
DIVASWAPNA: A BOOK REVIEW

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Introduction

Mr. Laxmiram is a teacher in a story written by Gijubhai Badheka (1885-1939) called Divaswapna keeping in mind the challenges that education system faced that time. Firstly it was published in Gujarati language in 1932 and was translated into other languages afterward.

It is a fictional story of a teacher who seeks permission from the Education Officer to perform experiments based on education on 4th class children. The book has four main divisions. In first division, experiments starts, second division talks about process of experiment, third division about the end of experiment and final division talks about summary and conclusion.

Overview

Laxmiram did not like existing education system. For him, this system was old servile system. He strongly disliked the summative education system in which children have to perform at the end of the year in a three hour examination, thus negating the child's performance throughout the year.

Gijubhai said that children should be free to learn. Any kind of forceful learning will lead to rote learning only. Peace of learning should be according to their interests, needs and capabilities. It is totally unethical to think that all children learn same things at the same time. Needs differ, interests differ and, also, capacity to understand differs from person to person. That is why, it's very essential that the environment in which children learn should be free and fearless. The children have the all the rights to ask the questions and clear their doubts at any point of time. They should be given several experiences to try new concepts using various experiments and processes. The learning should be fun based rather based on strict discipline and timings. The eagerness to learn new things and zeal to work on innovative ideas will surely open the minds of the children. It will help them in learning new concepts which lasts lifelong.

The teacher, instead of being an authority and power position, will be like a friend who helps children in progressing and understanding various educational concepts in a much better way.

Laxmiram convinced the Education Officer to give him permission for carrying out his experiment with Class 4 children of his school, which he delivered with great conviction and success.

The theoretical background of Gijubhai's experiments is based upon Montessori Method of teaching and learning, but the implementation is completely local.

The Challenges

Laxmiram faced several challenges while carrying out his experiments with children of his school. The biggest challenge that Laxmiram faced was to evaluate children according to the old same pattern of examination after teaching them through a purely freedom based and discovery way of teaching and learning.

Laxmiram faced stiff resistance from teachers as well as authorities. The teachers of the school created lot of hurdles for Laxmiram. The teachers did not appreciate Laxmiram's style of teaching. For them, old traditional methods of teaching were more trustworthy and reliable. He convinced all of them eventually by his hard work, his strong faith in his experiment and most importantly, by the results that came in the end. Change is not something that comes easily. That's why, changing people's mindset was not easy, however, he did it with perfection. Laxmiram, also, had to work a lot on children who were very different from the way Laxmiram wanted them to be groomed. At first, he faced issues. However, slowly and gradually, he became successful in making them understand things the way he wanted them to understand.

The New Method of Teaching and Its Relation with Present Educational System

Gijubhai came up with a number of new teaching and learning techniques. All were unconventional and new in relation to the existing education system. Few of them are as follows:

Child Centered Approach

Gijubhai was a strong supporter of child centered education. For him, the education which revolved around children, their needs, interests and capacities, was the best system of education. He never liked the teacher centered education. The education system is meant for educating children, not teachers, then how it ever can be teacher centered. That's why, he made it sure that Laxmiram, the teacher, centered the syllabus for his children based on their interests and pace. He never considered any kind of hierarchy or based his opinions about others based on their caste, class or creed. He tried to transfer the same kind of behavior to his children. Laxmiram never supported the system based on fear and punishment as they

hamper the growth and progress of children. He made his experiment for children, by children and for children. He never thought what others would think of him, however, always based his ideas and classes on the interests of his children. In the present scenario, the child centered education is definitely considered very essential and useful. Various educationists, book authors, subject experts and many more are taking at length about it. There are certain schools which have based their teaching learning methods completely on this philosophy. However, we are still not in a position to say that the majority of school-going children in our country are taught through this teaching and learning method. The picture is very far from being ideal.

Theatre through Plays

Plays had a crucial role in Gijubhai's Divaswapna. Laxmiram considered plays as very important as they helped children in becoming confident. It, also, helped them in expressing their views fearlessly in front of others. That's why, he did not believe in rehearsing and, then, acting out. He made children enact plays on the stories they know by heart. For him, the emotions and expressions which come out spontaneously are the best ones. Props play a secondary role. The play, thus, presented was enacted and staged on the spot. The dialogue delivery was completely natural, without any kind of artificiality. If we talk about it in present scenario, then this type of play is completely invisible. Neither teachers feel its importance, nor do they want it to be done in their classes.

Children Magazines

Laxmiram made children to work on magazines. He got them published as it is without any editing and correction. Thus, these magazines were purely untouched children work. In case of present scenario, there are some NGOs which are working in this area. They help schools and other organizations in the publishing of children's work. However, it's sad but true that schools hardly play any kind of role in the publishing of such books written by children only.

Strengthening Power of Imagination through Storytelling Session

Laxmiram introduced storytelling method to children of his class. It was one to one interaction where Gijubhai put various concepts in front of children in such a way that children loved to know about them. Eagerness was from both the sides to teach and learn. It, also, promoted careful and attentive listening. It encouraged power of imagination through which children understood those concepts which required careful thinking. In today's scenario, we hardly see any focus on storytelling by teachers. It is just considered as fun activity which is limited to library period only.

Strong Bonding between Teachers and the Students

Gijubhai considered it very essential to have a strong relationship based on love, respect and trust between teacher and the taught. Children will learn only when they trust their teacher and respect their feelings. That's why; he gave rapport formation a very significant place in his book Divaswapna. A good rapport between teacher and students surely means a strong foundation for the future learning. However, in the contemporary education system, such relationships are completely lacking. That's why; the cases of students' abuse and beating are on rise.

No System of Ranking

Laxmiram always promoted an atmosphere based on faith and help. That's why; he completely stayed away from the ranking system. In his class also, he focused on how one helped his friends to learn further. There was no room for 'I'. 'We' was something which emphasized throughout the year. Our present education system unfortunately promotes ranking system. For teachers, it's the rank in the class which decides the capability of a child. Children with higher ranks always get preferential treatment. They are the ones who get all affection and support from their teachers. Others are always looked upon. They are the neglected ones who are considered failures much before the exams. The system instead of working for them, works against them. As a result, these children accept themselves as non-capable learners with long lasting effects on their self-esteem. Few of them drop out even and get into criminal activities. That's why, ranking system is not just bad but dangerous for our society.

Important Role of Co-Curricular Activities

Sport was unpopular from teachers' point of view. Playing games, music, arts, drawing etc. were considered as waste of time. The focus was on reading books and clearing exams. The concepts of team building, cooperation, decision making etc. through games were almost unknown. Laxmiram focused on team work through games and sports. He gave the power of decision making to the students of his class, thus helped them in taking the responsibility of the choices that they made for themselves and for their groups. As a result, winning and losing left with no importance. Sportsman spirit was considered more significant. In the present scenario, co-curricular are considered very important. They have a separate time slot and weightage in the overall percentage of the children in the examinations. Even, admission in colleges gets done on the basis of sports quota.

Learning While Doing

Learning while doing was introduced by Laxmiram according to which the whole teaching learning process was fun based. He, instead of teaching from books, made books a

supplementary material. He, instead of understanding about mountains from books, arranged trekking trips and made children learn about them in a natural way. For him, reading about something which is already there in our surrounding was actually a waste of time. Seeing and observing were the two pillars which form the basis of all learning. The focus was completely on joyful learning. However, this concept is almost missing in the present educational system. The focus is on learning through books and help-books. It leaves no room to go out and experiment things on one's own.

Focus on Personal Hygiene

Laxmiram focused very much on personal hygiene. Teacher trained up children to form new habits. He purchased two brooms on his own expense. He purchased a comb, a small mirror, a piece of khaddar cloth and a small pair of scissors. He asked all the students to go to the tap and clean their faces, feet and hands in case they are dirty. Then, he asked them to comb their hair. Everybody looked clean, bright and fresh after bathing and combing hair. This was how, he proved where there is a will, there is always a way. He wanted children to realize the importance of personal hygiene and he did it nicely. Personal hygiene is something which is being very much stressed in high paying schools but given very minimal importance in schools run purely by Government.

Promoting Reading Skills through Well-Equipped Library

Gijubhai considered reading habits very vital for primary school children. He knew that books help in knowing and understanding various concepts. Library, also, offer a whole world of knowledge to children under one roof. They offer books starting from mythology to fiction, from folktales to science and from fun to horror stories. Libraries offer not only knowledgeable books, however, also, fun books based on animals, colours, king-queen, monsters etc. Reading skill has actually become an area of concern in the present educational system. Children prefer watch television and work on internet rather reading books. Reading for pleasure has almost disappeared in the present scenario.

Method of Teaching Grammar

Laxmiram believed that simply making children learn the definitions of noun, pronoun, adjectives etc. have no worth. One has to realize its meaning through practise. That's why, instead of following the old age traditional method of teaching grammar, he made children perform activities only for the first few weeks. As a result, the children identified the qualities of singular, plural, masculine, feminine etc. and the meaning of each of these became clear automatically. As far as present educational scenario is concerned, grammar is, again, taught to children via much traditional way. Definitions are the threshold and, then, examples come.

As a result, children have to mug up the definitions and meanings of the concept which lead to learning for a small duration of time.

Creativity

For Gijubhai, it was very important for the children to be creative. Creativity is something which enhances the rational and logical thinking. It helps one in thinking about more than one solution of a given problem. It opens the door of visualizing things in an unusual pattern. Mugging up closes mind. It does not let one venture out in the arena of infinite ways of thinking and understanding things. Laxmiram tried to promote creativity among his children by making them think out of the box. Organizing field trips, plays with spontaneous dialogues and many more were few ways of making children learn through practical experiences rather than mugging up what is written in books. Such kind of experiences surely promoted the thinking capacities and observational skills of the children. They became more aware about their surroundings. They grasped the logic behind the concepts rather learning things through the same banking concept of education. In the present scenario, creativity is something limited to drawing and art books only. There are no sincere efforts on the part of schools to promote creativity among students.

All Round Development of Children

Gijubhai felt that our schools only address the intellect of students. Making students study the concepts was the only motto for teachers. The capability was judged by the marks students get in final exams. The only thing that students used to do in schools is to listen to the lectures given by the teachers. There was no focus on the games and sports. Also, subjects like theatre, craft and music had no place in the school timetable. 'All work and no play make Jack a dull boy' had no meaning for the teachers. That's why, Laxmiram laid a great focus on the all round development of the children. He took his children for outdoor trips and excursions. He made them learn concepts by observing things in immediate surroundings rather than studying them from books. For him, it's not only the intellect but, also, the physical and emotional domains which need to be addressed for making a complete learner in a true sense. Again, this situation is not so good in the present scenario. Though the games period have a separate place in all schools, however, students hardly get chance to play various games in the playgrounds. Ironically, most schools do not have either big play grounds or well equipped sports material. As a result, students do not get opportunities to develop their talents. Apart from this, there is no focus on meditation, self development classes, puppetry, story-telling sessions, debates, excursions, small trips to nearby areas etc. So, the all round development is not taking place in the present educational system.

Peer Learning

Gijubhai wanted that children should have strong relationship with each other. This relationship should be based on support and trust. He never wanted to develop the feeling of competition from each other as it hampers the bonding that children share with each other. It, also, creates gaps in terms of intelligence and capability. As a result, Laxmiram made it very clear to his students that sportsmanship is the most important virtue in his class. Mutual admiration and help would be the pillars of this virtue. He gave, almost, no weightage to winning and losing. They are two sides of the coin. What is important is to take initiative and participate. Even in academics, he did lot of group activities with his class. He gave them a clear message that only together they can move forward in their lives. At present, peer learning is something which is discouraged in schools. Students are not supposed to talk to each other. Conversation between students is considered as annoying. Students are being charged fine for talking to others in the class. Helping fellow friends in class is a distant dream. Add on this, speaking only in English stops students talking to others even during lunch breaks. I wonder what will we really get out of this situation??

No Physical Punishment

No fear, no punishment was something that Gijubhai talked about throughout in his book. He said that fear kills the self expression. As a result, children feel hesitant to express their views in front of others. Punishment has a strong long lasting impact on the psychology of children. It curbs their inquisitiveness and power to take initiatives. It mars their curiosity and forces them to accept the structure as it is. It takes away from them their right to question things and makes them slave of die hard old habits. Thus, a whole new generation is being prepared which is ready to accept the power equations as they are without any query and interrogation. Laxmiram put forward his views on punishment in front of his colleagues. He, also, requested Education Officer to ban the physical punishment in schools. If we talk about the present scenario, physical punishment is completely illegal. However, it is very common to see teachers beating students in schools. This beating can be done with anything that is available- scale, sandals, shoe, book, chart papers etc. Sometimes, students are locked inside dark rooms for hours. Some teachers, at times, forget all the values and force children to remove their clothes in front of others. The situation is very bad. Strong actions against these inhuman people are very much required.

Teacher-Teacher Relationship

Laxiram initially had not so comfortable relationship with other fellow teachers. All looked at him with suspicion. For them, the work in which Laxmiram was interested was not just no value-added but useless. For the, making children play sports and play were almost spoiling

children. They, also, did not like his ideas on physical punishment. How will the child learn without beating was a thought that almost haunted them. However, Laxmiram knew that it is very important to have cordial teacher- teacher relationship for the betterment of students. So, he never reacted on any of the comments made by his fellow colleagues. Slowly and gradually, they realized that whatever he was doing was right. It was basically Laxmiram's hard work and dedication towards his work which made them convinced towards his educational views. In the present scenario, schools never promote bonding between teachers. They never make any effort to do this. That is why, it is a common sight to find teacher gossiping about each other in school staff rooms. Sometimes, they even do this on front of their class also which sends a very wrong message to their students.

Importance of Role of Parents in their Child's Education

The role of parents towards their wards' education was very minimal. They just had pay the fee and let the child come to school daily. Laxmiram realized the importance of strong cooperation between teachers and parents. He knew that their mutual support is very essential for the progress of the child. Especially in the areas of personal hygiene, regularity and punctuality, he surely needed the support from the parents. He, also, tried to arrange a parent-teacher meeting, however, it did not turn out the way he expected it to be. In the present educational scenario, parents are considered to be very important in the child's overall growth and progress. In public schools, Parent Teacher Meetings are arranged on regular intervals. However, the scenario is different in Govt. schools where parents (are usually daily wage earners) hardly have time to come to school and know about the progress of their wards. Moreover, their role is very minimal when it comes to regularity and punctuality of their wards.

Conclusion

Gijubhai has written a story on how a teacher can actually make a difference. Divaswapna from starting till end is an innovative book based on progressive teaching and learning methods. Thinking out of the box is something very commendable about this book. This book talks about almost all the important ingredients for making a classroom interesting and joyful for children. This book complements a famous quote- 'the way I think is the way I am.'