

Divasvapna
An Educator's Reverie

Gijubhai Badheka
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National Book Trust, India

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PREFACE

About one hundred and fifty years ago the colonial State forced the Indian teacher of young children to accept a life of powerlessness and inertia. Our teachers continue to live such a life. Meanwhile, the expansion of the school system has sent education to every corner of the country. Millions of children now have no option but to endure the indifference of the teacher.

Of course, there could hardly be a teacher who wants to train children to live in isolation from the world around them. But the school culture we have in our country demands that the thousand and one things of children's interest ranging from insects to stars-be considered irrelevant to classroom study. An average teacher works on the assumption that his job is to teach from the textbook and to prepare children for the examination: He does not perceive that it is a part of his responsibility to develop the child's curiosity. Nor does the school provide conditions in which the teacher could fulfil the responsibility.

This situation is optimum for the re-publication and dissemination of *Divasvapna*, written by Gujarat's famous educationist and teacher, Gijubhai Badheka (1885-1939). This book was first published in Gujarati in 1932. The same year, Kashinath Trivedi, the well-known educationist of Madhya Pradesh, took the initiative to publish *Divasvapna* in Hindi. Trivediji had learnt from Gandhi that right action requires untiring patience for its success. His dream of seeing Gijubhai's writings on education widely disseminated has come a little closer to fulfillment today. But the dream of bringing about a change in education can materialise only after a prolonged struggle along the line in which Gandhi, Tagore, and Gijubhai had moved. The educational theory propounded by all three of them emphasizes the child's need for an atmosphere of independence and self-reliance. Gijubhai gave 'this idea an institutional basis by establishing his Bal Mandir in 1920, and in his writings he identified the different facets of the idea. *Divasvapna* is the imaginary story of a teacher who rejects the orthodox culture of education. He remains enthusiastic towards children and continues to experiment while consciously neglecting the traditions of teaching and prescribed textbooks. The theoretical background of his experiments lies in Montessori, but his preparation and implementation are thoroughly local.

As a reader of *Divasvapna* one is blown off in a gust of joy and curiosity, leaving behind the sadness born out of one's knowledge of India's colorless, dust-wrapped primary schools. One starts to paint the picture of a future in which the talent imprisoned in the nation's schools will break forth and children will enjoy the pleasure of taking stock of the world around the classroom with their teacher.

KRISHNA KUMAR

Delhi
July 20, 1989

THE EXPERIMENT BEGINS

I had read and thought about it a great deal, but I had no practical experience. It seemed to me that I should have some first hand practical experience. Only then, I thought, would my ideas get shape and form; only then would they mature. And only then would I realise how far my views were correct and how far they were only hollow speculations.

I approached the Head of the Education Department and requested him to give me a primary school class for my experiment.

The Education Officer laughed, "Forget it," he said. "You won't be able to do it. Teaching children and at the primary school level is no joke. It is an uphill task. You are a thinker and a writer. It is easy to dash off an article, sitting at a comfortable table and chair; it's quite easy to imagine yourself teaching. But it's extremely difficult to put your ideas into practice and to carry the experiment through."

"That's exactly why I want to have first hand experience," I said. "I want to base my conclusions on reality."

In the end the Education Officer agreed.

"All right," he said. "If you are so keen, by all means try it out for one year. I'll arrange for you to take a class of standard four in a primary school. Here's a copy of the syllabus. These are the textbooks. Here is a copy of departmental rules regarding leave and other ancillary matters."

I looked wistfully at the papers. I picked up the syllabus and put it in my pocket. As I began tying up the textbooks into a bundle, the Education Officer said, "Look here! You may conduct whatever experiment you like; but please bear in mind that there will be examinations at the end of the academic year. Your work will be evaluated by the outcome at these examinations.

"Agreed, I answered readily and then added, "I have one request to make. I would like you alone to be the examiner and evaluate my performance. You are permitting me to conduct the experiment. I would naturally like to show my work to you directly. I feel that only you would be able to understand the reasons for my success or failure, whatever they may be."

The Education Officer smiled as he gave his assent, and I left his office.

I went through the entire syllabus; I was convinced some changes could be made for the better. I also went through the textbooks. It was easy to see what was good and what wasn't. I figured out the changes that could be made. I could visualize the whole outline of the plan of work from the first day to the last. I took into account the number of days that would be taken up by examinations, results, etc. The whole plan seemed to be ready; so many days of work; the manner in which it was to be done; the outcome. I was so engrossed in my thoughts that I did not realise it was two hours past midnight. I prepared my notes for the next day. It was three in the morning when I went to bed.

The next day found me all enthusiastic, full of self-confidence and sense of urgency. A quick bath and breakfast and I reached School Number Three in good time. The school gates were not open. The headmaster had not come. The school peon had gone to his house to collect the school keys. The children were arriving and were running about on the road.

I waited eagerly for the school to begin; I was eager to take my class and start my work, eager to put my new plan into practice, eager to bring about peace and order in the class, eager to make classroom teaching interesting and win over my pupils. I felt my pulse throbbing.

The bell rang. The boys entered their classes. The headmaster took me to my class and introduced me to the pupils.

"Listen boys!" he said. "Henceforth, Mr. Laxmiram here, will be your class teacher. You must obey his orders and no pranks and mischief, I warn you!"

I looked at the children who were to be my charges for the next twelve months. I could see some of them smiling; some winking at each other; a few nodded stiffly. One or two stared at me in mock wonder; the rest stood looking totally unconcerned.

I looked on. "These are the children I have to teach; this strange mischievous lot! I thought to myself. I was a little unnerved, but I recovered. "Nothing to worry," I told myself. "I will take them on by and by."

I took out from my pocket the notes I had prepared the previous night, and glanced at the list of activities I had made:

First, a game of silence; next, checking up of classroom cleanliness to be followed by a chorus song; and lastly, some conversation with pupils.

I told my pupils, "Come on, let us play the game of silence. When I say 'Om Shanti!' every one of you will be absolutely quiet. I will then close the door. It will be dark in the classroom. Since we shall all be quiet, we shall hear the sounds outside and around us. It will be a great fun. You will be able to hear flies buzzing around and even your own breathing. After that I will sing a song. You will just listen,"

I finished speaking and then started the game. 'Om Shanti!' I said. But the boys continued to talk and to push one another. 'Om Shanti!' I repeated again and again but it had no effect. I became a little uneasy. I couldn't shout at them to shut up and behave.

I could not beat them into obedience. So I went on with the game. I closed the shutters of the windows and the door. It was now dark in the classroom. The students started their own game. Some started making a low humming noise; some started making catcalls; some started stamping their feet. One fellow clapped and soon the others joined him; another laughed and the whole class followed, suit. I was abashed. I turned pale. I opened all the shutters and went out of the classroom for a while, when I re-entered, the whole class had become boisterous. The children were calling out 'Om Shanti!' to one another in mock imitation of my words. Some were closing the shutters of the windows.

"My notes have turned out to be impracticable," I thought. "It was easy to prepare notes at home and imagine teaching; in practice it is a tough task. It is absurd to talk of the game of silence at this stage to a group of children who have all along been brought up in an atmosphere of noise and disorder. I shall now begin afresh from where I went wrong. It was good in a way that I slipped up at the very first step. Tomorrow I will try a new approach."

"Boys," I said, "we won't have class anymore today. We shall meet tomorrow. You can have the day off today."

At the words 'day off' the boys rushed out of the class shouting 'holiday'. They ran out, jumping and making such a noise that the teachers and pupils of other classes wondered what the matter was. The headmaster came out of his room and accosted me! "How dare you let the pupils off! There are still two hours to go, he said, frowning. He was very angry.

"They were not in a receptive mood today," I said. "They were disturbed. I could see that during the game of silence."

"You can't let the pupils off without permission," said the headmaster sternly. "If the pupils of the class are let off, those in other classes would be disturbed and won't study. Such experiments can't be allowed." Then he added a little scornfully, "Forget your fads about receptive moods and the like. The game of silence may be good for Montessori schools. Here in primary schools a sharp slap would make all the students quiet. I would advise you to teach the pupils as the other teachers do, so that you can show some good results at the annual examinations. As it is you have lost one day and made a fool of yourself!"

I felt sorry for the headmaster. "Sir!" I said, "Everyone has been resorting to beating while teaching and the obvious results of this method are that the children have become uncouth, rude, restless and disturbed. During their four years of education here the boys have, as I have marked, learnt only this: to shout and hiss at the teachers and to clap and stamp! They don't like school. See how happily they ran off as soon as they were told it was a day off for them!" The headmaster could not deny the truth of this. "Is that so?" he said. "Well, we'll see what you do about it."

I returned home a little dejected.

"It seems the task is quite difficult," I said to myself as I sat down. "In fact it's going to be a really tough test. Well-no matter! I am not going to give up. I should have known one doesn't play the game of silence in this manner. In Montessori schools a lot of preparatory work is done before the game is taken up. I was a fool to take it up on my very first day! I should have got to know my pupils and established rapport with them. Only then would they listen to me and follow my instructions. These boys do not like the school and they want holidays! It is no easy task to work with them.

I prepared a plan of work for the next day and went to bed. I passed the night dreaming of the day's happenings and the next days work.

Next day I was at school when the gates opened. The boys crowded around me. "Sir, they cried! "Why not have a holiday today also? Please, Sir, a day off today also.

"All right," I said. "I will let you off today; not for the whole day but only for two hours. However, you will first listen to a story that I am going to tell you. We shall discuss other matters afterwards."

I began my story: "Once there was a king. He had seven queens. Each queen had a prince and a princess . . ."

The boys sat down around me to hear the story. There was some commotion and shoving. So I said, "Boys, this is not right. Sit around in an orderly manner." That brought about some order. They said, "Sir, please continue the story. What happened next?"

I smiled and picked up the thread. "Each of the seven princesses had a palace other own. There were, in the garden of each palace, seven trees of pearls . . ."

The boys listened with rapt attention. The whole class was quiet; not a sound or a movement anywhere. The absolute silence surprised the headmaster and he came to the class to find what the matter was. He asked me, "Are you telling a story?"

"Yes," I said, "a story, and a new kind of game of silence."

The headmaster turned back. I continued with the story. There was some noise in the neighbouring class. I drew the pupils' attention to it. "See how this noise disturbs us!" All the boys agreed.

Halfway through the story I stopped. "Tell me," I said to my pupils, "if you want a holiday. We shall stop here now. If not, we may continue with the story."

"Please continue the story; we don't want the day off," they answered-everyone of them.

"Very well. In that case we shall proceed with the story. But first let us talk together for a while. Then we shall have the story right up to the end of the day."

A boy interrupted, "Keep the talk for tomorrow. Today let us have only the story so that we hear it to the very end."

"The story is long enough to continue for four days," I said.

"Oh!" they exclaimed. "So long! That's very interesting!"

I took out the class register and wrote down the names of the pupils. After entering all the names I marked their attendance. It was all quick and orderly.

"Look here," I said. "Every day we shall have the roll call first and then the story."

I resumed my story and went on right up to the last bell. School for the day was over. But the children wanted to stay after school hours to hear the story.

But! "Enough for the day," I said. "We can continue the story tomorrow. However we must decide first. Do you want a day off tomorrow or the story?"

"Story! the whole class shouted in unison. As the boys went out of the classroom, the word 'story' reverberated in the corridors.

Thank God!" I said. "I have salvaged the day. A story seems to work a miracle! That is certainly true."

The next day, as I entered the class, the boys crowded round me, all smiling and begging me to begin with the story.

"The roll call first," I reminded them. "And then some conversation and then the story." I took out a piece of chalk from my pocket and drew a large circle on the floor. "Sit around this circle everyday." As I spoke I sat down myself.

"This way," I said. "This is where I shall sit to tell you the story."

The boys sat down. I marked the attendance and then I began to tell the story. They were in a good receptive mood and they listened as if in a trance. At one state I stopped and asked, "Do you like the story?"

"Oh yes," they chorused. "We do - very much."

"You like to listen to a story," I went on. "Would you like to read one?"

"Yes," they cried, "we would like to read as well. But where are the story-books that we can read."

"Suppose I get you the story-books; would you read them?"

"Oh, sure."

"But you should also tell us stories," put in one clever lad. "Our reading stories wouldn't be enough."

"All right," I said, and resumed my story telling.

The bell rang. All the boys crowded around me.

Some looked at me with affection. Some tried to touch my hand. Some just stood as if in a spell.

"Out," I said, "the school is over. Now be off! " "No, we won't," shouted a few. "We are ready to sit till late in the evening if you continue the story."

I sent them away. Other teachers came to me. One said, "You have worked wonders! Our boys also want

stories. They don't pay attention to the classroom teaching. They keep begging for permission to come to your class to hear your story; or else they want us to tell them a story."

"Then tell them a story," I said.

"But who knows story-telling? We don't know a single suitable story."

I smiled.

The next day was a Sunday. I went to the Education Officer.

"Mr. Laxmiram," he said. "The headmaster reports that you have been telling stories to the class all the while."

"It is true. Story-telling is the current programme."

"But then when are you going to begin your experiment? How would you be able to complete the prescribed course of studies?"

"The experiment is already on, Sir! It is my personal experience that the story is a wonderful magic pill that helps to establish rapport between the pupils and the teachers. Those very boys who were not prepared to listen to me on the first day and who had unnerved me with shouts and catcalls, have become quiet since I started telling them a story. They now have a sort of affection for me. They listen to me and sit as I ask them to. I don't have to shout at them to keep them quiet. And they don't leave the school even after it is over!"

"All right, I get your point. Now when do you propose to begin your new methods of teaching?"

"Well, Sir! This itself is the new method of teaching. I am teaching them orderly behaviour through story sessions. They are being motivated. I am exposing them to literature and linguistic skills. This will be followed by the teaching of other subjects."

"See that you do not spend the whole year just telling stories," said the Education Officer.

The pupils were sitting in a circle as usual for the story session. I went to the blackboard and wrote on it:

Today's programme:

- i) Roll Call
- ii) Conversation
- iii) Story

After the roll call I began talking to them.

"Come on boys. Let me look at your nails. Each one of you stand up and hold out your hands for me to see."

Their nails were overgrown and full of dirt. "And now," I went on. "Please take off your caps." The caps were dirty and tattered.

The boys looked at their caps.

"Now check your buttons," I continued. "Are they all right?"

They looked at their clothes. Only a few of them had all the buttons.

"That will do for now," I said. "We are getting late for the story."

I began the story. A boy stood up.

"Sir, what about the story-books that you were going to get for us?"

"I shall get them in a day or two," I said. "Those who are interested in reading story-books, please raise your hands."

All hands went up.

"Now please tell me the names of the story-books that you have read."

A couple of boys had read two or three stories. These were students of standard four. But none of them had read anything outside the textbook!

"Do you read any magazines?" I asked.

"We read *Bal Mitra*," two of them said.

"All right," I said. "We shall get story-books. You will read them. We'll have enough books for you to read to your heart's content."

That seemed to please them immensely.

I continued the story. At the end of the day the bell rang and school was over. I told the boys: "One more thing before you go. Remain in your seats and listen." Then I told them to get their nails clipped. "Do it yourself if you can," I said, "or may be, you could ask your parents to help you or you could get them clipped by a barber."

One boy said, "I will cut my nails right now. I'll bite them off with my teeth."

"No, no," I said. "You must use either a nail-cutter or a pair of scissors." Addressing the whole class again, I said, "Shall we have a little fun?"

They were intrigued, and I went on: "I suggest you come to school without your caps. Why wear dirty caps? And what is the use of a cap?"

They began to laugh. "One can't come to school bareheaded," they told me. "The headmaster would get angry."

"If I come bareheaded tomorrow will you also do the same?" I asked.

They were doubtful.

"What if our parents do not permit us?"

"Tell them the cap is a useless burden and besides, these caps are tattered and dirty. It's better not to wear anything rather than wear a dirty cap, isn't it? Another thing: get the missing buttons sewn on. Clothes without buttons look shabby.

That made them think as they went home.

The headmaster sent for me. "Mr. Laxmiram," he said, "you are creating problems. Why do you indulge in such fads? Clip nails and get buttons sewn on, indeed! Why don't you stick to your new methods of teaching, which is what you have come here for? Clipping nails and sewing buttons are parents' jobs - not

the schools. Why should we bother about it? And mind you! The boys can't be allowed to come to schools bareheaded. It is indecent. Permission from the Education Department is needed."

I said, "Sir, this really is the new approach and these are the new methods in education. What else can be the first lesson for boys who are slovenly and disorderly? Except neatness and cleanliness and order? The children were themselves ashamed when I drew their attention to their slovenliness. They know that one shouldn't remain so dirty. I am sure many will try to keep clean and tidy, if they are taught how to. As for the caps, I shall refer the matter to the Education Officer. If he does not permit it, the proposed change will, of course, be cancelled."

After dinner that evening, I went to see the Education Officer.

"What brings you here at this time?" he asked.

"Sir, I have a request to make."

"Yes?"

"Can the boys and I come to school bareheaded?"

"Why?"

"Their caps are very dirty. These are all sorts of caps. What is wrong if they don't wear caps when they come to school? Wouldn't it be better if they don't have this burden on their heads at this young age?"

"People will find it strange and ridiculous," he said. "I feel we need not interfere with their social customs in our present experiment. We should restrict ourselves to finding out what improvements we can make in teaching within the four walls of the school. Cut out this cap business."

I felt this was a shortsighted view. All the same I saw no point in insisting on my view. I thought it might be unwise to antagonize the Education Officer and the parents at this stage. I modified my request. "Would it be objectionable if the pupils worked bareheaded in the classroom?"

"Not in the least," he said. "You may make any change that you want in the classroom. If people get used to that in course of time, I will not insist on their wearing caps."

"Another thing, Sir!" I said. "I want to start a library in my class. Can I get a grant for it?"

"How can you get a special grant for it? Your experiment is, in a way, a matter between you and me. The school is to be run within the provisions made in the budget. You must manage your requirements within the small amount that may be the share of your class from the budgeted amount."

"What do I do then?"

"Drop the idea for the moment."

"I have another plan," I said. "I can take recourse to it if you approve. Every pupil has to buy text-books-text-books for language, notes on these text-books, a text-book for history and so on."

"Well?"

"I suggest that the pupils be asked not to buy the text-books. Instead, we collect from them an amount equal to the cost of these textbooks; and from the amount so collected we buy good interesting books. This would help to build up a library."

"And how would you teach without text-books?"

"I have thought about it. I depend on my method of teaching in this respect. I shall be able to convince you better about this when I put it into practice."

"That may be so. It is your experiment and you are responsible for the results. But I must warn you. You must ensure that the pupils do not suffer in the end. I am with you, no doubt, but am a little apprehensive about the outcome."

"Please let me try. Sir!" I said. "God willing, our effort will bear fruit."

"All right. But what will you do with your library at the end of the year? You will distribute the books among the boys, won't you?"

"Yes. In a way the books would belong to the whole class and the class must get them back. But I think I can persuade the parents not to insist on taking the books away, but leave them for the class library. It will then be the nucleus for a permanent class library. Every year more and more books will be added to the library."

"Who knows whether the parents will accept such an arrangement? The idea is good, however. Give it a try. But all said and done, I am not yet clear in my mind as to how you will teach without text-books!"

"I have my plans, Sir."

I took his leave and came home.

Next day, school began as usual. I had thought that the pupils would perhaps come bareheaded. But I was wrong. I learnt that the parents had refused to let them go to school bareheaded. Their comment was: "How can you go to school bareheaded. Your teacher seems to be crazy!"

I inspected their nails. Hardly any one had clipped them. They had various domestic problems to cite as reasons for not doing so. Who the hell had time to sew on buttons any way? One mother sent word: "Mr. Teacher, if you are here to teach, please teach; that's all. Why do you indulge in all these fads? Do you think we have nothing else to do but clip nails and sew buttons, and do this and that! Our children will be what they are. We don't have time even for death. How do you expect us to do your bidding?"

I was astounded! I had expected the boys to be clean and tidy. Instead, I had got this message! "Well, all right," I said to myself. "I won't get anywhere in this way. I'll have to seek the parents' cooperation on the one hand and instil in the pupils a liking for neatness and cleanliness on the other,"

I did not continue the conversation any longer. I began telling the story and finished it.

"Another story now," the boys demanded.

"We shall take up a new story tomorrow," I said. "Today we shall play games for a while."

"Play games?" The boys were surprised.

"Yes, we shall play games. Which games can you play?"

"Many," they answered, "but how can we play games here?"

"Why not?"

"This is a school. Nobody plays games here. Have you ever seen any one playing games here?"

"May be, but we can play. I will play with you. Come on." Some boys just stood there as if immobilised.

Some ran out to play with joyous shouts. Soon however, there was shouting all around. Pupils in other classes turned to look. Teachers stared at us. The headmaster came running out and reprimanded me.

"Look here!" he said. "You can't play games here so close to the other classes. If you want to play, go to the playground over there. You are disturbing other classes here."

I took the boys to the playground. The boys began running about like wild horses, shouting, "Games! We play games!"

"Which games do we play?" I asked them.

One boy said, "Kho Kho." "No," said another, "We play Kabaddi"

"No," shouted the third, "We play catch-as-catch-can."

"We will not play if you decide upon that game," said a fourth.

"Then we will play without you."

"Look here," I said. "We have come here to play. If you are going to quarrel, we just go back to our class."

"No, we want to play," the boys became a little wary.

"Come then, we play Kho Kho today. Two of you come forward as captains and select your teams."

The selection of teams took quite some time. Many wanted to be captains. Ultimately I had to select two boys as captains and the teams were selected by them. We started the game.

And what a game! These were disorderly, noisy street urchins! Not one of them could be quiet while playing. Everyone shouted and quite unnecessarily.

"Oh, come on lollipop, catch me." "Ever caught anyone baby?" "Hey mind that side." "I told you he would escape from there." "You fool, we lost because of you."

And it went on like that.

I asked myself, "Is this a playground or a fish market? Is this a game of Kho Kho or a game of shouts and noise?"

When the game was over, a boy from the winning team began to tease the defeated team. "We won! You couldn't score over us despite your efforts. Though you had a good captain, we licked you."

His opponent was annoyed. "Yes we lost. Now what do you have to say?"

The former continued with his teasing. "You lost, you good for-nothing! We defeated you. Hurrah!"

The latter was livid with rage. "If you say one word more, I will smash your head with this stone."

The former persisted, "Ever done that baby? I will say a hundred times we defeated you. We licked you!"

The latter lost his temper. He picked up a stone and hurled it at the former. The stone hit him on the head and he began to bleed. I was stunned! Things were going very badly, indeed. I took out my handkerchief and bandaged the boy's wound.

I called up the boys and told them, "From tomorrow we won't play games."

"But why should you punish us all when it was only those two boys who quarrelled?"

"We play games only if you agree to abide by two conditions I name."

"Agreed," they chorused.

"First, no one speaks while playing games. The one who speaks is out."

"Agreed."

"Secondly, no quarrels about winning or losing. It may be one team losing today and another team losing tomorrow. That shouldn't be made an issue. We play for the sake of playing, for running about and to have a good time. We don't pick quarrels and break heads over winning and losing a game."

We agree," they said again.

We came back to the school, the injured boy with us. The children from other classes came over to look. One boy said a little sarcastically, "So, how was the game, eh?"

"They seem to have played Holi," another remarked.

When the school broke up for the day, the other teachers and the headmaster met. One teacher asked me, tongue-in-cheek, "So, you played war games?"

Another teacher said, Mr. Laxmiram, why do you fool about with games? These are children from all sorts of families! They must be confined to the four walls of the school and subjected to memorising and cramming. They would break one another's heads if they are let loose. Don't you see what happens in the streets every day?"

"I knew," said the headmaster, "that something untoward was going to happen. Well, this gentleman needs a lesson otherwise he won't be quiet, Games! And in the school? Nonsense!"

"Sir!" I answered. "Games are real education. Great powers are born on the playground. Games mean character-building."

"That's why there was this fighting and a head was broken. Isn't it?" the headmaster retorted.

While we were talking, the father of the injured boy arrived. He was in a great rage. "I don't want this kind of education," he roared. "See, he has a broken head! Where is the headmaster? Who beat my son?"

I said, "Well, sir, the boys had gone out to play games. There was some quarrel and he got hurt."

"But who told him to go and play games?" the father asked. "Are the schools meant for studying or for playing? All through the day they play in the streets. I will send my boy to school only if you are going to teach."

I couldn't say anything. The headmaster intervened.

"Sir, this teacher is a new hand and is doing some experiments in teaching. Today he tried games, and there was a fight there."

"I don't want any of your experiments. Teach the boy in the regular manner, if you can. Or else, I will withdraw him from the school."

The other teachers were laughing up their sleeves!

What could I say?

I went home. I couldn't react. I went to my room and lay down thinking. It's disgraceful! I thought. But never mind. I have now already made some rules for playing games. I will add a few more. But games must be played. To my mind that is true education.

A thought came to my mind. I should call a meeting of parents to explain to them the importance of games. I should seek their cooperation in respect of cleanliness and order. I wouldn't be able to achieve anything if I don't get their cooperation. They would certainly take that much trouble for their children! That is where we teachers fail; we don't seek the cooperation of parents. I must call a meeting of parents tomorrow.

We had the parents' meeting. I wonder if I could rightly call it a meeting. I had invited about forty parents. Only seven gentlemen turned up. I was thoroughly disappointed. I had prepared the speech well. I went ahead. Our part of the job is to make efforts. The speech was also an experiment for the purpose.

In all seriousness I made a thought-provoking speech lasting for about an hour. Of the seven who had come, one was called back home and he left. Others listened to me with obvious boredom. To me all my points were important and I had to explain them.

I explained to them the difference between the right and the wrong in education, in great detail. I explained how cleanliness was next to Godliness. I showed them how games helped character building. I explained the importance and value of inner discipline. I criticised the existing system of education in schools and their regulations.

But all this was a waste of time and effort! The few who had come as a matter of courtesy were inclined to go away and left hurriedly as soon as the speech was over. We teachers and the Education Officer stayed behind. The Education Officer smiled a little and said, "Mr. Laxmiram, yours was a fruitless effort! Who would understand your philosophy?"

A teacher at my back commented in a low voice.

"The impractical fool!"

I felt bad but didn't say a word; and I was convinced that I was after all unpractical. I didn't know at all what kind of speech should be made to simple folk.

The teachers went home laughing.

I took up the library project after about eight or ten days. I had told the boys many stories. They were in standard four. It was time they had books to read.

I told the boys, "Bring money for the language text-book and the history text-book. We shall arrange everything here."

But the next day, one of the boys came with the textbooks for language and history. "My father had bought them for me right on the day our results were declared, he said.

Another boy said, "I have also brought the books. They are my elder brother's books."

A third boy said, "I am not going to buy books here. My uncle is going to send them to me from Bombay."

One boy said, "My father refuses to give money to me. He says he will buy the text-books for me."

"Bowled over," I said to myself. "Setting up a library was quite easy to imagine. Doing it is quite another thing!"

Some boys had brought money. I accepted the money from them and gave them receipts. Next day, the boys came asking for their textbooks.

I said, "I have bought these story-books for you from the money collected from you. You had said that you would like to read stories. So I have bought story-books." The boys were happy to see the illustrated books with colorful jackets. There was a scramble for the books.

"Look here," I said. "We have at present only fifteen books. Fifteen boys will be able to read. The remaining twenty will come to me and hear what I read."

To avoid confusion, I added, "The first fifteen boys will pick up the books; the others will come to me."

The first fifteen boys picked up the books and began to read. I said, "As soon as a boy finishes reading a book, he should return it to my table and should pick up another one which may be there. In this way, every one of you will be able to read all the books."

I called the others to my table and began 'model readings' from a storybook. I read with proper modulation of voice and proper accent. But what a noise those fifteen boys made reading aloud all together! I stopped and told them, "Boys, please read silently. We are disturbed by your loud reading."

The boys lowered their voices, but they had not learnt silent reading. They could only read aloud. They kept their voices low for a while and then lapsed into loud reading. I asked them to sit in the verandah and spread out a little. I remained in the classroom.

The model reading went on. The story was specially chosen. All the children listened with interest. So model reading and the reading by pupils went on till the bell rang for the day, and we all went home.

Stories, games, library, model reading, attention to personal hygiene and orderliness of pupils -all this took up about two months of my time. I took stock of my work. I reviewed the work done. I felt I had taken only the very first few steps. I had not done anything about the prescribed syllabus in language, arithmetic, history, science, etc. Some of the lessons had been covered in other classes. I would have to complete everything by the end of the year. That was the precondition for this experiment. Let me see what I have achieved so far," I thought to myself. The story telling is going on well and it has motivated the pupils and a sort of order has been established. However, Champaklal and Ramanlal do not like stories; Ramji and Shankar find them too easy! Raghu and Madhu wink and make signs to each other all the while. They are inattentive and mischievous. Something will have to be done about it. As for games, it is true that the boys have come closer to me because of games and regard me as one of themselves. They are not as afraid of me as they used to be. They listen to model reading very attentively after the games period. But the shouting and disorder while playing have abated only a little, I am trying very hard but there is still a long way to go.

There are only a few books in the library. I have not yet been able to convince parents about having a library rather than textbooks. I had believed that giving a talk and a little explanation to parents would suffice. But the parents here know only one thing: 'teach the boys' they say. They don't have time even to listen to anything else and they don't understand either. Never mind; it is bound to come about if I persist, tomorrow if not today. I have enough time yet. This experiment was certainly not going to be easy! As our imagination broadens, our understanding grows, so do our ideals soar and the seriousness and complexity of the task increases. Many questions troubled my mind. It seemed to me that my achievement in respect of personal hygiene wasn't anything worthy of note. I hadn't been able to do anything about caps and the clothes were clean for a day or two initially and then it was back to square one? Their nails are as unkempt as ever! I would have to follow this up. There was no other go. New habits are to be infused in society and this called for repeated efforts.

And it is not only the boys that I have to worry about. The Education Officer has also now become rather impatient. He has his own problems. He has to contend with his superiors and opponents. He wants to share the glory and therefore wants results, but he wants them quickly! He has his limitations in helping me.

My colleagues, the teachers, have no faith in me. They look down upon me as an out and out, impractical person. Maybe, I am rather. Besides, I have no experience. But I have no faith in their beliefs and their methods of teaching. Those annoy me. I am sure mine is the right approach. My boys don't run away from me. They love me, respect me and obey me, whereas the boys of other classes run away from their teachers. I have seen them mimicking their teachers behind their backs. Not a single boy approaches his teacher with a smile or with affection. They sit in their classes silent, sullen and immobile and they indulge in mischief and quarrels when they go out of their classes. I have given reasonable freedom to my boys in this respect. They have some outlet for their restlessness in the class itself. So they do not create much trouble outside. The other teachers say that I am spoiling the boys by over-indulgence; they complain that I tell the boys stories only and don't teach them; that I make them miss their classes by taking them out for games. All right, we shall see. These games and stories are, to my mind, half their education.

I will have to bear in mind that my task is going to be difficult, and I should not lose sight of this!

The stroke of twelve at midnight, jerked me out from my reverie. "Ultimately everything is in the hands of God; better to leave it to Him," I said to myself. "Tomorrow will take care of itself."

I fell asleep.

THE PROGRESS OF THE EXPERIMENT

It was the beginning of the third month. I felt I should now start to keep notes of the work done every day so that I would know how much had been achieved in a week. I prepared a work-plan for one month. The notes wouldn't be in the form of a logbook. They would be something of an *aide-memoire*, indicative of the progress made.

Story telling was a part of the daily routine. Games too were being played everyday. In between, we had talks, model reading and checking of personal hygiene. The library was also taking shape, though very slowly.

I decided to take up something from the prescribed syllabus. One morning I asked the boys to take down some dictation. The boys stared at me. They never thought that I would give them a dictation or take up a lesson from the textbook, or take a map reading exercise. They did not believe I was a teacher of that type. They were right in a way, for I certainly was not a teacher of that sort.

"Write down," I said.

Many did not have slates and pencils. They had not needed them until now in my class and so they had not brought them

I got them slates and pencils from a neighbouring class and proceeded to give them dictation.

Some boys showed their disapproval. A boy asked, "No Story today. Sir?" Another said, "We don't use the text-books in the class; now where will you give the dictations from?"

A couple of them said, "Please let us have a look at the passage that you intend to dictate so that we may not make mistakes."

"They all seem to be used to the obsolete old methods. They have the old idea of dictation and therefore they dislike it. They are scared of it and so want to prepare for it beforehand.

I picked up one of the library books and began dictating. I read out a sentence. But hardly had I said a few words, than the boys began to take them down: they paid no attention to the complete sentence. They began to ask me to repeat the sentence. There were repeated requests to repeat it.

"Look!" I said. "I'll show you how to take down dictation. You should look at me when I speak. Listen to me carefully; understand what I say and then write. After that, look at me again for the next sentence."

I continued to dictate the passage. At first they could not give up their old habit, but after a while, they learnt to take down dictation by the method I had shown. And after that, none of them had to ask me to repeat what I had said. I spoke only once and did not repeat a single word.

After the dictation they put down their slates and I went through their writing. I found many words misspelt. Quite a few of them were unable to write conjunct consonants. Their handwriting also left much to be desired.

I had made no corrections on their slates. These I returned after I had gone through them. The boys began to clamour, "How many mistakes have I made?" asked some, while others wanted me to give them ranks.

One of the boys said, " Now Laxmirambhai also will teach us as other teachers do and give us ranks."

"I am going to do nothing of the sort, I said. "You all know how to write fairly well. Try again tomorrow. Gradually you will learn to write well. And practice will help you to write well -I'm sure of that. Anyway, what's the point of marking you mistakes?"

"But what about ranks?" asked one.

"Do I give you ranks when I tell you a story?"

"No."

"Do we have ranks when we play games?"

"No."

"Some of you are tall, while others are short; does that mean ranks?"

"No."

"Some of you are fat, some quite lean; does it imply ranks?"

"Not at all."

"Some are rich, some are poor; does the school give ranks according to whether you are rich or poor?"

"No."

"Then we just don't want the rank system at all. A person who can sing may sing out poems. He may try to recall the words when he forgets them. A person who doesn't know a game may observe others' and learn; and one who is good at a game may play for the pleasure of it. A child with a good handwriting may serve as a model to others who would like to improve their own. Those who are good at doing things can always teach others who are not so good. That's all!"

They stared at me, surprised.

I said at the end, "Our class is some thing quite different, something new. We blaze a new trail. This is *our class!*"

I emphasized the words "our class", repeating the words a couple of times. The boys picked it up. "*Our class,*" they said. "It is something different, something new."

Within a week I was able to bring about some improvement in the area of dictation. I gave them transcription as homework every day. They were to copy out four lines from one book. I gave them dictation for ten minutes every day. They were also asked to take down dictation from each other and correct each others work.

I prepared a list of conjunct consonants including all those in the language text for the fourth standard. I gave this list to each of them, one by one, to copy out. I began to prepare a list of difficult words in the language text for their spelling exercise.

Our work was progressing well.

One day while the boys were listening to a story, we heard piteous cries from a neighbouring classroom.

We were startled. The boys found it difficult to pay attention. I stopped telling them the story and suggested that one of them go and see what the matter was, to find out who was crying and why.

A senior boy went out and was back in a minute. "The teacher beat up Jiva," he said.

"Why? I asked.

"He does not know the geography lesson."

"But why beat him?"

"He must suffer the consequences," said one boy, "if he does not prepare his lessons."

"But suppose he just doesn't know."

"One must know; if he does not know, the teacher will naturally beat him."

"But what if he doesn't remember in spite of his efforts to learn?"

A third boy intervened, "Even then the teacher will beat him. He gets beaten if he does not know."

"Would any one of you like being beaten?"

"No, who would like to be beaten?"

"Suppose I give you some lessons to prepare and you don't. Should I beat you or not?"

"But we would prepare the lessons that you give." "Suppose you don't remember even after you try to memorise?"

"No, you should not beat us in any case. It hurts. Teach us again if we don't know and we will work harder."

"All right," I said. "Let us proceed with the story. Shall we?" I started again, but their minds were preoccupied with Jiva. They said, "Sir, Jiva is the sort of boy who will abuse the teacher behind his back and draw the teacher's caricature on the walls with abusive captions."

"Jiva shouldn't do that."

"But the teacher beats him hard," they said.

"What is one to do then?" I asked.

"The teacher shouldn't beat him."

"What about the lessons?"

"Any one who does not prepare lessons," they said, "should be removed from the school. Why beat anyone? If beating makes one learn, every one should be beaten every day!"

One boy said, "Jiva is not interested in studies. He likes catching rabbits and tending cattle."

Another boy said, "Jiva gets a beating in the school and then he beats other children outside the school. We are all afraid of him."

"What caste does he belong to?"

"He is a Koli. His father is a government servant and sends him to school forcibly. A teacher has been engaged to give him private tuition at home."

"Let's drop the matter, for now," I said. "Let us go on with the story."

I finished the story. We were getting up when the bell rang I went home thinking about punishments and their consequences. I was quite sure of my own attitude: I did not want to punish anyone.

A few days after this I met the Education Officer again. I said to him, "Sir, please issue an order that every child attending the school must have clean clothes on; their caps must be clean, if they wear caps. Hair must be well groomed. Nails must be clipped every week and they should have a regular haircut. Clothes should have proper buttons. Students must have a bath or at least a wash before they come to school."

The Education Officer gave me a patient hearing and then smiled. "Why? Do the parents not understand?"

"I am trying my best to persuade parents. But they seem not to understand. Parents who are quite well off even they do not understand. They say, 'who is going to bother about it every day? Your job is to teach and mind just that. Leave the other things to us.' Very little improvement has been possible under these conditions. To tell you frankly, Sir, I don't like teaching such boys."

"So that's that!" said the Education Officer. "This is our society! It is an impossible task to raise their cultural level! Even so, there has been some effect on parents since the time I took charge of this department."

"Why don't you then issue such an order?"

I cannot issue such an order. It is outside my powers."

"Outside your powers? How come? You are a top-grade officer."

"This is a native State. Officers do not have such powers even elsewhere." He continued after a pause. "Such orders can be issued only if you go to the highest authority. And even then, are the people going to implement such an order? What can we do if the people disobey our orders?"

"Rusticate their children from the school."

"You can't do that. That would be stirring up a hornet's nest."

"Every thing can be done; what is the use of wisdom without power to back it up? The hard fact is that we are teachers and so we don't count!"

"Take it that way then. Let things be as they are."

"Oh, no!" he said. "We can't have things as they are."

"For my part I'll strive to bring about whatever improvement I can in the school. I will train up children to form new habits. I shall devote my spare time to a public movement in this connection. The fact remains, whether people care or not, that the lack of sanitation in schools is the breeding ground for disease."

The Education Officer said, "All right, do whatever you like. You have come to make an experiment. Four months have already passed. Mind you, time is running out."

I took his leave and came home.

I bought two brooms and paid for them myself. (The contingency allowance was too small to pay for them.) I bought a small mirror, a comb, a piece of *khaddar* cloth and a small pair of scissors. Luckily there was a water tap in the school compound. I made all preparations in the class.

I made the boys stand in a line. They were quite willing, for they loved me. They had realised that I was doing some thing, which they liked and was beneficial to them.

I asked them to look at their faces in the mirror and said, "Those who feel that their faces, eyes or noses are dirty may go to the water tap and wash them. They should wash their hands and feet also and wet their

hair a little."

They all rushed out and began to wash their faces, hands and feet, pushing one another.

I thought, "I will have to teach them to go about it in an orderly manner and queue up for work. People cannot work in a haphazard way. We want to save these boys from such disorder and indiscipline."

I drew a line on the floor. "Every one of you stand along this line and go to the water tap, one by one," I told them.

I stood on one side with two pieces of *khaddar* cloth in my hands. The boys began to wash their hands and feet as instructed.

It was the first time that such an activity had been undertaken in the school. Passersby were watching in surprise at what was happening in the school.

We went to our class after every boy had finished having a wash. I gave them the comb and asked each of them to comb his hair as best as he could. I got all their caps placed in a corner. Everybody was now clean and looked bright and fresh. I drew a circle with a piece of chalk and made them sit around it. I also sat down with them and said, "Now look at your hands. How clean they are! How your faces look! Don't you like yourselves looking clean and bright?"

"Of course, we do," they said.

"Then why not have it this way? A wash at the tap, and a tidying up as soon as you get to school. We shall take up other activities afterwards."

I felt happy and pleased. "Let's recite a poem," I suggested.

The first poem I recited was a prayer. It came to my mind spontaneously. Checking of nails could not be done that day, nor checking of buttons and clothes.

I had laid the foundation for the teaching of history with my stories. I decided now to prepare the ground for teaching poetry with the help of folk songs. After giving considerable thought to it, I decided that I should devote the first six months to some preliminary preparation. That way I would prepare the ground for the teaching of the subject during the next six months.

Usually the first reaction of the pupils to anything new is to make fun of it and laugh at it. I began with folk songs. "Come on, let us sing a song," I said. "I will lead and you follow."

I began to sing a folk-song:

"Krishna is a part of my heart

Dear sisters, Krishna is a piece of my heart."

Nobody was able to follow. I was surprised. How is it that the pupils of the fourth standard are unable to pick up such an easy tune! Perhaps they are not used to it.

I took up another song:

"Mine is the peacock,
Pecking up pearls,
It's my peacock."

There was some response. But the boys were out of tune and sang out very loudly. The song turned into

an uproar! The teacher in the adjoining class came up. "Please Sir, enough of this noise! We can't hear a word in our class."

Another teacher joined him.

"Must you create a new problem every day? Are you going to allow us to teach our boys in peace or not? You are not concerned with the consequences; if you succeed, the Education Officer will tell us to do this and that; and if your experiment fails, you will pack up and go away."

The headmaster came up: "I say, Mr. Laxmiram, is this a private elementary school that you resort to chorus recitation as if you were reciting the multiplication tables? A new experiment you call it! Why, even our forefathers knew folk songs!

And everyone left. "This knocks me down," I said to myself. "I shall have to discontinue chorus singing for some time. We shall have a listening programme only."

I told the boys, "Wait! You just listen when I sing."

I began to sing:

"Make a nose-ring
For me dear goldsmith,
Make a nose-ring.

.....

I had a voice that would allure a donkey! But I was not too out of tune; so I could manage. How nice it would have been if I had a good voice! But I sang with as much style as I could and also made appropriate gestures to go with the song. I had some training in acting. Some boys seemed to like my singing: some got bored and began their pranks. Champak and his friends winked at each other as if to mock me. It didn't escape my notice. But that was something I was going to deal with.

I told all those who I thought were bored: "You may please sit separately. You may write on your slates anything that you like, or draw pictures."

I recited one more song. Interest was now growing. I recited a third song. The children had liked the second song the best I sang it again and again, and their interest grew with each singing.

I told the boys, "Listen to the songs I sing but don't sing them yet - and not in the school compound at all."

Within two days, were heard singing: "Make a nose ring . . ." I ordered them out of the school compound.

The townsfolk began to talk: "What kind of a poem is this?"

Tailor Bhana said, "It is a song they using in *bhavai* during the *Navaratri* festival."

Ragha said, "The teacher then seems to be *bhavai* actor.

Has he come here to teach *bhavai*?

The mothers of the boys were worried. "Why do they teach the boys the songs which are meant for women to sing?"

I overlooked all this. How could I work if I paid attention to it? I had to throw myself courageously into my experiment. That is the way to blaze a new trail.

Every day I recited new poems to the boys and found out which poems they liked. During the process many boys learnt half a dozen songs by heart. Of course there were a few boys who did not like music. They used to read or write during that time, and I did not bother about them.

I began to think of introducing *Dandia Ras*.

So these were then the activities going on in the class: storytelling, the library, model reading, games, dictation, listening to the recitation of poems, cleanliness and prayer.

One day a Paramhansa *sanyasi* came to our class. He was accompanied by the headmaster. The headmaster introduced him: "His Holiness gives religious discourses. He has been permitted to give discourses in every school in the State. Today he has come to our school with a note from the Education Officer to give a discourse in our school."

I bowed to His Holiness respectfully and offered him a chair. Then I requested him to begin his talk.

The boys stared at His Holiness. They seemed to be curious about his shaven head, his bright face, lean body and the water pan in his hand. I told the boys, "Swamiji is going to give us a talk. Please listen attentively."

The boys obeyed me. They sat quietly.

Swamiji began the sermon: "Boys: God is the greatest of all in this world. He has created this world. It exists because of Him. He is the source of us all.

And so it went on about the glory of God.

I kept quiet and said nothing. The boys were also quiet. Gradually, however, they began to get restless. Some began to stir; some began doodling with pen and slates; some began handling books; some looked visibly annoyed. A boy went out, making a sign for a visit to the toilet. Soon another boy followed him. Two boys were trying to talk. I signaled them to keep quiet.

I requested His Holiness, "Swamiji please say something easy enough for them to understand."

Swamiji was a straightforward person. He began to talk of the Hindu religion, its scriptures and its tenets. But the boys were not interested in this either.

I began to wonder! "Is this the way to preach? Can one explain in this manner the philosophical basis of a religion, which is very mystical and takes a lifelong effort to understand? Is this moral instruction or dissemination of information about religion? Such religious information is a lifeless body."

I was ruminating on all this when Swamiji began to recite holy verses. The boys repeated them after him as best as they could: but they didn't understand a word. They were making sounds, more for the fun of it.

Swamiji was very serious about it all. To him this was an essential and sacrosanct duty. He was doing his duty all right; but it was like casting pearls before swine so far as the boys were concerned.

Swamiji began to explain the verses. The boys had to listen.

He wrote them on the blackboard and asked the pupils to take them down. Then he said, "Say this verse every morning when you get up and every evening when you go to bed. It will enhance your intellect, increase your strength and brighten you up."

The boys of my class were in the age group often to twelve years. What interest could they have in religion and holy verses! All the same, they took down the verses and the meanings.

I mused: "It seems there is no other place left now for holy men to preach and so they come to schools! In the days gone by, preaching that was done in the temples was practised at home by the parents and that served as religious education for the children. But now is it because the parents have no time for religious discourses or is it because the elders have had their day, for whatever the reasons. Is that why the buck has been passed on to the schools?"

I was still thinking about this when the bell rang. Tired pupils paid their respects to Swamiji and went out. Swamiji and I remained in the class. I said, "Your Holiness, please accept my hospitality today."

The topic of religious education came up during our talks over dinner. His Holiness said, "Religion today does not command the respect it once did. That is why religious instructions will have to be given at the earliest stage."

I said, "Your Holiness, how can such tender minds understand metaphysical concepts like God, soul, religion and the like? You saw for yourself that the boys had no interest in them and they sat through the talk only out of courtsey."

Swamiji said, "Yes, that's quite true. Children like to play; they enjoy stories. But whether they like it or not, our scriptures have got to be taught and children must be made to learn them by heart."

"But Swamiji," I protested, "religion is not meant to stay merely on the tip of the tongue. Religion is an awakening and it comes from within. It comes only when there is a yearning for it. It comes at the appropriate time only. Don't you feel this is imposing it at the wrong time?"

Swamiji pondered over my argument. I continued, "Religion is truth and it leads to deliverance. The ultimate object of man is deliverance. But don't you think all this is very difficult; outside the range of common sense? Don't you think it needs an enormous amount of preparation?" "That is true but . . ."

I went on: "Religion isn't something which one can buy in the market. What's printed in books is not religion. Don't you think the mystique of religion should remain a secret to be discovered by each individual by his own efforts?"

Swamiji agreed. "Yes. That is why our forefathers had to stay at the Guru's *ashram* and put in rigorous effort to understand religion."

"But today we seem to have set about to distribute religion among people through preaching at home and in schools!" "But this is the kaliyug" said Swamiji. "Who will go to a Guru's ashram today T

"Then leave it," I said. "Religion will not prevail by selling it or gifting it away."

"How then?"

I said, "I believe there should be no preaching of religion to small children. They should, at this stage, have a healthy body and a healthy mind, an unbiased intellect and an untiring capacity for work. We should make them strong in every way."

"Yes," Swamiji said. "Only the strong can reach out to the soul."

I said, "I believe that just as youth blossoms out in its own time, so also the yearning for religion will come in its own time. This untimely introduction to religion is like an untimely-married life. Making religion a matter of reciting verses and an everyday ritual will blunt the intensity of yearning for it. A person may recite verses and follow rituals all his life, maintaining all outward manifestations of religion and yet not be a truly religious person!"

"I agree," said Swamiji. "From my personal experience so far, I have also felt that such religious education would bore the students. I do feel that we should find some other way to impart religious

education."

"Excuse me, Your Holiness," I interrupted. "What I want to say is that we should try to live religion. Parents must try and teachers must try. We could tell children stories from the Puranas, and the Upanishads, 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. This much exposure, or, if you like, preparation is enough. Let us leave out teaching rituals. Let us not make our children memorise and recite holy verses! let us not teach religious dogma and scriptures and the like in the name of moral instruction."

Swamiji said, "What do I do then?"

"Teach," I said. "Just as I do."

Swamiji said, "How can a hermit work as a teacher?"

"It is your task to educate people. If you take up teaching, we could remedy the scarcity of good teachers and put in real good work."

Swamiji smiled and began to wash his hands.

He and I have come much closer since then. He reads about new ideas in education and I learn scriptures from him.

Time was passing. I had to complete the syllabus by the end of the year, and improve on my methods. If the experiment was to mean anything, I had to show definite improvement.

I thought of beginning the teaching of history. I went through the textbooks in history. I was not satisfied. There were factual mistakes in one book; another had an antiquated outlook; the third seemed to have been written for the sole purpose of making money; the style and language in the fourth was poor. The popular book was interesting for adults but was difficult for students.

"These text-books won't do," I felt. "What do I do then? I think I will teach history through stories."

All the children liked stories. Hitherto, I had told them stories of all kinds - half truths, fantasies and fairy tales. Stories from history are not of this type. I started by weaving dry historical facts into the form of a story. The children began to be restless.

"Sir, this is not a story," they complained.

"Sir, we don't want this kind of story."

"Please Sir, tell us again the story you told us yesterday."

"Sir, let's go to play."

"Or let us sing songs."

I realised that I had failed. The children crowded around me and gently pulled my hand to take me out to play games.

That night I thought over the matter. Attempts to stick to the facts of history as they are, wouldn't do. And who was a witness to that which he writes about as facts? History can be made interesting through stories perhaps. I should tell them stories from history with a sprinkling of imaginary details, wherever possible.

Next day I began the story: "There was a big forest. It was the home of Bhils. Bhils are a strong healthy people and excellent archers. They could shoot down a bird in flight. There was a small hut in the forest. . ."

The children began to listen with interest. I was telling them the story of Vanaraj⁽¹⁾. I was adding colour to the facts.

The story remained unfinished that day.

Next day the boys did not allow me to take up any other work.

"Tell us the story of Vanraj," they said.

I told them the story. After it was over, I told them a little hesitatingly, "Those who want to hear this story again may please stand up."

The whole class stood up.

Next day the same story was repeated. I went on telling them stories from history, day after day. Nobody now wanted games or songs.

I was wondering how long their interest would last. Some one reported to the Education Office. Time will tell how the experiment has fared. And then will blame the teacher and say that he failed. But what about children who will lose one year?

I would not be surprised if some teacher had gone and made a complaint to the Education Officer. My boys were happy and making progress while the/boys in other classes were dissatisfied, inattentive and mischievous. They wanted their teachers to tell them stories and that made the teachers angry.

"My friends," I told them. "You must follow your path and let me follow mine. Mine is an experiment, but I am confident about it. I am as concerned as you that the children should not lose a year and I am, therefore, working hard. But I have my ways of doing things and you have yours. I could take my class elsewhere if you so desire."

One day the Education Officer came to see my class. He was a good person, no doubt, but he was a little dissatisfied to find the entire time devoted to stories. He told me, "Mr. Laxmiram, children won't learn history in this manner. They will enjoy it so long as it is a story. That is all. They won't retain anything of the subject matter. What would be the achievement - yours in teaching and theirs in learning?"

I felt he was perhaps right. After all, the boys must remember the main points in history. Otherwise they would fail the examination in history. I was bound by the constraints of the examination.

I tried a test. I was telling them the story of Vanaraj for the third time. I changed the details slightly. The boys noticed it. They said, "No, it was not that way. Last time you had said there were a thousand horses; and now you say fifty horses. How come? Last time the hut was on the bank of the river, now you say... And so it went on.

I was surprised. These boys had picked up many details. I felt confident that they would not forget.

But a story prepared with imaginary details is not suitable for the examination in history. These stories must be brought within the range of the examiner's telescope.

I wrote down the stories I had told them and gave them to the boys to read. I had abridged them wherever possible and put in historical facts with regard to date and place, wherever needed. The styles of story telling and of story writing are quite different. I took advantage of this and the pupils liked reading the stories.

I was still not sure whether they would be able to answer questions put to them on this subject.

I took out essential points of a story and wrote down each point in one sentence. This was the outline of the story - only the points. I gave these to the boys to read.

The students read them. They felt they could recall the whole story in detail while going through the outline. One day I ventured to ask them questions, to get the details of the story. To my surprise they answered the questions quickly and correctly. I was convinced that they would not only pass the examination, but would also not forget the facts required.

I invited the Education Officer just for a trial and requested him to test the boys in history. After the test he said, "This seems to be good: we should introduce this method of teaching history in other classes also."

A load was lifted off my chest

Four months had passed. The success that I had achieved had boosted up my morale. But much remained still to be done!

* A king of Gujarat, in the Middle Ages.

AT THE END OF THE TERM

As usual, every year, our school began to make preparations for the school social. The Commissioner was going to visit the school. The usual practice was that the school would arrange a programme which would include a skit, some recitations of poems and display of physical drills. The Commissioner would then give away the prizes and everybody in the school would get a packet of sweets.

The headmaster had collected all the boys and was selecting boys, who, in his opinion, could sing well or deliver dialogues properly. I had also received the notice, but my boys did not report for selection. The headmaster called for an explanation and I said, "The boys of my class won't participate in this programme."

"Why not?"

"This programme is meant only to please the Commissioner and to impress him," I answered rather bluntly.

"But this is our usual practice," protested the headmaster. "The Education Officer wants us to put up the programme."

"That may be so," I said, "but I still won't take part nor will my students."

"Then," said the headmaster, "I'm afraid I'll have to report to the Education Officer, that you are not cooperating and are creating trouble."

"Do write to him by all means," I answered. "I will give him an appropriate reply."

The headmaster, exasperated as he was, wrote down the report that very moment.

Meanwhile, the selection of students to take part in the programme went on. Shamji and Bhimji were selected to recite Sanskrit verses, Devaji and Khimji to recite poems, Ramnik Nemchand and Maganlal for the skit. A few well-built and good-looking boys were selected for drill.

The altercation with the headmaster had made me angry. I was simmering with rage within. "Bravo headmaster! I thought angrily. "Hats off to the school and the present educational practices where boys have been selected who have nothing to do with the subject they are chosen for! Shamji and Bhimji have good voices - true! They are Brahmins and might have heard Sanskrit verses at home. So they have been selected. But the poor boys have poor memories! They will wear themselves out trying to memorise Sanskrit verses. But such things always happen under such conditions. I went home unhappy. By the time I finished eating, I got a note from the Education Officer asking me to see him. I knew what the matter was.

With a silent prayer for the Almighty, I entered his office. The Education Officer was visibly angry. His face was flushed and he was frowning. His lips, bereft of the moustache, gave an impression of a fleeting smile, but he appeared to be very much annoyed. He asked me to take a seat and then proceeded to speak: "Why shouldn't your boys participate in the school social programme?" he asked me. "Some of them are quite good-looking and bright."

I was apparently cool but my mind was agitated. I replied, "So what? Are these good-looking, bright boys meant for the entertainment of others? Jumping Jacks, to dance before others so that the school may get kudos?"

My sharp reply toned him down a bit. He said, "What's wrong? This-is not a new thing. This has been going on for years. It is always done whenever the Commissioner pays a visit to the school."

"Excuse me, Sir!" I had also mellowed down a little by then, and said, "Maybe it is the usual practice: but we must stop it. This is sheer hypocrisy on your part. Besides, we're cheating the Commissioner!"

"How?"

"Whatever we are going to show him is the end result of compulsion and force. It is the result of cramming which again has been brought about through beating of the students by the teachers. It isn't a natural product of classroom work. The boys will rattle out mechanically whatever has been crammed into their minds, helped by promptings from back stage. This sort of thing will bring about much tension in the students and prevent real learning, and tension is harmful. The children who have been selected will go through well prepared for a show of this kind."

The Education Officer thought for a few seconds. Then he said, "But you talked of cheating. Where does the cheating come in?"

"Cheating lies in our effort to impress upon the Commissioner that our boys are bright, our school is good, our performance is exemplary." I answered. "But we know the real state of things, don't we?"

He remained silent. He was thinking. I continued further, "Not only do we indulge in hypocrisy, but we lead the boys also along that path. Of course, the Commissioner will pretend to be happy and will make a speech at the Prize Distribution - the usual one saying, 'I am pleased with the performance of the boys - their skilful and intelligent presentation. Some of the boys are regally very promising who may later become good scholars, good citizens and good human beings. I appreciate your scheme to give them prizes to encourage them and am pleased to give away the prizes today.' Will all this be from his heart? Does he not know that we have arranged all this to impress him? You, the parents and the teachers - every one of us knows what kind of scholars, citizens and human beings these boys would make, shorn of their veneer of memorised recitations and laboured preparations."

"You are an impractical crank! exclaimed the Education Officer. "You do not understand the ways of the world. For you, the principle alone is every thing! We have to consider all aspects here."

"All right, you consider all aspects. I will not be a party to it. I don't like all this show."

"So?"

"Exempt my class from this work."

"That is rather difficult Other teachers and officers and...and...you see, that adds to my problems.. Frankly, I had thought that the Commissioner would be pleased to see the well-prepared boys of your class. You don't seem to . . ."

I cut in, "Please exempt me from this programme at least. I will prepare some thing else to show the Commissioner. I shall arrange it in such away that the boys will not have to waste their time, they will not be under any strain and there will not be any pretensions. I am sure both of you will like it."

The Education Officer gave it a thought. Then, in an attempt to put an end to the controversy, he said, "All right, I will write to the headmaster to exempt you from this work. But see that you do not annoy him further. He is rather old fashioned and you are an enthusiastic young man. I have to keep both of you on my side. This is really a tough job."

I appreciated his attitude in my own way. Without a word I left.

Preparations were in full swing at the school and every one was excited by the prospect of the Commissioner's visit. On the day, the officials-big and small, the important people of the town and students were all present. We teachers also were on our toes, apprehensive but trying to look confident, for we were maintaining order. The headmaster called the mischief-mongers among the students aside and warned them: "Look, if you create any trouble today, you will get a sound thrashing tomorrow."

The Commissioner arrived. There was great applause, followed by music. The headmaster, looking smart and important read out the School Report in a very loud voice, stiffening up frequently, to reassure everyone and himself that he was not shivering in his shoes! By the time he reached the end of the report, he was perspiring and his voice had become hoarse.

Recitations and a skit followed the presentation of the report. The boys on the stage were speaking mechanically. There was no expression on their faces. They spoke loudly and moved their hands and feet when they spoke. The irony of it was that the poems which were selected were beautiful, interesting and written by good poets. They were, however, rather difficult for the boys to learn. So the boys were reciting and acting them out without understanding them and with a pretence of interest. So also with the skit. The dialogues were moralistic. Lines which would have appeared suitable for an adult seemed unbecoming for small children. The sermonising by children was ridiculous, I felt, and I am sure the Commissioner also felt that way. He seemed to be secretly amused. If the teachers had not been so pleased I am sure they too would have felt as I did.

The function drew to a close. The Commissioner expressed his pleasure and thanked all concerned. Prizes were distributed. The Education Officer, the headmaster and others were all satisfied with the day's programme. The Commissioner said, more, I am sure, as a matter of courtesy, that he was satisfied with the work done by the school.

In the end, the Education Officer requested the Commissioner, "Sir, this teacher, Mr. Laxmiram, wants to show you some thing. He has arranged some programme behind that curtain."

The Commissioner showed his willingness and so I went behind the curtain. With the third bell the curtain went up, to reveal the students of my class standing on either side of me. We recited the prayer, the same that we said every day in our class. The whole room was quiet. People were surprised at the sudden presentation of this additional item.

After the prayer, the skit 'To The Court I Shall Run' was taken up. One boy acted as 'the mouse. A string tied to his waist served as the tail. He had put a black cloth on his head and he was walking on all fours, making squeaking noises like a mouse. One boy acted as the tailor, another as the embroiderer, a third as the jeweler, a fourth as the drummer and a fifth as the king. I was the king's soldier.

All the characters were in their usual everyday clothes. The king was sitting on a table with dignity. He had worn his cap slightly tilted. I, as the soldier had twisted up my moustaches and worn a small turban. I had a knife in my hand. The drummer had a small drum. There were no other props.

The stage was very simple. The programme was written on a blackboard placed just behind the curtain. A part of the room had been cleaned up and a small carpet obtained from a boy was spread out there. There was nothing else in the school, which could be used to decorate the stage. Some small branches of a neem tree and a peepal tree had been cut and fixed on the walls. On the floor there were some drawings in chalk by the pupils.

Elders and youngsters, all watched the play quietly. The younger element - the pupils, were especially interested: the elders were rather surprised. "What is this? "What is this new thing!" "What kind of play is this? they asked.

I must say that the boys performed very well. They did not make any mistakes. There was no prompter. Whenever there appeared to be a likelihood of a mistake, I corrected them openly. The second play was 'Let Me Go Sir,' and the third one was The Hare, His Grand Highness.'

There was only one curtain and no backdrops or wings with scenery. A piece of cloth on the head or an occasional stick in hand were the only costumes provided. Everything else depended on the acting.

The programme ended with a prayer. I came forward and addressed the gathering as if I was the manager of a performing team.

"Dear Sirs! I said. We thank you all for sitting through our programme with interest I should like to say a few words in this connection and I request your indulgence.

"These are the pupils of standard four. When they were asked if they would like to present a couple of plays at the school social, they were very enthusiastic. Plays were selected immediately. These plays are dramatisations of the stories they have read and heard. They were told that the plays would be presented without any preparation just as we perform them every week in our class. The boys are not required to memorise their parts. They know the story. Every character knows his role and speaks on the stage spontaneously bearing in mind the context. There is no memorisation. Props and costumes are secondary things. We lay greater emphasis on expression and acting. When costumes and props are removed, the play depends for its effectiveness only on the acting and the ingenuity of the children, and these get full scope for development. You can judge from what you have seen here how far we have succeeded. Children enjoy this kind of activity. They need neither praise nor reward because the satisfaction and fulfilment and the activity are one. The work itself is complete fulfilment." I concluded my speech by thanking them all, once again, for the trouble they took to see our children's plays.

The Commissioner appeared to be delighted. I had noticed his reaction for quite some time. In his speech he congratulated both the teacher and the students, "for the real treat they gave us this afternoon." He thought the work was splendid and spoke of progressive schools in his own country - England. "It was really charming," he said, "to see little children playing different characters and turning into mice and tailors and kings,-also spontaneously and joyously. That is true education. All recitation and cramming were things of the past; they were ugly and soul-killing."

He paused for a while and then continued.

"I say again, I am very happy to see this. I won't give the children prizes. The genuine pleasure they felt while acting, is a greater and better reward than anything else. I am very glad indeed! Very, very glad "

The function was over. Every one was leaving. The Education Officer was very happy. He called me and introduced me to the Commissioner. He spoke to the Commissioner about my experiment. The Commissioner, shaking hands with me, congratulated me on my success and insisted that I go on with my experiments. He felt these experiments were of great worth whereas the usual conventional forms of education were totally hollow. I wondered how the Education Officer felt then!

I went home, very happy. That the Commissioner had congratulated me personally was one reason, of course; but the main reason was that my experiment had been appreciated. I thought: "The Commissioner is a political officer, how does he know about this new school and the like?" Later on I learnt that he had sent this son to a progressive school in Europe and so he was interested in new education.

Two or three teachers came to see me that night. They were inquisitive about what the Commissioner had said. Soon afterwards I got a note from the Education Officer asking me to see him. I went to his place.

The Education Officer was in a good mood. The Commissioner had been pleased with the school that day. He offered me a chair and took an easy chair for himself.

"Tell me first," he said. "Did none of the boys cram anything of the-plays that you presented?"

"Did you feel they did?"

"No; but how could they remember everything? They all spoke their dialogues very well."

"That's the point," I said. "They were told the stories. They liked the stories. They had identified themselves with the characters in the stories and experienced their feelings. They were merely expressing what they had come to accept as their own."

"Who taught them acting?"

"Nobody formally directed them. We stage plays every week. I also take part with them. I act my part as well as I can, and so do the boys."

"How can that be? I don't understand."

I said, They keep their eyes open. They observe. They see people at work and playcarpenters, potters' tailors, etc. They listen to what people say and observe their mannerisms. They hear their descriptions in the stories they are told. Besides, God has given them imagination. So they create a synthesis from their imagination and experience and act their parts spontaneously and naturally. They are their own critics. All the time they watch and observe to see whether their imagination and their experience are properly projected on the stage."

"This is some thing high-flown and difficult," said the Education Officer.

"But the boys don't have to understand it. This is my analysis of how thy are able to do what they do."

"Oh, well, said the Education Officer. Any way, you put up an excellent show. The Commissioner was Very pleased."

"The performance would have gone on even if he was not pleased," I said.

"You never told me that! I'm sure, the headmaster and other teachers also don't know."

"It's true," I said. "I didn't tell anyone. They think that all this is wasting time. They are busy preparing for the term ending examination."

"But they would certainly come to know it."

"No they won't," I said. "Every week we go out hiking. We arrange these activities there just for fun. I carry a bed-sheet with me. We make a curtain of it. Two boys stand apart holding two ends. The actors are on one side of it and the audience on the other.

"Do you really?"

"Yes, I do."

The Education Officer said, "Well then, we may introduce play-acting activities in all the classes of our school. The Commissioner likes these methods of teaching. The plays were really enjoyable. How about dispensing with the recitations?"

"I have already discontinued recitations. I'd be happy if they are discontinued in the other classes, too."

"We shall certainly do that," he said. "The Commissioner agrees that cramming is a most ineffective way of teaching. I remember my own days of cramming. But I was rather an intelligent lad. So it was not difficult for me. But the others had a hell of a time. Cramming. Damn cramming!"

I was amused. The Commissioner's visit today was quite a good thing! Well, this too was an experience in my experiment.

The terminal examination was fast approaching. Other classes were revising their lessons. History, geography, arithmetic and language lessons were being crammed over and over again to memory. The course prescribed for the term had already been completed once. I was in arrears: from the examination point of view I was lagging far behind. My class had to appear at the examination. I was not going to provide time for revision. I was saving time on that. My teaching was going to continue right up to the last day, because whatever was taught in the class was being revised by the boys themselves. I had devised class work in such a way that by itself it provided for revision. Thus when we played for the game of *Antakadi** we were revising the poems again and again.

But I had so far not even touched geography, science and grammar. I thought of taking up grammar. It is considered to be a difficult subject and one in which students are generally not interested. Why should the boys of the fourth standard be interested in it anyway? Is there anything interesting in it? What can give them knowledge useful to them at that stage of life when they have no interest in it? How would a student find it interesting and useful? I have come to the conclusion that grammar should be taught only to older students who have developed an interest in the study of language. Why teach a subject which bores children and is difficult to teach? There are many other subjects to learn.

But I was bent upon doing an experiment, if only because I wanted to abide by my conditions. I had to prepare the boys for the examination in grammar.

I could not dispense with it in practice simply because of my theoretical convictions. I had to show how grammar could be taught in standard four under the existing conditions.

I went through the syllabus in grammar. I felt I would not be able to proceed in the matter suggested. Definitions of nouns and verbs could be memorised but these definitions would mean nothing to the learners. I couldn't remember at what age I had been taught grammar at school. I just remembered the words. Many teachers confuse memory with understanding. I said good-bye to the current practice in teaching grammar. What new method could I devise to teach grammar? I gave much thought to these questions and prepared a plan. I devised an interesting game for them and within two months they had learnt to recognise and identify nouns, pronouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs in a sentence. They understood the distinction between the singular and the plural and between the masculine and the feminine genders. I was planning to take up recognition of the subjects and the objects when the Education Officer paid a visit to my class, one day. He was perplexed about what I was doing. He said, "So you have made the boys play cards! The terminal examination is almost here. Please don't waste time. Please do hurry up and go on with your teaching. We can't afford to lose time. We do want the experiment to succeed, don't we?"

I smiled a little and said, "Sir, I am quite aware of it. What is going on in the class is a game to teach grammar. Would you like to test the boys?"

The Education Officer spoke to the boys and they answered his questions. He was satisfied: "Oh, quite good work seems to have been done!" he said to me. "I'd like to know the method you have used. If grammar can be taught in so interesting a manner, we should introduce this method in all the classes." The next day was a holiday. The Education Officer invited me to his house in order to get from me the teaching method I had used with all the details.

So the next day I went to the Education Officer with my teaching aids for grammar, and I told him, "Sir,

this is the first of my teaching-aids on these cardboards pieces. I have written nouns of the masculine gender on one side and those of the feminine gender, on the other. You will observe that the nouns having regular, and irregular forms of feminine gender have both been listed on the cards. My first job is to give these cards to the pupils forbad. The boys read them several times. They get acquainted with the nouns of the two genders in this way. I have given the captions 'Masculine Gender' and 'Feminine Gender' as the case may be. Their attention therefore is drawn to the genders of the nouns. This is the initial introduction to the two genders of nouns.

"One day I asked them to give me the feminine of the noun ox. 'Cow,' they said.

'Give me the feminine of lion?

'Lioness,' they said.

'Boy?' 'Girl'

'Man?' 'Woman.'

'Dog?' 'Bitch'

'Cock?' 'Hen'

"The question and answer went on like this. My plan had worked. The initial introduction had given them an inkling.

"Then I took up a game. I would write a masculine noun on the board and the boys would write its feminine. They followed me very well. When I checked their lists, I found very few mistakes and those made by a very small number of pupils!

"Then I took up another game. I gave them a pair of boxes and told them that one box contained the masculine nouns and the other contained the feminine nouns. Each boy was to pick up a noun and find its counterpart from the other box. The children played the game for hours without getting bored or restless."

"But how could all the boys play with just one pair of boxes?" asked the Education Officer.

"I had to find a way out for it," I said. "I drew up ten circles on one side of the classroom and ten on the other. In the circles on one side, I placed the masculine nouns and in those on the other side, I placed the feminine nouns. Circles were assigned to one boy each. A student on one side would pick up his card and pair it up with the corresponding noun of the other gender on the other side and leave his card there. The game would be over when all the cards were paired up. It would then start all over again. If only two boys were playing, each would keep a box and try to pair up the masculine and the feminine."

"Quite interesting," said the Education Officer, "but, how did you manage about the neuter gender?"

"Once the boys got well acquainted with the masculine and the feminine genders, I wrote the words 'chair', 'table', 'holder', 'duster', etc. on the blackboard under the heading 'Nouns of the Neuter Gender. The boys read the words and wondered what kind of a gender this was? They could not decide on the basis of the understanding that they had so far. So I told them that the words of that type were of neuter gender. I wrote again on the blackboard, 'Words of the Neuter Gender'.

"One boy asked, 'What does the neuter gender mean?'

" 'Nouns which are neither masculine nor feminine are neuter gender nouns,' I said.

"They seemed to understand. I told them to draw three columns on their slates -one for writing the masculine nouns, one for writing the feminine nouns and one for the nouns of the neuter gender. I dictated

sixty words asking them to write the nouns in appropriate columns. Surprisingly, a large majority of them had hardly made a mistake: I concluded therefore, that it was better to acquaint them first with the words directly instead of bothering them with definitions. This could well be done through games. Rules and definitions can be given gradually at a later stage."

"But you could have asked them whether they used 'he', 'she', or 'it' for the noun as a test to determine its gender," said the Education Officer.

"That would have been the rule of the thumb; mere cramming without understanding. Now that they have got the concept, it would be all right to tell them about this test just for fun."

"Very well!" the Education Officer was greatly interested. "What did you do next?" he asked.

"Then I took up numbers -singular and plural, in the same manner."

"So you devised a game for that too!"

"Yes. The boy having a card with a noun in singular would try to find out the card with its plural and pair up."

"I see! But how did you teach nouns, verbs, etc.?"

"Well, I took up verbs first. My pupils knew how to read. I told them that they were to do what I wrote on the blackboard. I would write a word, which would tell them what to do. They were to act accordingly. The boy whom I would name was to do it. Then I wrote the word 'stand' on the blackboard. I followed up with words 'sit', 'run', 'walk', 'dance', 'read', 'speak', 'play', 'fall', 'jump', 'swings, etc.

"The children enjoyed doing these simple activities. They asked for more words of that kind. I went on writing such words and they went on doing the actions indicated. The next day, I wrote on a card the words 'sit, stand, run,' etc. and gave them their name! 'Some Verbs' I wrote. The children read this. The day after, I brought a box marked 'Box of Verbs'. Boys opened it and took out cards on which I had written out some words. They were to act according to the verb written on the card. The boys danced, jumped, ran and fell according to the verbs on the cards. Then I asked them to write out some verbs they could think of. They wrote out new verbs.

"Then I started a new game. I told them that I would ask a boy to do something. They were to describe what the boy did and write it on the blackboard. I told Jagjivan to run. He ran. I asked the boys, 'What is Jagjivan doing?"

'He is running' they said.

"I asked another boy, 'Which activity is he doing?"

" 'Running.'"

"Then I began to ask them one by one to 'jump, write, read', etc. and asked other boys to write the activity that was being performed on the blackboard. When I looked at the blackboard, most of the boys had written the verbs correctly. Of course, one or two, who had not understood properly, had made mistakes.

"Carrying on further, I told the boys to do and then write on the blackboard for themselves what they had done. I told Jagjivan to run. He ran and then went to the blackboard and wrote the word 'ran.'"

"We continued with the games in this manner. I encouraged them to play by themselves and write. They were quite enthusiastic.

"One day I told the class, 'When Ramji runs, he performs the activity of running. Now tell me, which activity is performed when Shamji writes?'"

" 'Writing', they said.

"I put them similar questions using other verbs and got their answers. Then I wrote on the blackboard the words 'runs - ran, writes - wrote, walks - walked, etc. I explained that those were verbs; each word indicated some activity. The boys understood."

"Then?" asked the Education Officer.

"I asked them to give me as many verbs as they could. They wrote down the verbs and all slates were full. Then I took up another game. I wrote a sentence on the blackboard:

" 'Ramji runs: Champak reads.'

I told the boys to retain the verbs in the sentence and rub out other words. The boys did this correctly. I stopped teaching verbs at the stage.

I agree that the boys would surely learn that way, but it would take a very long time, said the Education Officer. They would have to play games for quite a long time.

Playing games is interesting. Isn't it better to spend a little more time for worthwhile results rather than try to cut on time and then have bad results which would ultimately mean a waste of the entire time spent?

All right, said the Education Officer. What did you do about nouns?

I wrote down some nouns on the cards as usual and hung up the cards in the classroom. Boys read and re-read all the nouns on the cards. I had collected all varieties of nouns. The nouns were arranged in separate word groups. So, reading nouns was a pleasant exercise for the boys. I wanted the boys to learn without any overt formal teaching by me. Boys were now able to distinguish between nouns on the cards and the verbs on the cards. They were getting more and more quick in distinguishing between the two groups of words.

One day I told them, 'Bring me...' I wouldn't say what. 'Bring me some thing which has a name. Ask the thing what its name is. If it has a name, bring it.'

The boys understood. They went to the blackboard and asked it. 'What is your name?' and then replied themselves: 'The blackboard.' So they brought the blackboard. Similarly they brought the table, the chair, the duster, a stick, a book, a slate, a pen, a box, anything which they could name. One boy caught hold of a pupil in the neighbouring class and brought him.

'What is this?' I asked

'He has a name,' the boy replied

'How do I bring the sun?' one boy asked.

'I can't bring that tree,' another boy complained.

"I realised that they had got the basic idea of a noun. Then I brought a box containing slips of paper on each of which I had written nouns, a name or a noun. The boys were now accustomed to this sort of game. They picked up a handful of slips and read out the nouns. I had written all kinds of nouns. One boy came up with a question, 'How is *green* a noun?'

"I showed him a leaf and then said. The leaf has a colour: what name shall we give to that colour?' The boy smiled and went away.

"I mixed the nouns and verbs and then asked the boys to sort out nouns and verbs separately. The game went on quite well. The boys were able to give a convincing performance of their understanding of nouns

and verbs.

"Then I took up another game. I would ask them to give me a noun that would go with a given verb and a verb that would go with a given noun. For example, with the given noun a horse, the verb would be runs or ran: with the given verb reads, the required noun would be, say, a boy. I showed them how the words were to be arranged. The game went on well.

"Next, I wrote some sentences on the blackboard and asked the boys to write down on their slates, nouns and verbs from there separately. For a variation, I would ask them to rub out the nouns or the verbs from the sentences or to speak out nouns or verbs. This way the boys were able to pair nouns and verbs."

"Right you are!" said the Education Officer. "Really the boys must have found things quite easy. But you had to spend on teaching, aids. One has to have an insight like yours.

"Spending a little amount of money is nothing if the boys can be saved from cramming. I spent some money, my own. I used old cardboard that I had, to make boxes, and old loose papers to prepare slips."

"I will see that you get this expense reimbursed," the Education Officer said.

"I would rather have your acceptance of my method of teaching than reimbursement."

"We will consider that. Now tell me, what did you do next?"

"I took up adjectives. I hope I am not boring you: grammar is a dull subject. Added to that is my habit of spelling out every detail," I said.

"Nothing wrong in giving details. Unless you give the details, how can I get the full idea? he said, and then added, "Let us have some tea before you proceed."

The Education officer was a connoisseur. He stocked good quality tea and knew I enjoyed good tea too. We spent about twenty minutes for tea. The tea refreshed us and put us in a good mood. We went on with our conversation.

"I gave the boys cards with adjectives written on them as usual. I had written many adjectives and the boys were interested. They read the adjectives. One boy asked, 'Sir, what does the word adjective mean?'

"I said, 'Find out for yourself; all these are adjectives.'

"Gradually they began to understand. I went on with the games. Now they were reading and sorting out cards containing nouns, verbs and adjectives.

"Then I took up a new game. I told the boys, 'Get me what I ask for; get me a pencil..'

"A boy brought a pencil.

'Get me a red pencil.' A red pencil was given to me.

" 'Get me a blue pencil.' A blue pencil was brought.

" 'Take away the pencil,' I said.

" 'Which one?' the boy asked. "

'The red one,' I said.

"One by one I used the words blue, yellow, long, short, etc.

" 'Pick up a pencil,' I said.

"A boy picked up a pencil.

" 'Now pick up the green pencil.' The green pencil was picked up.

" 'Pick up the yellow pencil.'

'Pick up the long one'

"And it went on like this. Then I asked; 'Which particular pencil did you pick up?'

""The yellow on.'

" 'And you?'

"The long one.'

"I wrote on the blackboard: These words - called adjectives, tell you something particular, something specific about things.

"Then I took up boxes of nouns and adjectives and told the boys to pair up nouns with suitable adjectives and *vice versa*. A boy picked up the adjective red and picked up the noun horse to go with it. Other boys started making pairs like this. I just watched them doing it. Occasionally a pair was mis-matched.

"I tested the boys in my own way. They had got the concept of adjectives and so they were able to identify correctly nouns and adjectives."

"You have devised an interesting game," said the Education Officer. "Nouns, verbs and adjectives have been introduced very well. Now what about giving them definitions?"

"Definitions are already implied. However, I would not give them formal definitions given in the textbooks. And I feel that you should not ask questions about formal definitions at the examination. You may ask them to form a sentence instead." "I don't want to examine your boys in grammar," the Education Officer said. "I want to introduce this method in the entire school. Students have a very hard time cramming rules of grammar."

"Sir, my back still aches with the thrashing I received while learning grammar at school. Our teacher used: o beat us when we failed to give expected answers."

"They haven't stopped beating children even today," said the Education Officer.

"Why don't you stop it then?"

"It is not entirely in my hands: maybe to some extent. But then I feel let's leave it. If we can teach well, corporal punishment will disappear on its own. Take your own case. You did not have to beat anyone while teaching grammar. Now let me know something of your method for pronouns."

"There is nothing new about it. It was just an easy game. I asked boys, 'Who am I?'

" 'Mr. Laxmiram,' they said.

" 'Who are you then?'

" 'Shamji,'"

"Who is he?"

'Dhanji'

"Then I wrote on the blackboard:

I-----Laxmiram

You-----Shamji

He-----Dhanji

We-----Laxmiram, Shamji, Dhanji, Bhimji

You-----Ravi, Lavji, Trikam, Devji.

They-----Pupils of standard three, Monji, Mulchand, Lakhamshi, Rupsingh.

'The children read what I had put up on the blackboard. Then I told them, The words I, You, He, They are called pronouns.'

"One day, a boy asked, 'What is a pronoun?'"

"Think about it yourself,' I said.

"Another boy said, 'Sir, mine means Layji's and yours means Laxmiram's, isn't it?'"

"A third boy said, 'Then mine, yours, and his should all be pronouns.'

"'Correct.' I said.

"One boy still persisted : 'But what is a pronoun?'"

"I wrote on the blackboard:

Ramji has a slate.

Ramji has a pen.

Ramji is a Brahmin.

Ramji goes to school.

Ramji comes to school early every day.

Laxmiram will be your teacher.

Laxmiram will teach you.

Laxmiram will take you hiking.

"The boys read the sentences. Then I replaced the word Ramji from the second sentence onward by the word He, and replaced the word Laxmiram by the word I. The boys read the sentences again. They seemed to understand. I asked them, Tell me, where should I use a pronoun?'"

"To replace Ramji,' some said. Others said, To replace Laxmiram.'

"'Are the words Ramji and Laxmiram nouns or verbs?' "

"'Nouns.'

"'So what replaces a noun?'"

" 'A pronoun.' "

The Education Officer laughed. "You seem to be quite a teacher. You describe every thing in good detail."

"How can I avoid being one? Had I been a lawyer, I could have been brief."

Though interested, the Education Officer was tired by now. So I sought his leave.

"I propose to exempt your class from the examination in grammar," he said. "You have yet to take up tenses and cases. Please let me know when you take them up. I want to do some thing about the teaching of grammar next year."

I wished him good day, came home and lay down on my bed, dead tired.

*Antakadi: a game in which one party recites a stanza of a poem beginning with the last letter of the one recited by the other party.

The terminal examinations drew nearer. The Education Officer himself was coming as the examiner. He liked to work as the examiner.

I had kept my class ready in my own way. I had told him beforehand that my class should be taken up after all other classes had been examined. I wanted all other teachers and the headmaster to be present at the examination of my class. I had suggested further that five pupils from each class be allowed to remain present at the time of the examination of my class.

I was calm and relaxed on the day of the examination. There was no tension in my mind. I was not worried about passes and failures. I had no reason to be worried. I had told the pupils, " You will do exactly as you do every day. You are, of course, going to pass the examination; but we want to show others what we have been doing."

I had arranged everything behind a curtain in my usual way. Everybody was seated in front of the curtain. Then I drew the curtains open.

The children of other classes were sitting there in separate groups. To each group, a pupil of my class was telling a story. The story telling went on in full swing. Each pupil had selected his own favourite story. They had kept the storybooks with them for reference in case they forgot. Each pupil was telling the story in his own style and was obviously enjoying it with his listeners. Each one knew the story-telling technique. The story was told with proper expression, intonation and action. The listeners were engrossed, the teachers just watched in surprise.

"This is one of the tests of my class," I said.

Test of what?" asked a teacher.

"Test of the command over the language, of the ability to narrate, a test of memory and acting," I replied. The teachers waited expectantly for the next test.

Again the curtains were drawn. The boys were now sitting in a circle. The programme written on the blackboard said that it was the game of ANTAKADI. One boy recited a stanza of a poem: another followed him with a stanza of another poem beginning with the last letter of the stanza said by the previous boy. This went on till everyone in the circle had his turn. Then it began all over again.

"Why haven't you divided the boys into two teams? There must be two teams."

"No, Sir I" I said. "I have not done so on purpose. A match between teams ends with victory and defeat. That gives rise to competition and jealousy. In my arrangement if one boy does not know, the next boy

takes over and the game goes on. A boy may be unable to say his piece once, but he has another chance and may be able to do so in the next round."

The Education Officer blinked and stroked his chin.

The boys were to play for a short while only. But they enjoyed the game so much that they did not stop even when the bell rang. I gave them some more time and then dropped the curtain. I came out and told the audience, "You must have noticed how many lines of poems in the text-book are on the tips of their tongues. I have been making them play this game every day during the poetry period."

When the curtains were again drawn apart, the boys were sitting in a circle and were asking each other riddles. There was great excitement.

"O, riddles and puzzles!" said the Education Officer. "I have heard them in my childhood. But are they in the syllabus?"

"The syllabus provides for the teaching of language. The objectives are to encourage their curiosity and develop and increase their knowledge. The boys love this game. They know an endless number of riddles! And each riddle has its own value from the point of view of language. They may not be there in the syllabus explicitly. All the same, I have taken them and I hope you will have them included specifically in the syllabus next year."

Then we had a word-building game. Each boy was to say a new word beginning with the last letter of the word said by the boy preceding him. The game was easy. But when it became known that each boy had selected a specific subject restricting his words related to that subject only, the game became interesting. Some boys restricted themselves to the names of rivers and others of mountains: some gave the names of Hindus and others gave Muslim names.

I told my teacher friends, "I advise my boys to use dictionaries, maps, etc. for new words. That way they get many new words. I find them often collecting words of different groups instead of just whiling away their time. They help one another in this search for new words and prepare the notes."

"This game has quite a potential," approved the Education Officer. "Not only would the game help students to acquire information and general knowledge, it would also encourage an intelligent study of sources." Then, looking at me intently he said, "You seem to be inventing new things!"

One teacher made a remark that the Education Officer didn't hear. "He has come here specifically to do this kind of work. He doesn't have to teach. He can have all the fun! We break our backs trying to teach and he does nothing but have fun!"

Another said, "Times have changed now. It is the new educationist's turn now. Gone are the days when wealth meant cash in hand and learning meant what was on the tip of the tongue. Now one has to play to learn. God knows how they will fare in future! Nobody seems to be interested in studies. One who takes the boys to play becomes popular."

I was preoccupied with talking to the pupils. So I hadn't heard these remarks. I heard about them later.

As I blew the whistle, all the boys fell in line with brooms in hand. I led their drill with brooms. Then I made them clean the premises. They went round the entire building and cleaned up every nook and corner. They collected all the refuse and bi-ought it to us in a basket.

The Education Officer and other teachers watched.

This was a part of the examination of our class. The Education Officer said, "I don't see the propriety of having a drill with the brooms."

"Squalor is the biggest problem of this country," I said. "So long as squalor and dirt reign I see no way that our country can progress. That is why my first task has been to declare a war on squalor. We shall have to fight to eliminate filth. The drill with brooms is only symbolic. My first lesson to the boys is this broom drill. We don't do anything till the room is quite clean. Now the boys have learnt to dislike dirt and filth."

While we were talking, the boys had washed their hands and feet and were back for further orders. I blew the whistle again.

"Your experiment seems to be a strange one!" said the Education Officer. "How much of this kind of work have you done while teaching standard four?"

"My experiment provides for such activities. I must teach them to standard one before I teach them to standard four,"

While we were talking the boys had all gone out into the compound. They had climbed the trees. On my next whistle call, they jumped down on the ground and at a third whistle call, they again climbed up and came down when I gave the fourth call.

"Dear me! This is a queer sort of education!" said the headmaster. "This can be learnt without any teaching. What kind of education is this?"

I told the headmaster, "Nowadays one does not learn these things without being taught. We do not allow such things to be learnt or taught. We do not even seem to want them taught."

"No, that is not true," said the headmaster.

"All right then," I said, "ask the boys of our school. How many of them can climb a tree?"

The Education Officer asked the boys of other classes who were sitting there to go and climb the trees. But there were hardly two or three who could.

"Sir," I said, "I have trained my boys in so many activities. All this forms a part of my experiment in education." I then added in a lighter vein, "Sir, their names are in the list of examinees. You should give them marks."

The Education Officer also took it lightly and said, "And you! Do you also want marks?"

At one more call of the whistle, the boys took out their spinning tops and strings from the cupboard and started playing with the spinning tops. It was not, however, a purposeless game that boys play normally in the streets. Here the boys played without noise or disorder. Nobody cheated. A definite place was assigned to each and they followed the instructions of their leader.

All those present had played spinning tops in their childhood. So they enjoyed the game.

"Who taught them to play with spinning tops?" asked the Education officer. "These boys seem to be playing according to rules and in an orderly manner!"

"Sir," I said, "our practicing ground is the river bank. We go there for our outings and there we have many activities of this kind. They learn many things just through play."

"You are right," said the Education Officer. "Recently I read that children learn through play." Then he looked at the headmaster and said, "When are you going to introduce these things in our school?"

"How can we complete the syllabus if we are to take up such things?" the headmaster asked. "This gentleman is not a regular teacher. He does whatever he can and gets away with it saying, 'It was an experiment. I did what I could! The rest I couldn't. The boys couldn't do it.' And you too would agree and

say that the results of the experiment must be accepted whatever they be. We on the other hand are bound by the syllabus.

You, yourself, send out memos inquiring why the syllabus has not been completed, why the results are bad and why the work has not been completed in time."

The Education officer smiled a little. He said nothing. I could see that he was annoyed but he restrained himself from making any comment.

I gave a call on the whistle. The boys took off their shirts and fell in a line. Everyone stood erect. They were well-built and clean -their hands, feet, hair -were all clean. Brahmin boys had clean sacred threads. There were no dirty fingernails and their hair was nicely cut. Their eyes were clear, their caps clean.

The Education Officer smiled and said, "How long have you been preparing for this? You must have put in a lot of effort to get them to learn personal hygiene."

"Preparations have been going on for the last six months: I have been working at this for six months and you know that."

I blew the whistle once more. The boys put on their shirts, fell in a line again, saluted and broke off.

The headmaster said a little sarcastically, "So the examination is over!"

"Not yet," I said. "Would you all please come to the neighbouring classroom?"

"Oh sure. You have taken up that room for the last several days and have not allowed any one of us to enter it," said the headmaster. "You were collecting something. Weren't you?"

"See it for yourself," I said.

We entered the room.

"Oh, this seems to be a small museum," said the Education Officer.

"I had guessed it," said the headmaster. "The students have been running about bringing and arranging things.

"They were all very enthusiastic about this work," I said. "I had told them that they could arrange the exhibits in any way they liked. I would not guide them in any way."

"Have the boys arranged all these things on their own?" asked the Education Officer.

"Yes Sir,"

"I can't believe it! It's not possible! Every thing has been arranged in such good taste.

I did not answer. My work was speaking for itself.

"Where did you collect all this from?" asked the Education Officer. "All this is very important for nature study."

"From nature itself," I answered. "We collected these things during our outings for nature-study."

"Perhaps from the place where they went hiking," said the headmaster.

"Splendid work!" said the Education Officer. "Don't disband this museum now. It will be useful to the whole school. We shall ask other teachers to add to this collection."

"When will the teachers teach then?" murmured the headmaster.

The boys had prepared a catalogue of their collection. The Education Officer read it and was pleased. "These boys deserve a prize," he said.

"Sir, collecting for the museum was in itself a matter of joy. That was their prize. This museum itself is their prize."

"Even then . . . , the Education officer left the sentence unfinished. Again I remained silent.

There were toys in one corner of the room.

"Who made these toys?" asked the Education Officer.

"The boys of course. I have no hand in anything that you find here."

"But when did they make and bake all these terracotta toys?"

"The toys were prepared on river bank and were baked there on weekends," I said.

"You seem to have considerable grey matter? Your experiment is wonderful? You do not have any equipment; and you go to the riverbank and improvise with field clay. Well done!" he exclaimed. He was very pleased.

I did not allow him to say anything more and interrupted him. "Would you mind sitting in the verandah for a while? I would like to show you something else."

As they took their seats, the headmaster seemed pensive. He said, "Sir, we may perhaps do all these things; but then when do we teach?"

I brought some cardboards. On one there were specimens of the students' handwriting as it was when I took charge of the class. Another card had the specimen of their handwriting the day before. The cardboards had a heading: Progress Cards for Handwriting.

Everybody appreciated the progress made in improving the handwriting of the boys except for one teacher who whispered to another, "This must be a demonstration specially written by a boy with good handwriting."

I resented the insinuation, but I disregarded it. It was too mean to be taken seriously. The Education Officer asked, "How did you bring about this change?"

"By various methods."

"Suppose we introduce those methods in our schools; how about that?"

"It can be done," I said. "I will be able to get you the results."

I brought another book. It contained information as to how many books had been read by each pupil of my class during the past six months. Each page had the name of the pupil at the top and, below it, the pupil had entered in his own handwriting, the names of books read by him. Towards the end of the notebook, I had worked out some figures namely the total number of books read by the pupils and the total number of pupils; the average number of books read by a pupil; names of pupils who had read the highest and the lowest number of books, etc. I had also noted which books were most popular and which were least

popular. Books read by pupils had been classified subject wise indicating preferences of the boys for subjects.

The Education Officer saw all this and he was surprised. "So many books have been read by the boys! And on so many subjects! When did they read?"

"It is a fact. Sir, that they have read these books. They read under my supervision," I said.

The Education Officer asked the headmaster, "How many books have been read by the pupils of the seventh standard of your school during the past six months?"

How can they read so many books of this kind? If they read such books, where would they find the time for regular study of history, geography, geometry, etc.?"

The Education Officer did not speak. He appeared to be thinking. Then he told me, "Your boys pass the examination in language without any formal test. Now what is left?"

I brought the manuscript magazine prepared by the pupils. The Education Officer asked, "Are all these articles written by pupils?"

"Yes Sir,"

"There seem to be two or three poems therein. Are they also by the boys?"

"Yes Sir. Two boys have been trying their hand at writing poems of late."

"Do you make any changes or corrections in what they write?"

"No, Sir? Not so far. They are published in the same form they were written in."

"Are these original works of pupils or borrowings? Do you give them ideas for writing?"

"What is the point in copying out others' writings? I tell them simply to write what occurs to them and publish what they write. They like their writings and I publish them all."

"Is this something special for the terminal examination?"

"No Sir; we have published this magazine every month for the past three months. It has been submitted now for the terminal examination, but it was not specially prepared for it."

The Education Officer was pleased and nodded with approval. "Quite a difficult job!" he said. "You are doing exceedingly well. What a fine achievement in six months!"

The headmaster intervened; "When will the examination in arithmetic, geography and history take place? Are we supposed to remain present in the afternoon?"

Perhaps he wanted to taunt me. He must have known that I had done very little in arithmetic and geography.

I said, "I have not been able to do any thing in geography and arithmetic. But I will take up these subjects before the annual examinations. In history also, whatever has been done is note up to the mark."

"Oh," said the headmaster. "The main things have been left out then!"

"That is your point of view, not his," said the Education Officer. "In your opinion the teaching of history, geography and arithmetic is the most difficult part of education." The Education Officer was in a good mood. So the headmaster retorted. "Sir? It is so from your point of view also. You also want results in these

subjects."

The light talk eased the atmosphere. Everyone prepared to leave. The Education Officer asked, "Where is your Result Sheet?"

"I have not prepared it at all," I said.

"Then your class is exempted from the examination."

THE LAST GATHERING

A few days after the terminal examination, I was chatting with my colleagues in the school.

Chandrashankar said, "You are a wonderful person! I must admit that your experiment has succeeded. We did not believe that anything like this was possible in a primary school."

Bhadrashankar countered him, "He knows English. So he reads English books and gets new ideas for experiments from those books."

Champaklal said, "Perhaps so; but he can afford it. He doesn't have to worry about money and isn't bothered about the results. He doesn't lose anything if the experiment fails."

"How can we undertake such experiments? Experiments need time," said Venkital. "And who has the time to think and prepare for all this? We have private tuitions to mind, we have to report at the Education Officer's every evening, look after our children, keep up social relations and so on. How many things can we look after? He's a free bird; he can afford to do these things."

I said at last, "Look here; we can do much more in primary education than we actually do. The entire system of primary education can be transformed. What it needs is a person determined to change it. The world today, physically and socially, is different from what it was. People have changed it. One must have enthusiasm, self-confidence and unswerving dedication to the cause. Experiments do not succeed merely because one knows English. That is a lame excuse one resorts to when one doesn't want to work. The main thing is the intuition to innovate. And that comes from the yearning of one's soul for a cause. Mr. Champaklal, nobody is more concerned about the result than the one who has undertaken the experiment. You seek better results for pecuniary gains. For me, a failure would mean loss forever of any opportunity to undertake an experiment. Not only that; but my failure would close the doors for others also in future. I must tell Venibhai that we have enough time to keep up social relations and for idle talk. And who asks you to call at the Education Officer's house every day? We would not have to flatter him if we do our work well. Only those who do not work, have to resort to such servility. Why should the boys need private tuitions? If we teach well in the class, who would need private tuitions at home? The need for private tuitions arises only when we do not teach well in the school."

Shivashankar intervened, "But my dear friend, why do you forget our low salaries? You get a fat salary; we don't. What are we to do?"

"Ask for a higher salary. You will get it."

"Indeed!" said Vishvanath. "Instead of a raise in the salary we would get the sack!"

"Let all the teachers write and put up a demand. Let us see how many get sacked. I say, why not kick the job ourselves before they kick us out? Be a bit bolder. I am bold. So I can have my way." Bhadrashankar said, "What about our maintenance then I?"

"Maintenance? God helps only those who help themselves. There is no shortage of jobs. I would work even as a sweeper for my livelihood. I would not stay half-starved like you. Your present salaries are niggardly."

"You do not seem to realise that there are any number of persons ready to take up our jobs," said Vishvanath.

"We should picket. We must not give the charge to the new incumbents. We must not allow them to take over our places. We must have picketing round-the-clock at the school. We should not allow them to fall into the pit into which we have fallen. We would beseech them to find other trades or professions, rather than fall into this rut of starvation, flattery and laziness."

We talked and talked. I found the teachers responding enthusiastically. I felt that a spark had been ignited

at the core of the old servile system.

I began to think of teaching geography. I went through the geography textbooks and put them aside in disappointment. I felt rather annoyed when I read the syllabus. Why should boys memorise the names of rivers and mountains? I thought I do not remember them myself. Yesterday even the Education Officer was trying to find the route to Australia with the help of a map. Who remembers geography crammed in childhood? Why teach such geography to young children? I was able to understand geography only when I went to Africa. It was only then that I developed an insight into geography. Today I am greatly interested in geography. I find the subject quite useful. But why teach and explain all this to children at this stage? I do not think it would be wise to follow this syllabus. The textbook amused me. Should I see the Education Officer? I think I had better seek his permission to deal with geography in my own way so that the pupils may develop an aptitude for and an orientation towards geography.

I went to the Education Officer.

"Well," he said.

"Suppose we drop geography as a subject from the curriculum. May we?" I said.

"Oh no", he said. "That's not possible," he said. "Geography is a very important subject. It is more useful than history nowadays. Our experiment does not provide for dropping any subject. The aim is to teach the subject in a better way. You may use any method you like to teach. But you must be able to show other teachers that geography can be an interesting subject and can be taught well. That is a test of your experiment."

The Education Officer silenced me very cleverly. I pleaded, "But I do not want this syllabus and the prescribed text-book. I will teach geography in my own way. I am sure you will have no cause for disappointment!"

"I also expect the same thing," said the Education Officer. After a little pause he raised another point.

"What do you think about the examinations that we hold? Protagonists of new education are opposed to examinations in toto. And it is an evil, no doubt. But we have to run the department. So we cannot dispense with examinations. We have to have results. If we abolish the examinations, the teachers may not teach. Even if an honest teacher does teach, there would be no means to test whether he has taught properly. We must have a tool to find out whether the pupils have benefited. What do you say?"

"Yours is a genuine problem. So long as every student goes to school and any kind of teacher is entrusted with teaching, examinations will have to be there. They can be abolished only when pupils come to school with an inner urge to learn and are taught by teachers who know the art of teaching and are enthusiastic about it. The mercenary system of the kind that we have at present will always have place for examinations."

"Of course; but I should like to consider if some improvements could be made in that system."

I said, "At present you hold only two examinations in a year, viz. the terminal examination and the annual examination. You can have monthly examinations instead. If a student has to face examinations, it is better he gets more acquainted with them. Familiarity lessens apprehension and makes the burden bearable. Secondly, the examination must be regarded not as a test of achievement but as a means to diagnose the pupil's weak points and to alert the weak students. This is the big difference. Thirdly, those students who are confident that they know the subject well, may be exempted from appearing at the examination. Pupils may appear at the examinations voluntarily to find out their weaknesses. Those who do not appear at the examinations will not have the opportunity to find out their weaknesses. Examinations may be held in respect of such subjects only for which valid tests are possible. There should be no examination in other subjects. Further, we should allow pupils to see textbooks during examinations to answer the questions. The way a pupil uses the textbook will itself be his test. Then again, we should classify results under three

categories only, viz. unfit for promotion to the higher class, may be promoted subject to improvement in weak subjects, and, fit for promotion to the higher class. We should abolish the ranking system wherein a pupil is declared to have obtained the first rank or the second rank and so on,"

"I should appoint you as my deputy next year," said the Education Officer.

I smiled and continued, "Teachers should themselves be the examiners. They know, more than any one else, the abilities of their pupils and reasons for their weak performance. They can best judge whether a pupil is fit for promotion or not. Sure, the Deputy Education Officer is needed to advise how the examination should be held, to see whether the teacher knows how to examine."

"Quite a new idea," said the Education Officer.

"Yes," I said.

I wanted to say more about the examinations. But by now it was his dinnertime. He rose to go and told me with a smile, "Well, well, we shall talk about this again. By the way, why not give a talk on this topic to the teachers?"

I got up to take his leave. I said to myself, "Teachers are not going to be any wiser by my talk. It is very difficult to take them out of the 'rut' of the present examination system. Only an order from the Education Officer would make the change possible. But the poor fellow ... !"

Boys of standard four are expected to be familiar with geographical terms to some extent as also with the subject matter. So I called for maps. I hung up on the wall the maps of Kathiawar, Gujarat and the Bombay Presidency. The boys were surprised. I had not taught geography so far.

They tore off pages from their notebooks and began to prepare paper cones to wear them on their little fingers.

"Why these paper cones? I asked

"To memorise the map," they said.

I was taken aback! Memorise a map? Such teaching of geography was ridiculous! Just for the fun of it I asked a boy to point out Bhavnagar in the map.

The boy ran his eyes over the map of the Bombay Presidency. He read Bombay, Ahmedabad and Hyderabad. He looked downward and read Poona! Looked sideways and read Porbunder. Two or three boys after him had already located Bhavnagar and were eager to give the answer. At last one boy pointed out Bhavnagar on the map without being asked to do so.

"Which side of Kathiawar is Bhavnagar situated on? Give me the direction."

The boys looked up and down, right and left, did some mental work according to some rule and then said. "In the north, Sir."

"North is up there," another boy said. "This side is called the east."

I could not help laughing. "Up there it is the sky: how can the north be up there?"

"No, Sir, high up is the north and down there is the south," said other boys.

One boy said, "Lengthwise it is north-south and breadth wise it is east-west."

Another boy said, "It is the east where the sun rises."

"Where is the sun in this map? Show me." I said.

The boys were puzzled. I asked them further, "Show me the river Shetrunji."

Boys pointed out Shetrunji with their paper cones.

"Whom does it meet?"

"To the Gulf of Khambhat."

"Why does it not meet the Arabian Sea on this side?" I asked.

A boy said, "Maybe, it is the river's choice. It chose to meet the Gulf of Khambhat."

"But why does the river go down this way?"

"Naturally, Sir, water would flow downward only. The south is downwards."

I was surprised. They had not forgotten the geography that they had learnt last year. Cramming had been successful! This year also I could teach them likewise. But that would not be teaching geography. I told the boys, "Roll up the maps. We shall take geography next month. Right now we shall have drawing."

The boys stared at me. Drawing was a new subject in the school. It was not included in the curriculum. The school should introduce at least one such activity.

Next day I told my class, "Draw anything that you like; draw whatever you can. Copy it out or trace it out if you like, or go by your memory and draw. Draw any way you like. Draw a man or an animal or a bird, butterflies, trees, flowers, sky, a house, or other objects, maps, anything."

The children began to draw on their slates. They drew all kinds of things. They drew all morning, the whole of the morning. We realised it only when the bell rang. The time was up.

I told my class, "If your parents give you paper and pencil, you may draw in your notebooks; or else, draw on your slates."

Two or three days passed. Many drawings had been prepared. Drawings of the kind an artist would throw away. However, they were children's drawings drawn according to their imagination and ability. I thought it would be worthwhile preserving them. I saw the Education Officer and got from him, with some difficulty, used papers, which were blank on one side. I got from him a couple of dozens of coloured pencils also. The Education Officer smiled and remarked, "It seems you have discontinued teaching and taken to drawing?"

I got notebooks prepared according to different topics of drawings and asked the pupils to draw in their notebooks. For a suitable decoration I put up some small branches of neem trees, leaves of peepal trees, crest of the basil plant, common flowers. From a cloth merchant, I obtained specimens of different prints on cloth and hung them up. I obtained, on loan from my friends, some good paintings and hung them up for pupils to see. For object drawing, I put up articles of daily use an inkstand, a holder, a box, a matchbox, etc. I wrote on the blackboard:

Draw Draw Draw

Do it yourself.

You know how to draw.

Your drawings get better every day.

The boys took this up in right earnest. Some drew exactly like the prints of the embroidery. Some painted flowers exactly as the real flowers. Some boys did no drawings. They just sat and observed others.

After a fortnight, I invited the drawing teacher of the high school. I told him, "I don't want you to teach boys how to draw. You just go on drawing on the blackboard whatever you like. Do it a bit slowly and step by step. You may draw a chair or tree, anything."

The drawing teacher did so. The boys observed him keenly. Next day the drawing activity picked up a good tempo. The students seemed to have picked up a thing or two about the technique. Then I asked them to begin writing their names and dates on their drawings.

After a few more days, I invited the drawing teacher again and requested him to demonstrate the technique of colouring a drawing. Using coloured pencils, he coloured about five drawings for a demonstration. A new vista opened up for the boys.

Next, I invited a surveyor friend of mine and requested him to prepare the plan of the school after taking the measurements of rooms, etc. He and I began to take measurements. The students moved along observing us. We demonstrated how a plan of a building could be drawn on paper. I took the boys to the surveyor's office for a few days to show them how draftsmen drew maps of streets, villages, forest areas, etc. Once or twice, I took the boys with the surveyor to the place where an actual survey of the land was being made.

The boys now began to draw the school building, their houses, classrooms, a well or a lake, etc. I took the boys to visit natural surroundings and made them play games of observation so that they could at a glance get the image of what they saw and would then be able to draw it. I made them observe the colours in the sky at sunrise and sunset. I let them have a distant view and a close one of objects like trees, etc. so as to give them an understanding of perspective. I made them observe light and shade on trees, hills, human beings and other objects.

Our drawing activity was in full swing.

One day I brought binoculars from the high school. I showed the boys how one could see through the binoculars the objects, which were far away. The boys were surprised. They spent the whole day taking turns to look through the binoculars. I brought a telescope one night to observe planets and stars. My friends commented: "You are such a busybody!"

My teacher colleagues generally remained with me on such occasions. They had given up slandering me and were inclined to learn from me. The Director of Education had permitted them to attend my class for one hour a week to see how I conducted my class.

At night, I showed the pupils the moon and the planets and the stars through the telescope. It was a revelation for them.

I showed them the moon and said, "You have heard about an old woman spinning on the moon and of her goat there. Actually they are the craters of the moon. It is so cold on the moon that no human life is possible there."

The boys stared at me as I continued.

"The earth that we live upon and the moon are sisters in a way. The sun is their father."

The boys were more surprised.

"Which story-book says this?" a boy asked.

"This is not an imaginary story. It is a fact."

"Oh no!"

"It is really so."

I began to tell them how the earth was formed. They were interested. I continued the story day after day. I told them how the crust of the earth was formed with the cooling of the earth; how mountains and valleys were formed; how moss, amoeba, fish, frogs, amphibian animals, jungles and the early anthropoids gradually evolved into present day mankind. The story was so exciting and interesting that the boys listened very attentively. The headmaster sent the pupils of seventh standard also to attend my classes for these talks.

One day I brought a globe of the earth and said, "All this happened on this earth of ours."

Then I told them how much of the earth consisted of land and how much of it was water; where different races of mankind -the whites, the browns, the blacks and the yellows, were to be found. I told them about the natural regions of the earth and named them. I told them that we were in Asia. I showed them India in Asia and also showed them Kathiawar, the land of Kathis, in India. I showed them where Bhavnagar was situated in Kathiawar.

Then I told the boys, "Take this globe and take out those maps from the map-stand. Now find out which map shows which part of the globe."

Everyday I gave them some new activity to find something or the other from the globe or the maps. I asked them to find out from the maps the villages which they had visited and the route to those villages; to find out from the maps which rivers they would have to cross and which towns they would pass by while going along that route to reach the destination.

That was one approach. There was another. I had been to Africa. So I began to tell them of Africa with the help of a map of Africa on the board. I told them of Victoria Nyasa, of Tanganyika, the rivers and the Zambesi, Nile, etc. I told them of the African animals, of lions and elephants, I spoke of African peoples- the Masais and Kovirondos. Then one day, I said, "Why not go and meet the people around us, the Kolis, the Rabaris, the potters, the shepherds and others?"

I arranged for some trips to villages, to rivers, to hills, to the outskirts of the villages and let them inquire into past history of those places. Then I thought of having a library for geography, but I could not get good travel books in Gujarati. I got whatever material I could. I gave it to them to read and said, "Read this and keep an eye on the map while you read. Keep track of where the traveller goes and thus keep moving with him."

Children like reading travelogues. A couple of them were interested in the encyclopaedia of Kathiawar. They would select a village from the map and then read all about that village from the encyclopaedia. They learnt a good deal about Ahmedabad from the drawings and paintings of Ravibhai Raval. It would have been good if we had such picture albums of every important place. One day Ravibhai came to our class. He had a film showing scenes of Madras. I showed the film to the boys. Cinema can be a valuable instrument for education. Showing actual scenes of places, far away, enhances interest in geography. I chanced upon a pack of playing cards prepared by the Scissors cigarette company. It had pictures of people of different lands. I showed them those pictures. I did not intend to teach them about the whole world. I did not expect the boys to memorise every thing. I just wanted the boys to know that the earth is very large, that there are many interesting things about it and there are various means to learn about it. That was all I wanted.

I had improvised another game called "Let us Travel". We imagined journeys' from Bhavnagar to Ahmedabad, Dwarka, Bombay, the Himalayas and even England. Then we would plan how to go; which

trains to take; where to change; what was worth seeing on route and where; what would be the probable duration of the journey; whom to meet and what to buy and so on. We also estimated the expenses for all this. We noted down the important places to visit from guidebooks. From the geographical information, we considered what was worth buying at each place. We studied everything as if we were really going on a tour. This was my project for the study of geography. I left the rest to the pupils. Sometimes they would try to trace where, say, a matchbox had come from. Sometimes they would try to find out how cotton grown here goes to England. Sometimes they would visit shops in the market and try to find out the names of the countries, from which the goods in the shop had come. Sometimes they played *Antakadi* with names of rivers, towns, mountains, countries, etc. The children also drew maps with the details of the villages, rivers, hills and other natural features, which they had seen or read about. For additional information, they referred to geography books.

So the study of geography proceeded. However, several of my teacher friends seemed not too happy. "Only you can do this," they said. "From where do you think we are going to collect all this information? We cannot talk about geography in this way."

But I felt that they too could do it, all that was needed was industry and enthusiasm.

The annual examination was drawing nearer. I began to take stock of the work done. I thought of arithmetic. It was not true that I had not even touched upon arithmetic up till now. It was only that I have not so far referred to it. I had tried to test the previous knowledge of the boys by giving sums of the kind done in the lower class. They were able to work them out. At first I thought the boys were well up in the subject. It was good in a way, I thought, because I would not have been able to do anything new in the subject. But when I asked the boys about the rationale of their computation and method, they were unable to say anything. I realised that though the boys knew additions and subtractions, etc. their knowledge was by rote. I was then worried as to what I could do about it. In the first place, arithmetic was not a subject I liked. I could understand that the present method of teaching arithmetic was faulty. But I had not given a thought to what needed to be done to rectify it. I had a difficult problem before me. I went straight to the Education Officer and told him, "Sir, I would not be able to do anything new in arithmetic. I will explain things well and complete the course. That is all I can do."

"Why? Isn't any change needed in the teaching of arithmetic?"

"It is needed surely. But the change needed is fundamental. Proper methods should be followed right from the stage the child begins to learn counting. Arithmetic is such a subject that if the concepts are not clearly understood, the student remains weak throughout."

Then' teach *arithmetic ab initio*," said the Education Officer.

"Where is the time for it? And even if we had time, these boys are now used to rote work and they never bother about the whys and wherefores of doing their sums. It is very difficult to reorient them."

"But then their arithmetic . . ."

"I will try to do whatever I can. The point that I want to make is that whatever experiments that can be made in the teaching of arithmetic cannot all be tried at this stage."

"Suppose we give you a class right from the initial stage. Would you then try out the new methods?"

"I do intend to try new methods right from the stage we teach them numbers. Only then will I be able to tell others that a particular method is good. I know some of my teacher friends are interested in introducing new methods in the teaching of arithmetic. If I have the good fortune to continue experimentation next year, Mr. Chandrashankar and I would try out an experiment. I believe the Montessori method of teaching arithmetic is good. It is natural. I have read about it and given some thought to it. Of course I have not tried it in actual practice."

"Would you then, next year, accept the post of the Deputy Education Officer and work in the Teachers' Training Institute doing experiments in the teaching of arithmetic?"

"I would leave it to Providence. Presently the only thing that I have to say is that I will not be able to do anything new in arithmetic this year."

The annual examinations drew closer. I began to prepay the pupils in my own way. They were working very enthusiastically. I was confident about the success of my boys at the examinations.

The examinations began. The Education Officer got the other classes examined first and then it was the turn of my class to be examined! It had been agreed from the start that the Education Officer was to personally examine my class. I smiled and said, "I don't want to examine your class. I promote all the boys of your class to the higher standard."

"No, that won't do," I said. "It would be unfair to some students."

"How can that be unfair to pupils?"

"Those who do not deserve promotion cannot be promoted I said."

"But I am sure you have taught the whole class very well accept the worth of your teaching."

"Maybe I have. But has everyone learnt equally well Frankly, some have not learnt anything. They are as blank as ever."

"Then what do you think we should do about them?"

"Some will have to be asked to leave the school. The son of Raghu, the barber, finds no interest in history, geography or arithmetic. He stagnates here in this school. But he is quite clever and is capable of heading a team of assistants and running a big barbershop quite well. He should be sent to Bombay to learn hair cutting and the management of haircutting saloons."

"All right; who else are unfit for the school?"

"It is not that they are unfit for the school. Rather, this school is unfit for them. The school is unable to teach them what they have the aptitude for."

"Well, perhaps; but who are they?"

"Name of Jeevan Sheth is fit for the Police Department. We should get him enrolled in a gymnasium. His father should be advised to arrange for him to travel too. He should be apprenticed with some good police officer and he should learn a little bit of law. Within five years he will make a good *havaladar*. Even today he behaves like one in the school."

"Agreed; now who else is weak?"

"Three of them are weak in studies. During the ensuing vacation I shall prepare them for promotion to the higher class. But, Sir, is there no remedy for the rigours of the syllabus and the standards in our school?"

"Leave it," said the Education Officer. "My hands are tied in that respect. I have told you so, a number of times. Now the examination of your class is over. And you seem to have arranged something as was done last term. I know your ways now."

Prize distribution day followed the examination. Every year those students who secured high ranks were given prizes. Important people of the town and the government officers were present. The Education Officer had asked me to arrange for the entire programme for the day. I had entrusted the work to the

students of my class. Everything was arranged by them in consultation with me.

First we had the *Dandia Ras*. For about half an hour the *Ras* enthralled the audience. Then came the races; the hop-step-and jump race, the three-legged race, the pecking-the-guava race, musical chairs. People watched with interest. After the races a mimic show and skits - revolving around a shopkeeper, the Director of Education, a police officer, a political leader-were performed. They were done well. Then the pupils brought their drawings and presented one each to every guest. Everybody looked at the boys' drawings with great interest.

It was now time for the prize distribution. Every year prizes worth Rs.125 were given. The amount was to be distributed among the bright students.

The Director of Education got up and said in his usual manner; "I consider today's function to be different from the usual. This gentleman sitting by my side has given me a new lesson in respect of prizes. I am not going to give away the amount of Rs. 125 to different individuals. I propose to give that entire amount for opening a library in the school in the name of the gentleman who gave me this new lesson. I am glad to inform you that the higher authorities have approved of such an arrangement and every year the amount of the prize money will be utilized to build up the library. Giving prizes individually gives rise to false pride and disappointments. The new arrangement for prizes is such that it benefits all concerned. I publicly thank the gentleman who showed me the futility of the prize system and showed me a better way of utilisation of the amount.

"At this stage I should like to inform you that when this gentleman came to me last year with a request for permission to make an experiment in standard four of the primary school, I considered him to be an impractical fool.

"I had thought that he was just like many others of his kind and would run away at the first opportunity when put to test. So I gave him permission. I had no faith in him. But I must admit that he has achieved success in his experiment. He has changed my ideas. I am convinced in my heart of hearts that we must put an end to the old routines in primary education. Teachers and officers like me should voluntarily retire and yield place to imaginative educationists of the new generation.

"How shall I express my joy? Look at the children of his class. How orderly, healthy, and cheerful they are! I am a witness to their development and growth. Their parents have often expressed their satisfaction to me."

The Director's speech was over. Everyone dispersed and I came home.