

Program Script for Tahsin Aksu (Aired on 7 February 2010)

Category: Social Justice

Location: Van

This is a city where not much happens. And when it does, it doesn’t last long. But one day, a new man was put in charge of a library and it changed the fate of the town.

(A scene from a movie Vizontele Tubaa)

-Hello Mr. Guner, what did you come here to do?

-I came to be the new manager of the library.

-Did you say library?

-Library manager?

-Library...

-Well well, you have honored us Mr. Güner, congratulations

-So now, if we had a library everything would be set ,right?

-You don’t have one?

-Unfortunately.

-This is the first time we are even hearing about this.

We are wrong if we think that stories like these only happen in movies.

While movies are restricted to the frames of a screen, the actual arts are alive in villages, towns and cities across Turkey.

Van, Gevaş is one of these towns; And in fact, this is where the movie Vizontele Tubaa was filmed.

Gevaş is a small town of 30 thousand inhabitants which lies in the skirts of the Artos mountains and close to Van Lake.

Until 4 years ago, Gevaş had accepted its destiny as being a part of this geography. But one day, a young provincial district governor with dreams larger than Van Lake, was appointed to Gevaş. And so, Gevaş’s destiny changed.

Tahsin Aksu is a 37 year old provincial district governor from Samsun. After serving for four years in Dargeçit, Mardin, he was appointed to Gevaş...

However, he didn’t arrive in Gevaş with only his assignment papers. He brought his dreams with him.

He rolled up his sleeves when he realized that there was a deficiency in education. He visited all the villages of Gevaş and started a project to promote for education.

The name of the campaign was “The Gevaş that Reads”.

Interview with Tahsin Aksu:

We started the ‘Gevaş that Reads’ campaign. **Our objective in 2008 was to set for the foundation** that would promote education, and promote awareness among women and children.

We wanted a project that involves everyone, no matter what age.

This campaign has 13 projects within it. Projects regarding women, the disabled and especially elementary school children.

We also have project which addresses prison inmates.

Our goal was to teach those who were illiterate to read and write in two years.

Our first goal was one book per person in Gevaş.

We hoped to have 30 thousand books read. Then **in 2009 we aimed for 2 books per person, and 60 thousands books in total** to be read.

In 2008 we reached our goal of one book per person.

In 2009, a total of 51 thousand books were read.

And it was primarily women that helped us reach that goal.

Women from disadvantaged backgrounds took a very active part in the “My home is my school” project which was part of the Gevaş reading campaign.

As women started to read, more children started attending schools. And women who had not finished elementary school had started to finish off their education through distance learning.

To build a library for the **“Gevaş that Reads” project, we collected 20 thousand books** from different locations.

We spent hours and days of meetings about education programs and awards that could be given as incentives to women and children.

Today, **anyone can take a book home to read, as long as they return it in 15 days.**

Those who live close by brought their books here to read and then discussed the books with others.

From Dostoyevski to Nazım Hikmet, from Reşat Nuri Güntekin to Doğan Cüceloğlu, a variety of books were read by women...

And now, these women wait in anticipation for the next delivery of books to arrive.

A woman is Reading a Poem:

(A women recites a few lines from a classical Turkish poem by Yunus Emre)

There is a reward system in our ‘Gevaş that Reads’ project for women and children.

With rewards and presents provided by the administration, they encouraged people to be educated and provided vocational training.

For those who have **read more than 8,000 pages** and wish to go to university **we offered free after-school education.**

For those women who don’t have any electrical appliances, we gave sewing machines, washing machines. For the students we supplied stationery supplies and outfits.

Many women reward themselves by finishing elementary and high school through distance learning and then continue to register for open university (university through distance learning).

(A Famous Turkish Singer, Sezen Aksu, sings a song)

“Ünzile is full of life; 10 siblings are still living through 5 have died.”

Hayat Karanfil, is only 35 years old.

But she already has 5 children. Like Ünzile, Hayat has had a hard life raising her children,

Today she wants to start living again. She finds a new life among words and sentences in books.

Interview with Hayat Karanfil:

I am reading “The Passionate Cloud” by Nazım Hikmet. I read Fatih Rıfık Atay’s “Olive Mountain”, and from Halide Edip Adivar I read “The House with Purple Vines”.

I read 3 books by Doğan Cüceloğlu, mostly books about reconnecting with people. We’ve probably read all the books available...

Reporter: Which level of school have you completed?

Hayat Karanfil: Primary school.

Reporter: Are you happy, do you enjoy reading these books? How long have you been reading for?

Hayat Karanfil: I’ve been reading for about 2 years now. We had read about 2-3 thousand pages. I myself have read 10 thousand pages. We’ve reached our aims for 2009 and 2010 already.

2010 the reading project lets us read now.

Reporter: What has changed in your life, what is different?

Hayat Karanfil: We now have a voice in our own homes. We have a chance to go out with our friends. We go from home to home and read books.

It’s wonderful. Our lives have really changed. See, my teeth are rotten, actually I never had a chance to get them done.

Our district governor promised that I would get them done. He helped us psychologically and financially.

In a country where **there is 1 book for every 20 people, in Gevaş- Van, with a population of 30 thousand, the town has read 33 thousand books in one year.**

570 house wives joined the reading groups. With the books they read, **36 people attended free after school education, 5 women received washing machines, 8 people earned scholarships** to continue their education.

There is another link to the Gevaş project, “Don’t be left out in the open, be educated through open learning”. Through this project **we registered 103 in open elementary schools and 210 in open high school.**

Interview with Tahsin Aksu:

We created a “Book Passport System” that is being used for the first time in Turkey.

In our town of 30 thousand people we have 5 thousand readers registered into our library that we are constantly monitoring. They borrow the books once a week and return it after reading them.

A Turkish teacher interviews them about the book they have read and they have to write a summary.

Everyone has to have an interview. We visit the villages once a month. Our self-sacrificing teachers do this once a month no matter how hard the weather and road conditions become.

In the villages they go through the same interviewing process; teachers collect book summaries. Then, they do annual evaluations.

The annual evaluations show us the needs of people in the villages. Some request to continue on with their education and some want to obtain support for their homes.

There are others who want to repair their homes, if they have read a lot of books, we are there to help them.

We are actually doing this to help out those that are in need, we are trying to create equality and access to books.

These people are disadvantaged groups and we are here to support them.

According to our calculations, **6 million pages have been read in 2009.**

And **we’ve finished 51 thousand books.** We are using different methods with students. Helping them understand questions for university entry exams, and in high school they develop skills in taking exams which will be very important to them in the future.

This change in Gevaş has spread throughout the streets and homes. We hear of a change story in every door that we knock on.

Even if outside the homes you are faced with the walls of the Southeast, inside the homes you will find eternal peace...

Interview with Ayşe Başkale:

Reporter: How long have you been reading for?

Ayşe Başkale: I’ve been reading for about a year now. I started in March. From March till to August I constantly read.

Reporter: How many pages have you read so far?

Ayşe Başkale: I’ve read 5 thousand pages. **We are 4 girls here, they have each read 8 thousand, I’ve only been able to read 5 thousand so far.**

Reporter: And then?

Ayşe Başkale: Then the district governor brought us a machine as a present for having read 5 thousand pages.

Reporter: What has changed in your life?

Ayşe Başkale: First of all your perspective of life changes, your outlook at the world, other religions, the lives of others.

You can look at the world through other eyes. I read Crime and Punishment, I read Reşat Nuri Güntekin’s books. I read books by famous Turkish authors. I have read quite a lot of books.

Some are lost in my memory. I think I remember and understand Reşat Nuri Güntekin’s books the most.

I enjoyed reading The Resurrection by Turgut Özakman. I read Dostoyevski’s Crime and Punishment which I enjoyed very much.

In the beginning I would read 10 pages and then get bored. It got easier in time, **now I can do 100 pages.** When you want it, when you need it, you can do it.

The change in Gevaş is not only limited to reading books. There are sewing classes for teenage girls.

These classes are trying to support them to find ways to earn a living. The hands that collect walnuts in the fields show their talent in sewing.

They sell the products they have sewn to financially contribute to their families.

Interview with Hanife Şatır

I am 58 years old. I have 9 children. 4 daughters are married, my son is not working, my husband is a guard and we are grateful for the district governor for opening up this course.

Thank God he provides us financial support. I learn things when I come here. I met new friends from different villages.

I see people. We will open an exhibition; show everyone what we have made.

Since 2006 these projects have helped not only in the area of education but also with regards to employment and disabilities...

The **“If I had a chance”** project, **brought 309 people with disabilities to workshops.**

Here, while listening to classical music they sculpted and improve their social skills and carry on the traditional culture of Van.

Interview with Selçuk Selvi:

Selçuk Selvi: I used to work in a bakery. My arm got stuck in the machine. It’s been ten years now since I’ve become disabled.

Reporter: Did this make it harder for you at school?

Selçuk Selvi: It was hard at school. It was hard financially and psychologically. We worked as much as we could.

I painted houses, I worked in a coffeehouse. It was hard for me because I was taking care of everyone at home.

Reporter: Then you came here.

Selçuk Selvi: I was introduced to this place thanks to the district governor. Our life is very different now. We are doing things we enjoy doing. Time passes by much better.

Reporter: How do you feel when you drew paintings at school. Did you like it during your school years?

Selçuk Selvi: It was fine when I was in school, but not like here... Here we get much more pleasure from painting.

Interview with Erdal Şan:

We live in a very small town. There is not so much we can do therefore this project has become something amazing for us.

Interview with Abdülrahim Bayram:

We are doing things to display Van’s traditions, its heritage and monuments. This is a good visibility for Van.

Hopefully we will develop this project even further.

Interview with Tahsin Aksu:

For example, when we used to visit the villages, we would only see and talk to men, but now we see women talk as openly and comfortably as men in these gatherings.

They share their problems. When you think about it, this is something that is hard to accomplish around here.

We encouraged socializing in villages, Through reading books they interacted with one another; one group club even went on to perform in a theatre.

At the same time, among these women, some become beekeepers. .

They earn their own money. Another success is the increasing rate of students who registered for open high school, open elementary school and open university. We also have a higher amount of children attending kindergarten.

We link these outcomes to reading. We frequently have open discussions about books that they have read.

Tahsin Aksu started on a mission that he had dreamed of doing, he never gave up. He brought books to houses that did not have any.

He believed that he could change the fate of a town by having them read.

He spread his faith to thousands of people. He changed Gevaş in such a way that future generations will benefit.

Dear viewers, we will take a short break now. As you can see, Tahsin Aksu’s story really is a changemaker story; we had great pleasure working on it.

With each program we once again are grateful and happy that to be sharing these stories with you. We take pleasure in sharing good news.

What’s more important, we believe everyone will be inspired when we introduce people like Tahsin Aksu to you.

In fact, this is what we aim for through this program. We will take a short break and then close up today’s Turkey’s Changemakers program.

Dear viewers, we present the Turkey’s Changemakers program in The Seed Conference Center of Sabancı University Sakıp Sabancı Museum in Istanbul. So if you think you are a Changemaker please apply; or you know someone around you that might be, you can nominate them.

Please apply from our site at www.farkyaratanlar.org or please call us on 0212 249 2314, we will always be here ready to answer.

We aim to bring Turkey’s changemakers to the screen. This is the end of today’s program. Until our next program, here from “The Seed” room in the Sabancı Museum, I wish you a good night.