



Gijubhai on Education

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The author has translated several of Gijubhai Badheka's thoughts on education from his original writings in Gujarati into English. Even though they were written over 75 years ago they touch upon timeless truths about education and are as, if not more, relevant today. She shares them with us in this article.

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Gijubhai Badheka was born on 15 November 1885. He began his career by practicing as a high court lawyer. In 1913, the birth of his son set him thinking about child upbringing and child development. Looking for new ideas in education, he discovered the writings of Maria Montessori. So impressed was he, that he left his legal practice to devote himself to children and education. In 1920 he founded the first pre-primary school – Balmandir – under the aegis of Shri Dakshinamurti Vidyarthi Bhavan. This provided him with a rich opportunity to experiment with new ideas in education.

Gijubhai had an experimenter's scientific rigour, the urge to do and demonstrate something new, the perception to be able to find the sparks in the dark educational system current at that time, and above all faith. With this rich capital he embarked on his journey into the realms of education.

In the 19 years till his untimely death in 1939, Gijubhai worked incessantly, contributing a lifetime of work in the area of children's literature and education. He left behind a legacy of prolific writing (nearly 200 publications for children, youth, parents and educators). His best known work is Divaswapna (meaning day dreams). First published in 1939 in Gujarati it is an original contribution to ideas on pedagogy. Most of his other writings for teachers and parents have not been translated into English. I share below some translated excerpts from these writings, first published in Gujarati in the mid 1930s.

This Will Not Do... In Our School

Excerpted from Prathmikshalama Shikshak, first published in 1932.

It will do if our school does not have a vast library of books on education. It will not do if no one reads a single book on education related topics.

It will do if our school building isn't clad with fancy stones or tiles. It will not do if there are potholes in the ground, or if its walls are not clad with mud and dung.

It will do if the walls are not covered with paint. It will not do if there is dust and cobwebs in corners.

It will do if the floors are not covered by carpets. It will not do if there is litter and dirt strewn on them.

It will do if there is not a laboratory full of fancy equipment. It will not do if the little equipment that is available is not ever used.

It will do if there is not a great big library. It will not do if there are not at least a few books that children would enjoy reading.

It will do if we are not great scholars. It will not do if we cannot give our children due respect, and an environment that encourages their development.

It will do if we are not constantly engaged in 'teaching' children. It will not do if we interfere in their activities, or threaten or force them to sit down to study.

It will do if the children in our school study a while and play a while. It will not do if they toil through the day like labourers under our strict supervision.

It will do if the children of our school do not cling to us like friends. It will not do if they run at the sight of us, or are afraid of us.

It will do if our children sit, read or draw because they feel like doing so. It will not do if they paint a picture or sing a song to impress an outsider.

It will do if our children learn a little less, or a little slower. It will not do if they are screamed at to study, so that they get fed up and become lethargic.

It will do if children tell us that they did not understand something, or do it slowly, at a later stage. It will not do if they rush through it under duress or punishment.

Let's Show Them

Excerpted from Aa te shi Mathaphod, first published in 1934.

We can describe the beauty of birds to a child, or we can show him some birds. We can draw the diagram of an engine on the blackboard, or we can take the child to an engine to see it for herself. We can tell tales about the wealth of minerals hidden in the depths of the earth, or we could dig some soil together and explore the depths.

We can lie on the bed and talk about the stars, or we can go up

to the terrace and look at them. We can explain to the child that there is nothing to be afraid of, or we can go for a walk in the dark with the child. Or take children places that they fear and show them how not to be afraid.

We can inspire the child to be brave, and to do great deeds when she grows up, or we can encourage him to do small acts of courage. We can talk to the children about the millions of poor people in our country, or we can show them the huts of the poor.

We can talk to the child about masters and servants, factory owners and workers, or we can take her to see and meet all these people. Will this not help the child to develop better?

Confessions of a Teacher

Excerpted from Prathmikshalama Shikshak, first published in 1932.

I am a teacher. I saw an article entitled 'Teacher's Confessions' and thought, why not pen down my own confessions? I have been in teaching for years now. As a requirement to becoming a teacher, I had at that time, to study the science and principles of education. I have not learnt much more, since then.

I go to public libraries but rarely touch teaching-related journals.

A glance at the librarian's issue book will show several books against my name, but none related to education. I am certainly in the habit of reading.

In the early years I was busy studying the textbooks and related material. But the text books don't change often. I now need only to glance at the books. My reading list now includes dailies and monthlies and some assorted fiction.

After school hours I rarely discuss education-related topics. My discussion includes topics such as

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someone's dismissal or promotion, forms and examinations, higher authorities or fellow teachers, booksellers, and so on. During recess time, my colleagues gather for a cup of tea. We talk of many things. But never do we talk about how to teach, teaching aids, or students.

The school timings are fixed. The curriculum is set. The school bell heralds the passage of time, and students are prepared for the examinations. The systems are in place. I go to school. Teach the lessons for the day. I carry out my

tasks and keep the order – partly by force, partly by wit, partly through my image, and largely through the set disciplinary systems of the school.

I don't get into the depths of any subject. There is no time; just enough to complete what will be part of the exams. Students will take longer, and explanations will have to be made to the authorities.

I know the students by name. Or those that know their lessons, and those that do not. I do not know anything about their family, their friends, and their own

personalities. We are not close. I know their minds, but not their hearts.

I see who comes first, and who is last. I do not know about their physical strengths and weaknesses. Those who finish their work and bring it to me are clever; those I like. The rest are duds; I do not like them.

Between us there is no affection. How can there be trust? They are afraid of me; and I exert my authority over them.

Once I leave the school, I scarcely think of them, save perhaps, one

who might have been greatly disrespectful. Each to our own homes. Perhaps, as I lie down the thought may cross my mind that as the exams near, I will have to speed up the revision, for which I'd use the recess. I haven't seen the homes of the children. Nor have I shown them my home. I do not have such a relationship with them.

I dream that I will be promoted till some day I become headmaster. I will complete by term of service, retire and enjoy my pension. I hope to save a little before I am too old. That is why I have to take tuitions. I wish that I am well thought of in my community, that I can educate my children so that they get good jobs, and I can marry them off before I enjoy old age.

It is for this that I wish to work. Today the profession of teaching is, for me, an activity, a job. In all this, the ideals of education, the changing principles and practices of teaching, the desire to bring new changes in the field—all this is not in one, where will they come from? I would like to explain clearly what my position is today. My state is like this; I presume my fellow teachers are in a similar situation.