

BOOK REVIEW

Nuggets – Reflections on Language Education

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Title of the Book : *Nuggets – Reflections on Language Education*

Author : Varada M. Nikalje

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The book, *Nuggets – Reflections on Language Education*, by Varada M. Nikalje makes an interesting and insightful reading for those engaged in language education. It is a collection of articles that focuses on four central themes — the nature of meaning, language usage, language cognition and relationship between language and reality.

Language education is a comparatively recent branch of knowledge. Most research work done in

this field is contained in articles and books suitable to educationists and researchers. Concepts in language education are seemingly concrete and defined. However, a teacher, who is at the lowest rung of the hierarchical ladder in school education, hardly ever gets to know about the latest theories. The book serves to give the teacher, parent and educated layman a basic understanding of language education.

‘Nuggets’ that form a part of the title of the book refer to the

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perceptions that have been captured from the routine experiences of the author's professional life. These include development of English textbooks, being on committees for the development of language curriculum, teacher training material and teaching of trainees from other countries. The articles in this collection address a gamut of issues and ideas.

The first chapter introduces a reader to a temple honouring the Goddess of English in a small village in Uttar Pradesh. At present, the image of the goddess has been installed in a makeshift shrine. The foundation stone has been laid for a larger edifice. The author uses this as the starting point to elaborate on the visible presence of English in India.

The second chapter analyses the belief that some languages are 'superior' — a belief found in fairly large numbers across the world. The chapter states that all languages are equal — not in terms of chronology or prestige — but that they were created out of the common necessity of communication.

The third chapter talks of the content of textbooks, and remarks that textbook writers are often focused on disseminating information that they become heavy and boring. The author advocates a conversational tone and a bit of humour to retain the interest of the students.

The next chapter talks of tales from *Panchtantra* and their inclusion in school textbooks.

The fifth chapter is a comment on the dismissive attitude of elders to the utterances of children, ending with an appeal to the elders to listen to the little ones, for they may have something significant to communicate.

The chapter that follows goes deep into the notion of the explosion of knowledge in school textbooks of the twentieth century. This contributed to the practice of rote-memorisation of information without understanding.

The seventh chapter, 'Saying Hello to the Textbook', is a humorous take on the fact that most teachers do not read the 'Teacher's page', a regular feature in the prelims section of textbooks.

The eighth chapter warns of the assumptions that one might make with regard to schools, textbooks or classroom teaching.

Chapter nine endorses the use of dictionary and gives interesting shippers on the origin of dictionaries in various languages.

The last chapter talks about reading culture or rather the lack of it in present day school teachers. The author reiterates that, morally speaking, a teacher cannot ask a child to read less.

If readers are looking for qualitative research into the latest theory of education or quantitative

analysis of statistical data collected painstakingly over the years, they would be disappointed. This book reflects interest in life, in general, blending theories of language education with socio-philosophical perspectives. What comes through is the author's love and appreciation for language and literature.

The book has been brought out at an appropriate time. To language teachers, the present time is both disturbing and challenging. There are

many schools, where the conventional routine of teaching is rooted and perennial. But the winds of change are blowing. There are now schools, which endorse that learning to learn is more important than mere acquisition of knowledge, and that fear of examinations should be eliminated.

The book makes a valuable resource in our country where language education is not given enough thought and few write about it from an informed point of view.

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