



Vidhyayana - ISSN 2454-8596

An International Multidisciplinary Peer-Reviewed E-Journal

www.vidhyayanaejournal.org

Indexed in: ROAD & Google Scholar

‘Folk Wisdom’, Pedagogy and GS

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“I am not interested in what you know, I am interested in what you are. With all your discoveries and inventions, what have you become? Your enlightenment is great—but what are these strange creatures that move about in the electric light you have installed and imagine that they are human?” Is it a great gain for the human intellect to have grown more acute and discerning, if the human soul dwindles? [...] Man in Europe is descending steadily from the human level and approximating to the ant and the hornet. The process is not complete but it is progressing apace, and if nothing stops the debacle, we may hope to see its culmination in this twentieth century. After all our superstitions were better than this enlightenment, our social abuses less murderous to the hopes of the race than this social perfection.

Sri Aurobindo

‘Folk wisdom’ a noun is generally spoken of as ‘common sense/knowledge’ also called folklore or oral tradition, the lore (traditional knowledge and beliefs) of cultures having no written language. It is transmitted by word of mouth and consists, as does written literature, of both prose and verse narratives, poems and songs, myths, dramas, rituals, proverbs, riddles, and the like. Nearly all known peoples, now or in the past, have produced it. Much of folklore, because of historic movements or overwhelming foreign influences or the mere lack of skilful practitioners of the tradition, become less and less important, and occasionally ridiculed as ‘primitive’, and die out from the human repertory of knowledge. The details of such changes have been of great interest and concern to all students of folk literature. ‘Folk wisdom’ has been handed down from one generation to the next with a view to keep intact the acquired wisdom/knowledge. It speaks of the time-binding capacity/ activity with a view to ‘development’ and ‘progress’ of civilisation.

Pedagogy is a formal discipline that deals with the theory and practice of education today. A didactic method is a teaching method that follows a consistent "scientific" approach or educational style to present information to student where the role of ‘teacher’ is as both a guide and a resource for students. But etymologically ‘pedagogue's job’ was distinguished from a teacher's by primarily focusing on teaching children life-preparing knowledge such as social skills and cultural norms. Which traditionally was imparted orally and informally. There is also a large focus on care and well-being of the child. The pedagogue's work also consists of supporting the child in their mental and social development. Folk pedagogy formulation is based on revising the conception of child's mind, children as doers (imitators/ knowhow), knower and



seeing children as thinkers.

General Semantics according to the glossed definition by Bruce I Kodish in *Drive Yourself Sane: Using the Uncommonsense of General Semantics* is :

a general theory of evaluation which considers the interrelations: what is happening in ourselves and the world around us, how we get information about those things and how we talk about such things and how we behave ; an up-to-date, scientifically-based applied epistemology. (213)

Hereby I would *dare* to attempt at speaking of GS as a Pedagogical tool to use folk wisdom i.e. regarded as ‘common’ to make ‘uncommon sense’. Korzybski too repeatedly spoke of it as “ This is a baby stuff.” For which I shall rely on chapter three of Kodish’s *Drive Yourself Sane* who attempts at uncommon approach to living. Kodish dares the readers/ practitioners with the application of GS as, ‘On the surface, much of what we say may seem ‘simple’, even obvious. As you read, you may find the obvious becoming more complex; the simple not easy to understand and even less easy to apply.’ (16) Further warns that one might also get confused in the process of getting it!

Korzybski’s statement used as epitaph to the chapter ‘Uncommon Sense’ simplifies the same to make this modern ‘uncommon sense’ ‘common and workable to think of making the ‘common sense’ of folk ‘uncommon and sensible. The epitaph reads:

The older systems were ‘common sense’ perhaps of pre-scientific era, but the new system represent more closely ‘reality’ as we know it today, and uncommon sense was and is necessary. In our work we are trying to make this modern ‘uncommon sense’ ‘common’ and workable.(30)

According to GS the root cause of all the human strife is that science has progress far ahead of the humanities has lagged behind. Science has progressed due its as a result of accumulated knowledge and its applications by becoming *aware of , questioning, testing and revising their assumptions* where the human time-binding capacity is at its best which on the other hand in case of humanities/ social sphere has unfortunately failed. And thus GS is an approach to broaden and come to generalised understanding of applications of scientific method to our personal and social lives.



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Folk oral tradition however ‘primitive’, as they are ingrained in cultural beliefs, is a store house of wisdom and instead of neglect it needs our attention in incorporating the folk wisdom along with the knowledge of humanities today by scientific attitude to relate to our life and make it up-to-date.

The folk wisdom is imparted in an informal way where it is oral mode of personal one-to-one communication, family; social and cultural systems play a major. To systemise or formulise it as pedagogy GS which is multidisciplinary in nature can play a role through its scientific attitude. A myth, tale, proverbs- the moral of the tale or real life experience- anecdotes, jokes, verses, drama etc. Should be part of the mainstream curriculum at relevant levels of education with methods to study the applicability or otherwise to broaden the knowledge of humanities which might be lost otherwise. It should be accepted that knowledge is built on the past knowledge and experience. The GS prescription to make ‘common’ ‘uncommon’ can aid as a tool to implement the scientific temper.

If folk wisdom is understood as a product of assumptions of *pre-scientific era* it is our ‘advanced state’ in evaluation that we can revise and test the formulations of folk with the notion of Logical Fate. Korzybski emphasises the notion as: from our assumptions, particular consequences (our conclusions, evaluations, attitudes and behaviour) inevitably follow. If we could bring in to our every day thinking the mathematicians concern of making assumptions we might function more effectively.

The scientist too start with a set of assumptions which are open to questions and this is done by deriving, through logic or mathematics and some consequences which can be tested through observations to support or pull down a theory and bring it to question. Thus science grows by revising assumptions. Similarly folk wisdom should be put open to question and continuous revision with passage time.

Kodish finally ends with the aspect of science i.e.: ‘tentative for ever’, what Korzybski calls “GENERAL PRINCIPLE OF UNCERTAINTY”, ... Instead of looking to always prove our pet theories or *beliefs*, we can look for evidence that might disapprove them.’ (43) This vigour and temper can be more easily applied to folk knowledge. This is what GS calls ‘uncommon sense’ with a realization that we are operating out of some assumptions or premises that may have been relevant in the times of its formulations.

Folk knowledge has not been extinct and that is a proof of its openness to questions and revisions for ages. The experiment with its use and misuse in itself should be of interest for humanities because its concern is ultimately to impart wisdom. The need is to revise and use for solutions of the complications due



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the lopsided development the disciplines.

Further, goal of GS apart from defining man on the basis of time-binding capacity is basically, ‘.. to use human ability to function with awareness of how we get information, symbolise it and communicate it to others; improve how we function individually, in groups and as culture ‘(Kodish 213). Thus provide us a model of STRUCTURAL DIFFRENCIAL which represents our experiencing process and a map of our abstracting process by which we can accumulate and transit knowledge. GS prescribes to Extensional Orientation to remain close to non-verbal happenings and facts (WIGO). Extensional devices are methods formulated on this bases that include Indexing, Dating, Etc., Quotes and hyphens to relate our words and statements to life-fact. These devices can be introduced to revise and evaluate the folk lore prescribed as part of syllabus in education systems to meet the academic objectives.

Before I conclude I shall refer back to Korzybski’s “ This is a baby stuff.” On which Weinberg remarks in *Levels of Knowing and Existence* to justify my application of GS to revise folk wisdom .

‘Now, if it is so simple, why make such a fuss over it; why build a complex system and windup with such atrivia? Primarily , because, though much has been said before in many philosophies, religion and psychological systems, its usefulness is largely vitiated by being surrounded by and and embedded in a good deal of nonsense in the form of unsupported inferences , false facts, authoritarian dogma, contradictory theories and invalid reasoning. Thus the ‘good’ is difficult to distinguish from ‘bad’, and as a consequence both have been rejected. Stated another way the wisdom of ages and sages is rejected either because it is derived from a doctrine whose basic assumptions were unacceptable or because it is rendered innocuous by being offeres as *ad hoc* advice, largely useless because it is not part of an integrated system within whose framework it becomes meaningful on all levels of abstraction, that is at the non-verbal level of feelings and emotions and the verbal level of factual knowledge, inference, and theory. (9)

And thus even if many a disciplines have attempted at using folk wisdom scientifically and it has been a mutual benefit of both in addition to accumulation of knowledge at large. GS in a way can be termed as pedagogy as it has evolved as a methods and has devices that can be used as tools for application for systematic teaching and learning.



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