

Giju Bhai Badheka: On Being a Primary Teacher

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Abstract



Experiments of great thinkers and educationists can act as beacon light to guide our thoughts. One such thinker, teacher and educationist we had in India is Giju Bhai Badheka. He lived and worked in Gujarat. The purpose of this article is to look into his thoughts and ideas as an answer to present challenges of primary education in India. The strength of his thoughts lies in his simple description of situation or the problems he faces and then with equal honesty he tries to find the answer to it. He uses common sense to see what works with children to teach them concepts. He also tries to understand the underlying concept of the topic

to be taught. His fight is against the system and those notions of learning that fail children or do not allow children to become good learners. Teaching is very challenging and a serious job according to him and requires sincerity on part of the teacher to see what works out the best.

INTRODUCTION

Among many thinkers and theorists, one comes across in the field of education, a very simple yet convincing, and impressive contribution is of Giju Bhai Badheka. He pens his

educational ideas and thoughts against the backdrop of colonised India and an equally 'colonised' system of education. A system which is highly bureaucratic where for every little detail the hands are bound by rules and teachers find

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no system to try out new ideas or bring change to make children learn in an efficient manner. The problems he raised are unfortunately still the problems that most of the primary teachers are facing in India or could be, in many other parts of the world. Especially, those parts of the world where education is imparted to learners, majority of whom belong to different social and economic backgrounds than that of their teachers. This difference in the backgrounds of learner and teacher is likely one factor among several others that are held responsible for poor level of teaching and learning by teachers. Or if we word it differently where the world of school is very different from the everyday life of learners and hence the divide between educated and non-educated is too overt and imply connotations to the status of both. *Giju Bhai's* arguments and experience try to answer such deep questions. However, his trysts and struggles which are beautiful, simple and honest have equally plausible answers for educationists and teachers to look at. Hence, an immense scope to benefit from his practical accounts and other thoughtful ideas.

Against the above backdrop, this article is an effort to explore contributions of *Giju Bhai* with relevance to present state of education in India, highlighting what is real learning or good education. The conviction is that even in present times how meaningful his works and writings

are. The article also discusses underpinning of his educational thoughts and 'experimentation' as key to achieve the change of real learning in the system.

Birth and Life

Giju Bhai's own life has been an exemplary to try out 'new' and bring change. He was born on 15 November 1885. He was a high court lawyer by profession. Birth of his son made him wonder about the education of child and his developmental needs. He found his answers in the works of Maria Montessori, another noted educationist, teacher and thinker from Italy. He became a primary teacher and cofounded his experimentation and trysts with the system to bring about real learning for the children. In 1920, he founded the first pre-primary school— *Balmandir* – under the aegis of Shri Dakshinamurti Vidyarthi Bhavan. Henceforth, his ideas not only on education of children in school, but also about parenting and child development started ossifying.

In the words of Pandya (2008) who has been translating works of *Giju Bhai* from Gujarati, the language he penned his ideas in—

'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.'

Now many of his works are translated into English, Hindi and also in Punjabi. With the translation of his ideas in many languages the hope of disseminating his ideas and hence making change possible could be realised in near future.

Uncomplicated Eloquence

The power of his thoughts lies in the simple description of the situation and the action he takes to address the problem faced in that situation. He stands as an example of a reflective teacher with a very spontaneous common sense to react and act in the situations of primary classes in the Indian context. His style of writing is as if he is talking to someone and one feels that as these are their own words and thoughts only that someone has dared to put in the correct form and bring in the solution too. Many of us would have done the same or would love to do what Giju Bhai found as solution to the problem. His simplicity is in the conviction with which he writes and also practicability of what he is doing.

Another very important point that one finds is that the jargon of theoretical and philosophical standpoints or terms has been missing in his reflective and analytical accounts of his works, making him easy to relate to everyday challenges of a primary teacher. Most of us as teachers find it relatively

difficult to remember any theory and almost impossible to find its implication. Works like that of his are complete practical accounts and ready reckoner to try out in classroom.

But the weaving of all the implications of theory and philosophy is also there. His thoughts have genesis in a 'child centred' education and he cites several examples of the same in his classroom experience with children.

Real Education

His works *Divaswapna*, *Mata-Pita se*, and others solidify his thoughts on education. His works remind us of not only goodness of the child, nature of real learning, but also critical role and responsibility of adults as parents and teachers to educate the child. His experiment of teaching children in meaningful manner begins with the conflict between theory and practice. He wishes to have the 'first hand experience' of the classroom.

The real purpose of education that teacher should understand is that children should love their school and teachers. If the children are treated with respect and find enough meaningful learning opportunities, he feels, no child would avoid coming to the school. Giju Bhai cites several of useful learning activities like story telling, drama, games and paper folding that could serve many objectives of teaching-learning at the primary level and make it relevant for children. However, teacher's intuition to link all these methods to curriculum is the real

challenge. Real learning is also a form of learning where children learn by doing and hence are independent. They do not depend merely on textbooks or teachers as a source of information alone. Giju Bhai explains—

“Games are real education. Great powers are born on the playground. Games means character building.”

Divasvapna, p.20

His ideas on imparting value education to children as against religious indoctrination could be observed—

“...we should try to live religion. Parents must try and teachers must try. We could tell children stories from the Puranas, and the Upanishadas, whenever there is a reference to these in their textbooks. Let us tell them stories of saints just as we tell them stories of historical personages. ...let us not make our children memorise and recite holy verses! Let us not teach religious dogmas and scriptures and the like in the name of moral instruction.” Divasvapna, p.44

This way he tries to argue for meaningful education for children in different areas — History, Language or preparing for exams or school function. He argues that underlying assumptions of methods we follow have flaws hence a need to relook. This will make alternative methods or use of the same method in more effective and correct manner. He believes that for any learning topic, the teacher should figure out the underlying concept and then help children identify that through interesting activities.

Experimentation—Key to Change

He put a firm faith in alternatives he wishes to try with children and make change possible. We as teachers have stopped to argue for changes and alternatives on arguments saying these are not possible or too idealistic or on several other similar arguments. Giju Bhai makes it possible by saying that ‘experimentation’ is the key to bring the change. A teacher with an untiring spirit to learn, to question the existing system, methods and even failure of individual teacher or student, can try several things that will make ‘real learning’ take place and which is not only for exams and some outward reward alone. However, outward rewards of praise, applause and good marks are also dealt by him in his experiment of education.

It is an honest experiment since his trusts are met with failures, doubts and also criticism of fellow teachers, complaints of their responsibilities of family, securing job and oppression of bureaucracy. All this is the reality of a common human as well. The system seems reluctant to change and our individual needs. Also all of us find it challenging to meet the demands of the system, job and our own personal needs. But Giju Bhai answered this by saying the key lies within. Once we start questioning the system and recognise that it is even our personal need to do our job of teaching in an efficient manner. Good teaching is the real satisfaction and key of change.

The first step of experimentation is 'failure' and that is what Giju Bhai's tryst or experiment begins with. His first day of teaching made him realise that his plans may not work the way he thought, as he describes in the first chapter of *Divasvapna*. Students in his class did not respond to his plans of silence, concentration and discussion as he had planned. Our experiments not working, is something that all the primary teachers will agree to. But he, with his experimentation could figure out methods of stories and games to make students interested in real concepts and not mere rote memorisation. One can say that he could figure out at least so much success rate of his new experiments that he kept on going while most of us are likely to be discouraged by failures. He could also not bring many changes due to social or bureaucratic demands, but yet many of the changes he cites are positive signs. Say, children might need to prepare for exams, but let them continue to read and play and not only focus on paper-pencil tasks alone.

His writing of *Divasvapna* is especially the weaving of such new ideas, failures, disgrace and solutions. It makes the reader feel very normal and humane, that job of primary teachers might be all this, but a bit of real success is also possible.

A very novel experiment by him was to divide the day into activities, games,

and stories and not go by strict authority of the pre-set time table. He happens to use his own instinct to organise his days with the children. Several other features of good and useful teaching practices one can find in his works.

CONCLUSION

Reading Giju Bhai is opening up a world of possibilities to make primary education beneficial for students and teachers. The purpose of this article is to motivate a reader, anyone who loves children to look further into the works and words of Giju Bhai, and look out for the answers and problems of education he has articulated for us. One may not find Giju Bhai struggling with his filial responsibilities, but he argues in his works addressing parents that we even need to question what is good for our children and not only those whom we teach in schools. This is where his ideas draw the tangent of looking at life and our own existence in an alternative manner. Hence once we try to make our life meaningful, school will also become meaningful. All of us as primary teachers may feel the need to look at life in an alternative manner, real meaning and purpose of it, which means not only to fulfil demands as put forth by the society or system on us but go beyond it. The idea is to live a real and meaningful life and also make it the same through the educational experience for children.

This column has been coordinated by Dr Anupam Ahuja, Convenor of the Series. She may be contacted at the Department of Teacher Education and Extension, NCERT for more information.

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