshinamurti
Balmandir, Bhavnagar (Saurashtra)

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

This is the third book in the Literacy Primers that Gijubhai and Taraben developed for adult learners mainly in rural areas. They were widely used under the Akshargyan Yojana.

While the primary aim of the series which started with *Chaalo Vaanchiye* (Let Us Read), and built on this with *Aagal Vaancho* parts 1, 2 and 3 was familiarisation with letters, and building a foundation for reading and writing (read more in *How to Teach/Kem Shikhavvun*), Gijubhai was also aware that these offered an opportunity to communicate social messages on health, hygiene, farming practices and community living.

We have tried to make the content of the book as interesting as possible. We have also tried to see how the content could be useful in other ways. But we have tried to avoid being preachy. Such books that provide useful and life lessons should certainly be published. For now the main objective is to build the ability to read and the content has been planned and organised to meet this objective. (Kem Shikhavvun).

The language used is colloquial Saurashtra Gujarati, including proverbs and sayings which are difficult to translate literally. References used are also locale-specific, especially terms used by farmers. The names often indicate the profession rather than the surname—for example Patel refers to the fact that the person is a farmer. These are in the context of the prevalent vocabulary of that time.

I have tried to retain the original flavour and spirit of the writing.

Cow is Our Wealth

Cow is our wealth.

Cow is our Laksmi.

Our means of the farmers.

Cow gives us milk.

Cow gives us dung.

Cow gives us calves.

Children drink the milk.

Leftover milk is made into curd.

Curd is broken and make into buttermilk.

The butter floats on the buttermilk.

The butter becomes ghee.

We make manure from the dung.

We put the manure in our field.

Our field gets rich.

The calves grow into cows.

Some calves grow into bulls.

The bulls plough our field.

The bulls pull our carts.

Cow is our wealth.

Cow is our Lakshmi.



THE TULSI PLANT

Look at this tulsi plant in my courtyard.

And look at the tulsi plant in my uncle's courtyard.

My plant is green and fresh.

The green plant is so nice to see.

Its leaves are clean.

There is not a single insect on the plant.

When we go near it we can smell the tulsi scent.

My tulsi plant makes my courtyard look pretty.

But the plant in my uncle's courtyard looks so dull.

It does not attract the eyes.

There is a lot of dust on the leaves.

There are tiny insects sitting on it.

We can hardly smell it even if we crush the leaf.

The reason is that I sprinkle my plant with water every day, but no one does that at my uncle's house.

The plant blooms when it is sprinkled with water; it seems as if it is happy and smiling.

By sprinkling the dust is washed away and it looks green.

By sprinkling the insects die or fly away.

A good gardener sprinkles his plants every day.

And we all like his garden.



SO DIFFERENT

[1]

Look at this house, and look at that house. Are they not very different?

The cow dung plaster in this house has come off; there are patches here and there.

The lime coat has become as black as soot.

See the courtyard of this house, it is full of ups and downs.

See the walls of this house. There are cobwebs here and there.

See the entrance this house. Are there layers of dirt?

See the embroidered wall hangings in this house. Do they look faded and dull? Can you even see the mirrors in the threads?

[2]

Now look at this other house.

How bright it is!

Can you see any patched in the cow dung plaster?

The lime coating looks fresh, as if it were put just yesterday.
You can see the house from afar.

And how clean is the courtyard? No cow dung cakes to be seen, no cow urine anywhere; and no house sweepings lying there.

The walls are as clean as glass. You will not see a single cobweb.

The roof also looks clean does it not?

The threshold is as clean as can be is it not?

What can be the reason for this?

The reason is that the lady of one house is lazy and the lady of the second house is hard working.



MADHA PATEL'S CATTLE SHED

This is Madha Patel's cattle shed.

Its beams (*gamaan*) are made of mud.

These mud beams break every now and then.

The dirt falls on the dry stalks and grass for the cattle feed.

The shed has a dirt floor.

There are a lot of lice in the dirt.

The lice stick to the legs of Patel's bulls.

The bulls try hard to shake them off.

But the lice stick so hard that they cannot be shaken off.

The lice suck blood from the animals.

The cow dung and urine mixes with the dirt. Everything gets dirty and smells bad.

The legs of the cattle get dirty.

When they sit, their stomachs get dirty.

In Madha Patel's cow shed the cattle are not happy.



OUR COWSHED

This is our cowshed.

We tie our cattle in this.

This are our beams.

We have made them of stone.

Stone beams do not drop dust.

The grass and fodder remain clean.

We have clad the shed with stones.

So there are no lice here.

So there is no dirt here.

The cow dung and urine is washed away.

The cowshed is washed with water.

See there are no lice sticking to the legs.

They do not bite and bother.

They do not suck blood.

The cattle are happy in our shed.



TWO HOUSES

[1]

This is Jeevabhai's house. Look at it.

Look at Vaaliben's courtyard.

What a nice courtyard this is!

It has been swept and cleaned well.

There are no papers or rags flying around.

The children are not sitting here and there for their toilet.

There is a tin in that corner.

Every one puts the waste there.

When the tin is full the waste is burnt.

Look over there the bricks have been arranged so that the children can defecate there.

Potibhabhi sweeps it every day and goes and throws the waste.

There is a small platform there. Next to it is a tulsi plant and two gods.

Over there near the wall cow dung cakes and firewood have been stacked and arranged.

Jeevabhai's courtyard is nice to see.

One feels like sitting there for a while.

Both Potibhabhi and Jeevabhai like cleanliness.

[2]

Now look at Hirabhai's house.

Look at Maniben's courtyard.

Do you see any order here?

It has been carelessly swept.

The children do their toilet here and there.

The dust keeps dropping from the roof.

The papers and other waste from the house are sometimes thrown here and sometimes there.

There are the remains of the *datuns* (neem twigs used for cleaning teeth).

Over there Gaguma has rubbed *bhang* on her teeth and has washed her mouth. She has spit out phlegm. Crows are pecking at it.

And over there two dogs are pulling and tugging at a tattered shoe.

When Nandu brought in some cow dung cakes for cooking, he dropped two on the way. They will lie there for three days.

And look how people are urinating right outside the house.

Who would like to go to a house like this?

ROOMS FOR SLEEPING

[1]

Look at this room for sleeping.

A nice breeze is coming in.

The room has two small windows.

The breeze keeps coming through the windows.

The windows have been fully opened.

Look two children are sleeping. How soundly they are sleeping.

There is no humidity in the room.

It is not at all suffocating.

The bodies are cool.

The breeze fills the room.

The room feels light and airy.

How nice it is to sleep in a room like this!

[2]

Now look at this room for sleeping.

There is not a single window here.

There is no ventilation here.

Not a bit of air comes in here.

Look at the small children sleeping here.

See how uncomfortable they are?

Their bodies are sweating.

They are restless.

There is no breeze in the room.

The room is stuffy.

The room feels heavy.

How bad is it to sleep in a room like this?



SHOPKEEPERS ARE ALSO DIFFERENT

[1]

Here is one shop and that is another shop.

Khima the shopkeeper keeps second rate things in his shop.

He buys goods that no one wants to keep or those that are thrown away, because he gets them cheap.

He keeps matchboxes in which you waste ten matchsticks before you can light one.

The suparis are those that have been offered in pujas, and that he buys five for a pai.

The kerosene is such that only smoke comes from the lantern.

He keeps cheap goods but he sells them at the market rate.

Sometimes if other shops do not have something that he has, he sells that at even higher prices.

What can one say about him? His only aim is to make money any way that he can.

[2]

Look at Harichand's shop.

His goods are new and fresh.

He sells at the market rate. Why should he keep cheap goods?

The chillies he sells are red hot. The cinnamon is sharp in smell and taste. The *hing* (asafoetida) is as strong as it can be. The grains and cereals are clean and of good quality. You will not find insects in them. Hirachand sells at a standard price. Whether there is a shortage or not, his prices do not change.

Hirachand sticks to his price. He will not bargain nor change.

Hirachand has another great quality. He will never cheat, even if a small child goes to his shop. That would be the way of the other shopkeeper; who may give bad goods, may weigh less,

not return the correct change, or confuse the child with calculations. That is why no child goes to his shop. Children are eager to go to Hirachand's shop.

Now you know the two shopkeepers. How different they are, is it not?



THIS IS NOT ALLOWED IN OUR VILLAGE

Feasts to honour the deceased are not to be held.

Community feeding of the *Khakhis* (ash smeared sadhus) is not to happen.

Alms to the mendicants are not to be given.

Leaves from a tree are not to be plucked without reason.

People cannot sit idle and gossip during the day.

Nobody can take opium.

No one can drink alcohol.

No one's cattle should wander unminded.

No animal sacrifices can be made for the goddess Meladi.

Untouchables are not to be called by insulting names.

IS THIS ALL RIGHT?

Buffaloes bathing in the pond from which we drink the water. Is this alright?

Women with lice washing their hair in the pond from which we drink water. Is this alright?

Horses being washed in the pond from which we drink water. Is this alright?

People washing clothes in the pond from which we drink water. Is this alright?

People cleaning pots in the pond from which we drink water. Is this alright?

All the dirt goes into the water, the water in the pond becomes dirty. The dirty water is drunk by people. Then people get all kinds of diseases.

Then let us think. How can we find a better way?



VILLAGE MEETING PLACES

The meeting place (*choro*) of Zamrala is broken down and collapsing/falling apart.

The meeting place of Tarashmiya looks like it was built yesterday.

The meeting of Zamrala is without cow dung and clay plaster.

The meeting place of Tarashmiya has cow dung and clay plaster.

The meeting place of Zamrala is the meeting place of idlers.

The meeting place of Tarashmiya is where the literacy class meets.

The meeting place of Zamrala is where people sit around smoking bidis.

The meeting place of Tarashmiya is where people gather to study.

The meeting place of Zamrala is where people play cards and gamble at night.

The meeting place of Tarashmiya is where *bhajans* are sung at night.

The meeting place of Zamrala is where ash-smearing sadhus sit and *ganja* is smoked.

The meeting place of Tarashmiya is where volunteers come and learn to spin.

The meeting place of Zamrala is where all day rumours are spread and opium is ground.

The meeting place of Tarashmiya is where no one is seen all day; all are at work.

The meeting place of Zamrala is where all the faults of the village are discussed.

The meeting place of Tarashmiya is where the village elders (panch) meet and resolve disputes.

The people of Zamrala are opium addicts.

The people of Tarashmiya are like a fount of wisdom.

Every village is different, and every village meeting place is different. The people make a village, and as the village, so is its meeting place.



VILLAGE POND

How nice the pond of that village is looking! Can you see the little black ducks swimming in it? See the ripples in the water in the pond. There is a lot of water. The people of this village are lucky. They have such a big pond near to their village!

Two friends were talking as they neared the village. Slowly they walked all around the pond. On one bank they saw a woman washing clothes. The clothes were dirty. All the dirt from the clothes was being washed into the pond. It was all going into the pond's drinking water.

As they walked ahead they saw a man washing some strips of cloth.

"What is it that you are washing?" they asked him?

"My master Madha Sheth had a boil. It burst and all the pus and blood came onto his dhoti. He has given it to be washed."

"Will not all the pus and blood go into the pond?"

"If not here, where can I wash it?"

"Do you drink the water from this pond?"

"From where else will we drink water if not from the pond?"

The two friends walked on. A little ahead, a barber was washing his cutting cloth.

The friends asked: "You are washing this here but will not all the dirt from your shavings and the lice from your cuttings go into the water?"

The barber replied: "Where else will I go? If there is a pond it will go into that, and if there is a river it will go there. The sheets have to be washed somewhere."

The pond did not look as pretty to the two friends as it has done from a distance.

They walked on. A woman was washing her hair as if rinsing out years of dirt and lice.

The two friends were embarrassed; they moved on.

They reached the second bank of the pond. A cowherd was grazing his buffaloes there. Some buffaloes were in the water and some were sitting in the sun. Some were wallowing and making the water muddy.

The friends asked: "Is it right to let your buffaloes get in the pond? Is not this pond water is used for drinking? Look the buffaloes are dropping dung and urine in the water. Will the water not get dirty?"

The cowherd said rudely: "Who says so? The buffaloes are at this end. The place to fill water is at the other bank. How will the water get bad?"

The friends walked on even as that cowherd continued to mutter.

One man was washing his horse. The friends stopped and observed but moved on.

They came to the third bank. Just ten hands away from the bank was a pile of ashes. They went nearer. "This looks like it was a pyre. It seems that there was a cremation here."

The friends were thinking. "Imagine! Cremation on the bank of the pond of drinking water?"

Just then someone passed that way.

The friends asked: "Hey brother. This is not correct. Cremation on the pond bank? This is shocking!"

"Look here. If we cremate far away we still have to come here to immerse the ashes. We also have to come here to bathe. If the cremation is here then everything else is easier and faster."

The friends were stunned by the answer. All this on the banks of the drinking water pond? What kind of people live in his village?

The friends walked further. They reached the fourth bank. The women were filling their pots with water. They scrubbed their pots till they shone like glass and they were using cloth to strain the water as they filled the pots.

The friends asked: "Sisters. Are you filling this water for drinking?"

"Of course brothers, it is for drinking that we are filling this water."

“But the water is very dirty. People are washing dirty clothes there; there are buffaloes there; there is a pyre there; and there...”

The women said: “There is never dirt in water. That is known since the ages.”



THE HUT IS ON FIRE

Run run! Bhaga koli's hut is on fire.

Run, everyone, run. Take water from your houses and run.

Run run. Take blankets and run.

Run run. Take sticks and rods and run.

Splash water splash water. Empty the water pots.

Throw the sand by the bucketful.

Pull it down, pull it down. Pull down the straw hut.

Pots and pots of water was splashed.

Blanketsful of sand was thrown.

Sticks and rods brought down the hut.

Soon the fire was put out.

When the whole village is here to help, how dare the fire spread?

The fire could not burn more than one hut.

But what about Bhaga koli?

What about him? The next day a new hut was made.

Every house gave one bundle of straw.

The kolis chopped the wood and the carpenter smoothened the poles.

The hut was put up.

The potter brought some cooking pots and clay griddles.

The shopkeeper gave grains for two days.

The broom maker gave a broom and a base for the pots.

The priest gave the deity, and the sweet was prepared to celebrate the new hut.

When the whole village is united, no fire or anything else can do harm.

United we stand!



WHO SET THE FIRE?

Arrere! Who has set this jungle on fire?

The flames are spreading!

The whole jungle will burn down. *Arrere!* So many living things will die; so much grass will be burnt; so many trees will burn down. *Arrere!* Who would have set this jungle on fire?

Birds will die and our gardens will be silent.

Deer and rabbits will be burnt and our outskirts will have no beauty.

The grass will burn and there will be no fodder for our cattle.

The trees will burn and so much wood will be lost; so much shade will be gone; so much greenery will go; so much moisture will dry. With all this gone we will feel so much heat; the hot winds will blow.

Arrere! Who has set this jungle on fire?

What kind of person would set fire in a jungle?

What kind of person would throw a lighted *bidi* in a jungle?

What kind of person will leave burning embers in a *chulha* in the jungle?

Arrere! A person who sets a fire in the jungle has burnt the stomachs of the cattle, burnt the abode of cattle, and burnt the

wealth of humans. Let nobody burn the jungle, please do not burn the jungle anyone!



WHEN YOU GET HURT

When you have a wound, do not put mud over it; there are all kinds of germs in the mud.

The mud can have dried dung; it can have phlegm or mucus; it can have TB germs; it can have urine of people who are sick, it can have faeces of sick people; mud can have all kinds of germs.

Mud can have all kinds of germs.

You should not put mud over a wound.

The germs from the mud can get into the blood; this can lead to new illnesses.

That is why you should not put mud on a wound.

If you have a wound you can put some kerosene; or you can put spirit; or you can apply some benzoine.

Do not put mud on a wound, do not put mud. Please do not put mud on a wound.

IF THE ROADS ARE GOOD?

If the roads are good then dust will not fly; people's clothes will not get dirty; the dust will not get into then nose and throat; the throat will not burn and the stomach will not get upset; the cars and carts will not get dusty.

If the roads are good the wheels of the cart will run fast; if the wheels run, the cart will reach early. If the cart reached early it will save time, if time is saved more work will be done.

If the roads are good, the wheels of the cart move smoothly; if the wheels move smoothly there is less strain for the bullocks. If the bullocks are less strained, the cart will move fast. And if they are less strained, the bullocks are happy.

So many good things if the roads are good.



MOTIYO AND KALIYO

Look at this dog Motiyo and look at this dog Kaliyo.

Motiyo is a pet dog; Kaliyo is a stray dog.

Motiyo has a collar around his neck; the collar has the name of its owner.

Kaliyo belongs to no one and he does not wear anyone's collar.

Motiyo is so clean!

Motiyo's owners bathe him every day. They do not let him sit here and there in the dirt.

Kaliyo is so dirty! He sits in ditches and gutters, and he rolls in the dirt.

He does not have an owner. Who will look after him?

Motiyo's does not have ticks in his ears, and he does not have fleas in his paws.

Kaliyo's ears are full of ticks and his paws are full of fleas.

Motiyo is a good watch dog. He barks if any stranger comes near.

Kaliyi barks all the time at everyone, and gives everyone a headache.



A DEGRADED FIELD

Look at this field.

Does it look healthy?

Does there seem to be any life in it?

How did this happen?

If only *jowar* is planted year after year, what else will happen?
If the same crop is planted again and again then the soil will get bad.

So what can be done to make the soil healthy?

Plant different crops in rotation.

What does that mean?

That means do not plant the same crop for three or four years; plant a different crop every year.

Then when can the plant the old crop again? Every three of four years. The soil will be healthy and you will get a good crop.



INDUSTRY AND LAZINESS

Look at Hama Patel's field. How lovely it looks.

How green the standing crop is.

See how it sways in the breeze.

And look at Shama Patel's field.

The crop is sparse and dry. It rustles in the breeze.

How else will they be/

Hamo Patel tends his crops day and night.

Hamo Patel waters his crops regularly.

Hama Patel plants good seeds. He has ploughed his soil deep.

But Shama Patel lies around at home. Shama Patel has not set up his watering system. Shama Patel has planted poor seeds. Shama Patel has not ploughed his soil deep.

Why did Shama Patel do this?

Shama Patel is a lazy farmer. Shama Patel's well is broken. Shama Patel does not have good seeds. Shama Patel's bullocks are weak.



THE FIELD AND THE STREAM

There is a *vonkalo** at the edge of Shava Patel's field.

This stream is his enemy.

When it rains the stream gets water. The water washes away the soil of his field.

Bit by bit the soil gets washed away; the stream carries off the good soil.

Shava Patel does not do anything about this.

He says: "What can I do?"

Madha Patel's field also has a stream like this.

Madha Patel has planted in this.

The plants hold the soil around them and stop it from being taken away.

Madha Patel has built a big bank and has made a channel nearby.

Madha Patel has blocked his stream.

Would it not be good if Shava Patel also did this?

**Vonkalo*: stream/ rivulet



GRAIN IN THE STORE

Dhana Patel knows how to farm.

Dhana Patel ploughs his field at the right time, not too late and not too early.

Dhana Patel ploughs the soil deep.

Dhana Patel plants good seeds.

Dhana Patel is not lazy taking out the weeds. He does not mind spending money to get the weeds removed.

When the field is weeded it is cleared of the unnecessary grass. This grass drinks up the moisture in the soil.

When the soil is ploughed deep the moisture deep down remains. When there is moisture, the crop can be double.

Dhana Patel does not mind spending money for the scarecrows.

Why then would it be a surprise to know that Dhana Patel's *kothis* are filled with grain.

**Kothi*: silo



GOOD FARMERS

We are farmers.

We are educated.

We have started a *mandali*.. We have named it Good Farmer.

We have resolved to a Good Farmer. We want to learn good ways of farming.

We will go around the fields and see who is doing good farming; we will ask them how they do farming.

We will go around the village and see which houses have good bullocks. We will ask them how they take care of their bullocks.

We will see everyone's farming implements and find out who has good implements; we will ask them where they got them from and how they are used.

We will read new books.

From them we will learn good farming practises.

We will bring new implements and experiment with them.

We will bring new kinds of seeds and find out which are good and which are bad.

We will bring new things from different places and introduce these.

[2]

Bhimo is a member of the Good Farmer *mandali**

Bhimo is my son. I have given Bhimo a separate one *bigha* piece of land.

Bhimo has ploughed it himself. He has ploughed deep into the soil; he has turned up clods and clods of soil.

Bhimo has planted big and clean seeds.

Bhimo did not allow weeds to grow in the field. He weeded them out as they grew.

When the crop grew, it was a sight for sore eyes. (*Aankh tharine him thay*).

Every ear of the plant was so big.

The ears were packed with seeds that looked like ripe pearls.

Bhimo worked hard day and night, tending to his field.

In Bhima's one *bigha* field, he got two *bigha*'s worth of crop.

Bhima is a real member of the Good Farmer *mandali*.

Only a farmer who can do good farming, can remain a member.

**mandali*: Group or association



WATERING THE PLANTS

Have you seen the watering systems in Ragha Patel's farm and in Hama Patel's farm?

Ragha Patel's *kos** is not broken from anywhere; not a single drop leaks from it.

If there is even a small hole or tear Ragha Patel gets it fixed immediately.

Hama Patel is very lazy.

So what if half of the water leaks away from the *kos*!

He thinks it is too much trouble to go to the cobbler to get it mended.

He does not realize that the bullocks have to go up and down so many more times to pull the water from the well. Hama uses the *kos* for the whole day but only half the farm get watered. Who can tell Hama Patel? He is not a child, nor is he an old man; he is a strong young man. But the laziness has settled in his body!

Look at the two farms next to each other: Ragha's farm and Hama's farm

Ragha's farm is like a lush green grove, and Hama's farm looks so dry and lifeless.

But how can plants grow unless enough water reaches them?

*Kos: Leather bag or bucket for lifting water from the well



THE WISE FARMER

Govo Patel is a wise man. And his wisdom gives him good rewards.

His stores are bursting with grain.

His bullocks are strong and healthy.

His children are also capable.

That is because Govo Patel is a wise man.

Govo Patel is a wise man because he has made a pit near his field.

He makes compost in the pit.

He puts the waste from the house in the pit; he puts left over food in the pit; he puts cow dung and urine in the pit; he puts the sweepings from the courtyard in the pit; he even puts the waste from the lane in the pit.

The pit has been dug deep and long.

There is a hedge made from dry stalks of *jowar* and *bajra* surrounding the pit.

There are some planks laid over the pit. Young and old sit on the planks to defecate. That also falls into the pit. This makes the compost rich.

When the pit is full, it is covered with dirt.

Once the field has been ploughed and before the rains start the pit is opened.

The compost from the pit is emptied and put into the field.

When it rains the compost mixes with the soil.

Such good fertiliser, in which good seeds are planted. How well the plants will grow.

And what a good crop the field will yield!

No wonder Gova Patel's stores are always full of grain!

And Gova Patel's cattle are content! And Gova Patel's children will be happy. And there will be money in Gova Patel's money box. After all Gova Patel is a wise man, is he not?



IN YOUR VILLAGE

How many huts in your village?

How many wells in your village?

How many stepwells in your village?

How many ponds in your village?

How many meeting places in your village?

How many shops in your village?

How many temples in your village?

How many schools in your village?

How many hospitals in your village?

How many post offices in your village?

How many tea shops in your village?



IN YOUR VILLAGE

What is the population of your village?

How many men in your village?

How many women in your village?

How many children in your village?

How many cattle in your village?

How many bullocks in your village?

How many cows in your village?

How many buffaloes in your village?

How many male buffaloes in your village?

How many goats in your village?

How many horses in your village?

How many donkeys in your village?

What is the population of your village?



IN YOUR VILLAGE

How many people in your village?

How many people are literate?

How many people are illiterate?

Is there a school in your village?

How many children go to school?

How many children do not go to school?

Why do the children not go to school?

Is there a night school in your village?

How many people go there to study?

Why does everyone not go to study?

Is there a *pathshala* in your village?

How many Brahmins go there to study?

Is there a literacy class in your village?

How many people have studied there?

How many are studying there?



IN YOUR VILLAGE

How many are blind?

How many limp?

How many have lost a leg?

How many have lost an arm?

How many are squint-eyed?

How many are deaf?

How many have leukoderma?

How many have leprosy?

How many have scabies?

How many are sickly?

How many have a big stomach?

How many have a stammer?



EDUCATION HELPS

My name is Santok.

I did not study when I was young.

We lived in a small village.

There was no school there.

I got married and came to the city.

I work in some houses in the city and earn a little money.

These days I work for Taraben: sweeping-cleaning, washing utensils and clothes.

I get eight rupees a month.

Taraben asked me: "Santok do you want to study?"

I asked her: "What good will that do for me?"

Taraben said: "If you study then you will do my work better; you will understand the work and do it. If you work well your salary will be increased. It will be good for both of us."

I told her: "Teach me."

Tareben started teaching.

She taught a lot in a month and a half.

Taraben's medicine bottles have labels and the masala boxes in the kitchen have name labels. Now I read the names and arrange the bottles and boxes.

Taraben writes chits and I can read them.

I send her whatever she needs.

When Taraben goes to another town she writes letters to me.

I read the letters and keep everything ready. I clean the house; I clear the cobwebs; I put the mattresses and quilts out in the sun; I buy milk, and I get the vegetables.

Taraben has taught me how to read.

I am very thankful to her that she taught me.



TELL ME?

Is it better to read a nice book or to gossip about someone?

Is it better to read a good book or to chitchat all day?

Is it better to read a good book or to find fault with other people?

Is it better to read a good book or to spend the time smoking opium *hookas*?

Is it better to read a good book to watch the street performers?

Is it better to read a good book or to make fun of other people?

Is it better to read a good book or to sit around smoking bidis?

Is it better to read a book or to spend time quarrelling?

Is it better to read a good book or to go and see plays and performances?

Is it better to read a good book or to keep playing cards?



THE VILLAGE SCHOOL

Dinubhai is the teacher of our school.

One year ago two men came to our village and said: "We want to start a school in your village. Will you all support us?"

We said: "That will be our good fortune. To have a school in our village. We will help you in any way that you ask us. Please do bring your school."

The school opened in our village on the auspicious day of *Chaitra Sud beej*.

We gave a grand welcome to Dinubhai. The women of the village performed a welcome ritual; and the students filled the school.

The blessings of goddess Saraswati and Ganapati were invoked. The drummers played and the traditional distribution of *gol-dhana* (jaggery and coriander seeds, to mark an auspicious occasion) was done.

Every house in the village put up buntings. Everyone gathered that night to dance the *garba* and *ras*.

That was a golden day for the village.

As the days passed Dinubhai's school started to grow. The boys and girls could barely fit; it was a small building and the students were many.

The village got together and constructed a school building on a piece of fallow land. Every villager helped. Some dug the foundations, some brought the stones and mud, and others did the building. There was some expenditure but every house contributed to it. The new school building was the pride of the village. The Dinubhai started teaching. He had vowed that there would not remain one person in the village who was illiterate. Even the oldest man and woman in the village would learn how to read and write.

Dinubhai made three groups for the school. The morning shift which was called *Kridangan* (play school); the afternoon shift which was called *Moti shala* (the big school); and the night shift which was called *Aksharshala* (school of letters).

Young children up to the age of seven years went to the *Kridangan*. When Dinubhai beat the gong, the young children would come running from their homes. They would all gather

on the *otla* (raised platform) of the school; then they would go to the river.

They would sing and dance as they went along. At the river, Dinubhai would make the children clean their teeth with a neem twig. He would make them scrub well, then gargle; he would make them wash their eyes, and wash their legs and hands.

Earlier the children did not clean their teeth. But Dinubhai made sure that every one of them began to do so regularly. The children's teeth now shone as white as milk.

After cleaning, Dinubhai would tell the children stories. He would sit in the sand and the children would sit around him.

He would tell them small tales and make them laugh. While the children enjoyed the stories, we would also listen to them as we passed that way. Dinubhai was a good storyteller.

After the stories, Dinubhai would get the children to sing songs. He would sing and they would listen and repeat the lines; often they would dance and jump with the songs. Dinubhai is from the city but he also knows the songs of the village.

Even though Dinubhai is from the city, he understands the ways of the village. He knows how to meet and mingle with everyone, how to mix like lime water. A man like this, any wonder that the children are drawn to him?

After the songs, Dinubhai makes the children play games. The children have a lot of fun playing the traditional games like *khokho* and *hu-tu-tu*.

The Dinubhai would take a children on a walk around the village. It is so good to see the little children marching by as they sing. Every day the children walk through the village and every day everyone comes out to see them.

When they procession reaches the village meeting place, it disperses. The children go home for a meal and Dinubhai goes home.

An hour later the bell rings for the senior school. The students head for the school with their slates and bags. The village headman has made a rule that every boy and girl of school age must go to school; if any child does not go the headman takes note.

The village headman feels strongly about the school. He goes by the school three times a day, and checks with Dinubhai: “Do you need anything? Do you need to tell me anything?”

When the children come to the school they sweep it. Armed with their brooms they sweep the rooms, veranda and courtyard clean. In the meanwhile some of the other students bring some *akda* flowers and sprigs of neem and pipal and place them to decorate the school. The students decorate the school every day with different plants—flowers or sprigs and leaves. There are many plants on the outskirts of the village.

Once the cleaning and the decoration is done, the students wash their hands and faces. The students do all this on their own. Dinubhai simply watches, only if they do something wrong, he tells them.

Then the students sit down; it is time for prayer. Dinubhai leads and the rest softly follow. At prayer time, *dhoop* (incense) and a ghee lamp is lit. The school is like a temple.

Then the children pick up the cymbals, one takes the drum, and the singing begins. One, two, three, four: They sing as many songs as they like. Sometimes the songs are about swadeshi and khadi; sometimes about the antics of Krishna, and about maharajas. Songs of all kinds are sung.

The children have learned so many songs! It is amazing how much they know by heart without being forced to memorize or by frequent goading. The children sing songs whenever they are free. That is Dinubhai's special way of teaching.

After the songs, the children dance the *garbi*, *dandiya raas* and *raas* (traditional Gujarati folk dances). The boys and girls dance together; but it is not that they must dance together. The girls know the *raas* better so they dance that, while the boys dance separately with the *dandiyas*.

In our village is not like it is in the city that boys and girls should be kept apart, nor they should study separately. We do not follow that; here everyone works together, it has been so from the beginning.

After the dancing the students sit down to study. There are many students; Dinubhai is the one teacher. He does not beat or punish, but still how well the students behave! Each one picks up what he or she likes to do. Some read a book, some write, some do sums, some draw, others make toys out of clay. The children sit and do what they are doing, and Dinubhai

walks around. If anyone needs to ask, they get up and come to ask Dinubhai, who explains to them. Dinubhai is one and the students are many; one after another they come to him.

Dinubhai's school is not like other schools. In other schools the students are made to sit in lines and are made to repeat mindlessly. Or else they are made to write again and again on their slates while the masterji goes out asking for alms, or sits rolling a *bidi*. Dinubhai is himself enthusiastic. The people who have put him here are also like him. Now the village has also been affected by his enthusiasm.

Earlier the village believed that children would not study unless they were beaten. But Dinubhai has shown that children can study without threats and punishments. Not only that, they can be obedient and well-behaved; punishment only makes them obstinate and rebellious.

The studies continue in this way until they go home to eat. When they come back, Dinubhai takes them to the outskirts of the village. Dinubhai's teaching is not from books, his education is from every place.

The children walk around with Dinubhai. They see different kinds of trees and plants; they see birds and insects; they see many kinds of grass. The children in our village have seen all these, but they do not know much about these things. Dinubhai explains everything. Interesting things about birds, the uses of a particular grass, flowers that can be used to make medicines. The children learn a lot. Wandering around this way, they do not realise how much they are learning.

Dinubhai has found his children and the children have found Dinubhai! What more can one ask for? They return to the village at the time of the evening prayers.

This is the daily routine. But if there is a festival, or every few weeks, Dinubhai plans a trip. Either to an orchard or farm, or to the hills, or to a stepwell. Each one brings something to eat from their home to carry with them, and off they go. The children sing and skip and rove as they head for the well or pond. When they get there, they take a dip, swim, climb trees, and run after birds. They collect different kinds of flowers and caterpillars. They play games and have fun. Then they share the food that they have brought and enjoy.

The children are so happy. They adore Dinubhai, and always call out for him.

Then everyone goes home and sleeps. But Dinubhai works not only all day, but also at night. After his evening meal, Dinubhai comes to the *choro* (village meeting place). This is where the literacy classes are held. The entire village comes for these. How can Dinubhai alone manage? Dinubhai has first educated five people from the village. They are now teachers like Dinubhai. There were also five people who were already educated. So with these ten-twelve teachers and Dinubhai the classes are held. There is one light, one teacher and a circle of learners. Eighty-five year old Ramabhai and thirty-year old Makan and Hamo, all sit together and study.

The enthusiasm in our village is great. No matter how tired they are, all come to study. If someone has not come, the headman sends someone to find out and to bring them. Our

headman is a respected person. When Dinubhai and the headman are together then much good can happen.

So everyone sits down to study. No one is in a hurry to get up. The classes go on till eleven or eleven thirty; sometimes even up to midnight.

In the beginning we were not sure if it would be possible to teach adults. But we were proved wrong. Now so many people have started reading books and newspapers.

Why talk about others? I myself could not read a single letter. But now I am beginning to recognise letters and words. I feel as if a blind man has gained vision. I am enjoying reading and finding out new things every day. I am understanding the advantages of being able to read and write. Only the one who eats sugar will understand how sweet it is.

Late at night we all disperse and go home. Sometimes if the *garba* or *raas* dancing begins, it gets even more late. Dinubhai is with us even in that. Dinubhai is not just a teacher, he is much more. He helps us resolve our quarrels, he helps us keep peace at home, he helps in distribution, or in preparing documents, he gives us correct advice, and shows us the right path.

We are indeed fortunate that we have met Dinubhai. Our women are so lucky that they have Jayaben. Jayaben is Dinubhai's wife. She is a gem. She teaches our wives and daughters in the afternoon at her home. Many women of our village are illiterate. Jayaben teaches them embroidery. She also teaches them how to keep their homes clean and neat,

how to raise their children, and much more. She has settled in so well with our people, even though she is from the city. But she does not feel nor act like that. Two good people in one house. Both who believe in the good of the village.

Our village is really fortunate. We pray to god for a long life for Dinubhai and Jayaben. May they teach our grandchildren, and their children.



