



I Wish to Do a Lot

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Often when teachers are being talked about, the picture that is presented of them is disappointing and negative – the image that emerges is that teachers in schools do not actually teach, they only appear to be doing so. The education establishment also looks at teachers with doubt. My experience, though, tells an altogether different story. Over the last couple of years I have been visiting some schools in District Khargon. The reason for these visits was trying to understand the conditions in which the task of teaching is done in classes. I also wanted to see for myself if there was some truth to the negative image that teachers have come to have.

Before proceeding any further, it needs to be underlined that I did not know any of the teachers working in the schools visited by me, nor did the Headmasters or teachers of those schools have any prior information about my coming.

It is noteworthy that the commissions set up in post-Independence India and all the policies that have been framed, have been making recommendations for the educational uplift of teachers. In spite of this we have not been able to implement the recommendations for the professional preparations of teachers. Also, the social status of teachers has been gradually coming down. Still, we do find teachers who are looking to their educational tasks with competence. These are teachers who give us the confidence that they can bring about a change in the educational scenario in government schools. And they look committed to this.

Here is a brief account of the work done in some of the schools:

When I reached the Adivasi school in District Khargon, the teacher was surrounded by children who were busy reading books of stories. These were students of Classes 3 and 4. The children who come here are from Phalya that is situated on a hill nearby. The teacher is quite enthusiastic. Even though we were strangers, she did not react to our being there. She was engrossed in her work with the children. The children, busy reading stories, would consult her whenever they faced a difficulty

in reading and she was helping them out. She was alert and conscious especially of children who lacked the courage to ask her something – and she would try to help them out.

We spent about an hour in that class. At the end of the period, we talked to the teacher who told us that she is teaching the children to read. In order to do so, the children will have to go through the process of reading. That is why she gave them books of stories to read. I was pleasantly surprised at this singular method of teaching adopted by her. I asked her about the practice, in most schools, of making the beginner-children memorise the English alphabet and the ‘baarahkhadi’ (the sets of twelve syllables in Devnagri). How, I asked her, could she teach them to read without first having made them read the alphabet? She responded with a question of her own – ‘How will the children be able to learn reading from the alphabet?’

I fell into thought on hearing this. It is indeed true that when we read, we are making meaning as we go along. Whatever a baby babbles, too, has some meaning. The process of the alphabet and ‘baarahkhadi’ that is followed in the primary classes is indeed meaningless. And in the context of language, we also know that the linguistic abilities are well entrenched in a child.

I also noticed that the teacher every now and then talked with the children and gave them opportunities to be in dialogue with one another, allowing them to converse in their own way.

It is indeed true that in language-teaching, along with reading and writing, dialogue is also of significance, for conversation is a powerful medium of expressing one’s thoughts. In this context it is important to give ample opportunities for this in the primary classes.

I went to the same school again – and again. Once I reached there at ten in the morning. The teachers were already there but the number of students was negligible. One teacher talked to another and they prepared to leave on a motorcycle. On being asked where they were going, they invited me also

to come along. Without any further enquiries I too accompanied them. They were going to Phalya, situated on the nearby hill, from where the children came. Parking the motorcycle at one place, they moved from home to home, encouraging the children to come to the school. They spoke to some parents too, requesting them to send the children to school. The teacher knew about the children who had not been coming to the school for long and so, specially talked to their parents.

Such was the effect that the children got ready to leave for school with their bags – the children walking in front, and the teachers following them on the motorcycle. The teachers told me that they make these trips to the community once or twice every week.

I found this process of bringing children to the school in the fitness of things. The fact is that this effort can be a lesson for the schools facing the issue of children not coming on a regular basis. What is striking about this whole effort is the fact that this is being undertaken without any specific orders from the Education Department for teachers to go to localities and bring children to the school.

I got an opportunity to visit another school. A child is at the centre of a school, but at the centre of

ensuring the quality of that school is the role of the teacher. I got a chance to meet a teacher who had transformed the very face of his school. He worked to make the campus of the school so beautiful and attractive that one could just not believe it to be a government school. A variety of flowers, ways for their irrigation, velvet-green grass and ample space for the children to play in – all this was there, and also special toilets for the girl-child and arrangements for drinking-water. Other teachers told me that this was a school with wild vegetation, the clearing of which was a Himalayan task. This teacher worked day and night to improve the campus and brought such healthy greenery to it. Not just this, he established a laboratory wherein one can experiment on all the themes related to the subject of science at the secondary and high-school levels. The teacher collected alternative teaching-learning materials and journals that are given to girl-students regularly for reading.

Teachers are continuously making efforts in the direction of making the school better. They work contrary to the belief that the environment of a government school cannot change. They believe that if the teacher so wishes, no task related to education is impossible to do.

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