

# **TEXTBOOK REGIMES**

a feminist critique of nation and identity

## **AN OVERALL ANALYSIS**

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# Gender in Education: Opening up the Field

*... I am your mother. Not only yours, but also the mother of your ancestors. I am Ganga. Ganga, meaning, I give speed to that which can move even a little. I have descended on this earth primarily to give speed, that is why I am named Ganga. I desire to serve others incessantly... I bear witness - to penance and meditation [sadhana], to the sacrifice of lives into the holy fire for the protection of the country, and to the service of those who are troubled and poor. On my banks, a great civilisation has grown because of these sacrificial ascetics, and I have seen myself as an intrinsic part of this civilisation. This country's culture and I are not separate.*

Excerpted from 'I am Ganga', Samba Hindi Reader 8, pp 69-72

Despite considerable debate on the content of education in the last 20 to 30 years, and an increasing acknowledgement of the significance of gender in the domain of curricula and policy, gender remains an under-researched and little understood area in the field of school education in India.

Over the last two decades, female literacy has emerged as a key indicator of national development, thereby marking it as an important concern for policy planners.<sup>1</sup> Questions of access and retention in schools have therefore dominated the domain of gender and education in India for

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<sup>1</sup> The UNDP-sponsored Human Development Report, for instance, is based on indices that evaluate the development process principally along three vectors, namely, longevity, education and command over resources. The logic of this kind of statistical measurement has spurred a 'race' among developing countries to try and 'catch up' with others by way of a demonstrable improvement in these indicators. The Indian State no longer shies away from recognising the exclusion of girls from school as a denial of their basic right to education. On the question of gender, the National Human Development Report (GOI 2002) identifies its goals as: Bringing down the gender gap by 50 per cent, generating demand for girls' education and building women's capacity to effectively participate in village-level processes. This push is also evident in the formulation of the SSA programme.

over two decades, be it in State or civil society organisations (non-governmental organisations, educational institutions). For instance, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), the Government of India's flagship programme, aims at getting nearly 59 million out-of-school children into school. Of this, nearly 35 million are girls. A major focus area of the programme is bridging the gender gap, which involves getting girls to school and ensuring retention - but the question of how quality and equity will be addressed is not clear.

The implicit assumption in all this is that enabling girls to enrol in school and stay there will automatically empower them, expand their life options and give them greater control of their lives. However, it is by now widely recognised that while schooling in and of itself can create new possibilities, it does not necessarily empower new roles for its participants. Like other institutions, it is also a site where dominant socio-cultural values and norms are reproduced and reiterated, thus implicitly validating existing power relations.<sup>2</sup>

An outcome of this assumed equation between education and empowerment for girls has meant that research and reflection on gender and education has revolved around mapping data on male-female participation in schools, drop-out rates or in identifying factors that limit participation of girls in schooling. The very act of going to school is seen to help society achieve its transformative goals. What happens to girls after they have sought entry into the classrooms goes largely unquestioned. Studies that understand the nature of classroom transaction and its role in constructing masculine or feminine identities are rare if not altogether absent. We are still to unravel how classroom transactions bring together a teacher's own attitudes and a child's perceptions built on her world outside the classroom, to create so-called normal/acceptable gender identities.

Another area that remains outside the domain of inquiry is how current policy debates contrast with earlier historical debates when educating girls and women was tied to challenging the social order or in a majority of instances conserving it. What should women and girls be taught? How could the curricula be imagined so as to create a particular type of Indian woman? (Bhog 2002) These were areas of concern and heated debate in the nineteenth century (Bhattacharya 2001; Minault 1998; Sarkar 2007; O' Hanlon 2002, Ranade 1963).<sup>3</sup> Women's education then

2 In an unpublished study done by Nirantar on a six-month residential school, Mahila Shikshan Kendra, in Auraiya District of Uttar Pradesh (August 2002), it emerged that an important motivating factor for poor Dalit families in sending their daughters to study was to improve their marriage prospects. Also see Patricia and Roger Jeffries (1994) article that questions the role of education in enabling women to make decisions on their own.

3 The fear of western education refashioning the native woman to her white, western counterpart resulted in an emphatic concern with defining the kind of education suitable for Indian women. Preparation for chaste wifehood, strengthening their 'self-sacrificing', religious nature, producing patriotic sons—these emerged as some of the intended outcomes of educating the Oriental woman.

was not so much an end, it was a means to an end — the betterment of the family and the nation. An entire range of social values and cultural norms were tied into this debate. Have these concerns become outdated or do we see continuities in the articulation of ideas of nationhood, family and community existing in curricula and content even today? Is the schooling of girls a means to new ways of being or a transformation of existing ideas of nationhood and family into new vocabularies? How are ideas of nation and family being fashioned now - for girls and also for boys?

## Formulating a Study on the Textbook

This study is a step towards opening up the issue of gender in school education for scrutiny and debate. We chose the textbook as the site for our exploration for a number of reasons. One, it is the site where larger curricular goals and the desired outcomes of education are broken down into concrete bits of information, concepts, exercises, visuals, etc. Curricular aims inform the content of the textbook and in a vital sense mirror them. It is also worthwhile to bear in mind that for many children textbooks remain the only source of information and knowledge on a whole range of subjects. Textbooks, in our opinion, also provided the possibility of exploring how school and nation linked up to create the ideal citizen of a modern, yet ancient nation. Just like how, in the nineteenth century, the idea of the Indian nation and the creation of a particular past, culture and tradition was critical to how schooling was imagined and operationalised for both men and women, in a similar vein the creation of ‘official knowledge’ identified and put out for mass consumption and communication through the textbook was critical to unpack the nation today. This critical lens afforded the chance of pushing gender analysis beyond charges of a ‘bias’ or having an ‘ideological slant’ that has become classic to critiquing curricular policy changes, to bringing in structures of patriarchy and other socio-political and economic structures of domination that underpin the content of learning.

The issue of gender bias in school textbooks had been dealt with in particular ways: the non-representation of women and girls in textbooks and the promotion of stereotypes were identified as the two main aspects of gender bias. The solutions to this were to quantitatively increase the number of times women and girls appeared both at the level of text and pictorial representation, and to promote new images. In some cases a role reversal strategy was adopted. Here women were shown to do what men did or were as great/heroic as them. Gender was tied to the domain

of the social, an aspect of attitudinal change and value generation amongst children.

However, none of these efforts looked at how a particular subject or discipline was taught. Syllabi outlines remained the same, unlike in higher institutions of learning and research, where feminist scholarship in Social Sciences, Economics and languages brought in new concepts, challenged existing ideas and expanded the boundaries of knowledge within and across disciplines — in some instances leading to a substantial reformulation of syllabi and content. The question was, why was this process entirely absent in school syllabi and curricular policy? Questioning how knowledge was being constructed, and questioning why existing feminist critiques of disciplinary knowledge were outside the domain of school education was crucial. Were the previously mentioned strategies of adding gender engaging with existing social relations or hierarchies of power? If not, there was a need to analyse them - as gender appeared to be a concept floating independent of all other social, political or economic categories, in addition to being unrelated to any discipline.<sup>4</sup> If that were the case, then it was important to understand how feminist critiques were being sanitised of their critical edge and 'normalised' to becoming an adjunct to moral education or character development.<sup>5</sup>

Another objective that was a priority in developing this study of textbooks was the engagement of Women's Studies departments and other feminist organisations in the area of school education. The Towards Equality Report (1974) brought to the forefront the urgent need to address the stark gender inequalities that continued to persist despite more than a quarter century of independence. This had a profound impact on the way that Women's Studies defined its concerns and the linkages that it sought with the women's movement. Issues of development, violence, legal rights and economic and political participation became central arenas of research and intervention. This strong interconnection between action and research, activism and theory not only gave a distinct and

<sup>4</sup> See Position Paper on Gender Issues (November 2006), pp 27-38; See also Appendix 1 of the same document for a more detailed discussion on the issue of feminist critiques contributing to disciplines and the nature of debates it has generated within these.

<sup>5</sup> An insight into the emergence of gender as an isolated category operating in the domain of attitudinal reform emerged through trainings that Nirantar undertook for the Delhi State Council for Educational Research and Training (SCERT) in 2001. This was an ambitious gender sensitisation programme, involving training of 1,000 teachers. Subject-related teacher trainings followed formal, top-down, information-oriented formats. Gender training pedagogy, in contrast, proved too 'feminised', focusing on the experiential, concrete aspects of the teacher's or learner's world. The self image of the teacher as a person who is the giver of or provider of knowledge, made it difficult for them to accept those outside of formal structures as 'educators'. The analysis on the situation of women and girls was approached through debating common-sense positions: women are better managers of homes; they nurture and care for children in school, and so on. This possibly relegated the gender training to a more 'homely' arena rather than according it an aura of academic rigour. For school teachers, in the formal hierarchy of knowledge, gender seemingly had no disciplinary base.

dynamic identity to Women's Studies in India but also, as perhaps an unintended consequence, largely reproduced the neglect by the women's movement of the education question in the post-independence era. As Desai, Mazumdar, Bhansali and others (2003) have pointed out: 'Whereas in the pre-independence phase, all aspects of women's education were a vital concern with the women's movement, thereafter both education and the educational system were absent in its agenda.' Located in institutions of higher learning — typically, colleges and universities — those involved in Women's Studies were compelled to fight for their own space and legitimacy in the academia, but mainstream education, particularly at the primary and secondary-school level, remained a huge blind spot. Women's groups and organisations rarely intervened in educational programmes. At best, they came up with 'alternative' educational initiatives that were specifically geared to women and girl's education.

A handful of women's organisations became involved in this area at the time of the debates around the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2000 and, to a more limited extent, in the formulation of NCF 2005 (traced in the next section). In the process of working on this study, there was an effort to draw in Women's Studies departments and other organisations that were willing to look at this area. The textbook was a good starting point for those who had worked in the area of feminist knowledge production at the university level. We hoped that a patient and sharp reading of the textbook would be strategically appropriate to set the ball rolling on an engagement with school education.

A project finally emerged that would undertake a close reading of the textbook, setting out its main objectives as the analysis of how gender was constructed in school texts and how it intersected with caste, class, sexual orientation and religion to create a particular nation-subject. It also sought to look at the differences and commonalities that existed between State-produced textbooks and those by private publishers, in addition to how the Centre (through nationally-produced textbooks) and the States played out their convergence and divergence on political and ideological issues in school textbooks.

## Counting Gender In: A Brief History

### The Debate over Gender in Curriculum

A significant event in the history of textbook writing occurred at the turn of the millennium. An intense academic debate erupted over the NCF 2000 — formulated by the Human Resource Development department, GOI — and the new textbooks for schools that were produced and published a year later by the National Council for Education Research and Training (NCERT) on the basis of that framework. The NCF, or curriculum debate as it came to be called, was dominated by questions over history textbooks, both in terms of what should be taught and the historical veracity of the content. At another level, the new framework



Fig. 7

Visuals from a photo-essay on the Women's Movement in the NCERT Social and Political Life textbook for Class 7.

and therefore seen as exceptional, out of the ordinary. A photo essay on the women's movement, depicting different forms and strategies used by individuals, groups and organisations to question inequality in society was such an attempt (See Fig. 7).

Describing a social system that limits and determines people's lives, and revealing the spaces in this system where change can happen, was perhaps a responsibility we felt as activists in education. The possibility of painting either too cynical a picture, communicating the inevitability of hierarchies of power, or invisibilising certain social realities in order to demonstrate a 'success story' could be seen in most activist and educational material available. To create material that showed a certain social reality and encouraged learners to question it was what the new textbooks could perhaps attempt to do. This was our challenge and learning as we worked on both writing and critiquing textbooks. In the latter exercise, the textbook study, this challenge translated into building a theoretical framework that saw social structures and institutions as grids in which power is embedded. We tried to locate gender, as well as caste, class and other determining factors at different points in these grids. The methodology as well as the theoretical framework we developed is elaborated in the following sections.

## Theoretical Framework: A Feminist Lens

*How can it be that femininity is a fiction and yet lived as though it were real, felt deeply, as though it were a universal truth of the psyche? It is not that we are filled with roles and stereotypes of passive femininity so that we become what society has set out for us. Rather, I am suggesting that femininity and masculinity are fictions linked to the fantasies deeply embedded in the social*

*world which take on the status of fact when inscribed in the powerful practices, through schooling, through which we are regulated.*

—Valerie Walkerdine  
School Girl Fictions

The very act of creating textbooks while analysing others was like holding a mirror to oneself. Reading a text and creating a text with a feminist lens was a simultaneous process where, in a sense, one clarified the other. The starting point of the study was to view the textbook as a product, drawing on the Marxist idea of products as crystallised or congealed human activity. The activity here was developing in concrete form the idea of what is seen as knowledge, that is worthy of transmission or acquisition by the next generation. It is well established that the school curriculum is not neutral knowledge (Apple, 1992). Therefore, the act of identification or prioritisation of certain kinds of knowledge involved making choices—an act of power. There were no universal truths or values that textbooks necessarily had to or were required to espouse. As Walkerdine rightly states above, it was through powerful practices that particular fictions became reality, or in some cases facts gather the status of becoming fictions. Therefore, it was the relationship between knowledge and power that required attention.

As we have pointed out in the previous sections, the absence of power as a critical grid to understand gender relations, has led to efforts at including gender in textbooks as primarily commatising gender with other categories of caste and class.<sup>10</sup> For this study, power was taken to be the central concept, not gender. Gender for us was not merely a matter of difference but involved issues of subordination and domination. Power was the key to understanding political, social and economic relations in society. The construction and experience of femininity and masculinity were part and parcel of these relations of power and not external to them.

Feminist scholars and academics have pointed out that power is at the heart of understanding relations between men and women, as well as between other social groups. Yet power is not simply a matter of control over others, but involves complex and subtle ways in which both men and women, boys and girls participate in the creation of themselves, in the act of creating the other. Getting your gender right, learning the ‘obvious’ or the ‘normal’ in terms of gender or sexual identity are an intrinsic part of the process of schooling. Bronwyn Davies (1989) points out how the imperative to be normal or to be correctly gendered

10 This is a term used by O’Brien, in Luke (1992) to describe the phenomenon of paying only tactical attention to gender in the texts of Critical Pedagogy. Despite its progressive agenda of empowerment and emancipation of the self, of rationality and citizenship as the guiding conceptions of this approach in education, Critical Pedagogy has come in for considerable critique from feminist educators and academics for its reluctance to challenge master texts that privilege male subjectivity, locating emancipation in the domain of the formal public sphere of policy, law, text, paper and film. All these domains are those that historically have been the prerogatives of men.

becomes almost a moral imperative. These imperatives are created and embedded in the more explicit articulations in textbooks (for instance) of how the learner needs to be sensitised to certain values and behaviour. Thus the physical, the material, the ideological converge to discipline or construct particular identities. At the same time, we are also aware that there are no tidy, single-track explanations for how gender comes into play. Identity — whether gender, sexual or any other — is constructed by a web of intersecting factors, which often contradict each other. The textbooks, mostly inadvertently, display this intersection of agendas — sometimes class-based, nation-based, gender-based and so on.

This analysis has emerged from a feminist standpoint that is both critical and engaged, in the sense that a mere critique was not the only purpose as there was an alternative sense of how textbooks could be imagined, partly reflected in our own struggles to write textbooks.<sup>11</sup> This engaged view created for us the possibility of moving beyond simplistic categories of male-female, victim-oppressor, right-wrong, visible-invisible, to look at new ways in which writing and thinking about the communication of concepts, ideas, information to children could be done. For this, the categories we used to analyse the textbooks were those key concepts that feminist critiques had engaged with, both in terms of disciplinary knowledge and its own practices as a movement. These were nation, tradition and modernity, labour, body, violence and nature.

## Nation

Nation, gender and education are part of a mutually interacting conceptual triad, and therefore Nation was a key category that informed the study. National education systems as they exist in the modern state play an important role in the communication of ideals and values through the processes of standardisation and homogenisation of schooling for large populations (Kumar, 2001). Policy documents time and again have placed ‘national identity’, the building of ‘national character’ and ‘patriotism’ amongst their core concerns. A significant goal that national education systems then set out for themselves is the inculcation of national character in children through school—what will enable them to become ideal citizens. These concerns implicitly

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11 Standpoint theory holds that those who are dominated or marginalised by structures of society may know different things, or know some things better than people who are more privileged than them. In other words, they have an epistemic advantage in some respects. Feminist standpoint theory says that the social location of women, like other oppressed groups, could be the source of knowledge not only about themselves, but also the rest of nature and social relations. Using women’s lives, experiences and activities (or labour) as a starting point, feminist standpoint projects try to see ‘beneath’ or ‘behind’ what is a dominant male-centred view of social and economic life. A feminist standpoint is not an automatic view, but one that is struggled towards. Standpoint theory therefore moves beyond knowledge that is created from being situated in a specific social location, to generating a critical awareness about how that social location impacts the way we know things, or what we know. (Harding 2004, Hartstock 2004, Wylie 2004)

and explicitly mirror the choices that textbook writers make regarding content.

As the debate on NCF 2000 referred to earlier makes clear, schooling is overwhelmingly determined by nationalistic concerns and anxieties. And since the latter is increasingly a matter of political contestation, competing visions of nationalism can define the educational curriculum quite differently. The reason why gender is central to this process is because, for historical and other reasons, it is the site where nationalism, especially nationalism in the once-colonised societies, defines itself.

In formulaic terms, if women are the bearers of a nation's identity, it is through the instrumentality of education that they are inducted to assume that role. The process of gender socialisation is mediated through the category (or justification) of the nation. The school is a key arena for the creation and normalisation of these specific sets of values, norms and ideals. It sets out the notion of the ideal citizen, the ideal woman, the ideal family, the ideal worker, and so on.

We can see, for example, the significance of the 'ideal' in education policy. As far back as 1961, the Hansa Mehta Committee argued against the need for differentiation of curricula for boys and girls. Rejecting differentiation as unscientific, it provided women the option of work. It was the beginning of an increasingly reluctant recognition by the State that women were required to do more than just live up to being idealised as 'mothers' of the nation. The needs of the new nation state brought with it demands for the training and development of women; as a result of this, women would have to leave home full-time. From the Hansa Mehta Committee's encouragement of part-time employment for women, we come to the Kothari Commission (1964–66), which identified the middle class woman as the ideal when it argued for women to share responsibility of developing the nation equally with men. They were mandated to develop careers and contribute to the economy. And in the formulation of the NCF 1975, we see a clear move to link population control with the education of women. The ideal Indian woman was not only one who learnt the alphabet but also limited or controlled her reproductive power to suit the new needs of the State.

Women are implicated differently in the project of the nation. Work over the last two decades has explored how gender manifests itself in the nation. Scholars have argued that the nation, despite the rhetoric of equality, remains the property of men. It is men who claim the prerogatives of the nation and women who accept the obligations of the nation (Mayer 2000). The effort in this category was to unpack the nature of expectations from both women and men, and to link this with how it drew the contours of the ideal Indian nation.

## Tradition and Modernity

The role of women is not only limited to the biological reproduction of the members of the nation, they are participants in the reproduction of culture and ideology. This culture and identity that women are meant to stand in for, and also reproduce, was clearly something that had to be ‘constructed’, and at the same time, as in all nationalist imaginations of identity and culture, present itself as a discovery rather than fabrication (Chakravarti 1993). In other words, the effort was to appear ancient, timeless and unchanging. As we are well aware, it is only within modernity that a self-conscious awareness of tradition emerges. The term ‘invention of tradition’ represents precisely this aspect of the creation of suitable historical pasts in the context of creating a particular national tradition. The outcome of the creation of tradition in modern times is that both exist and constitute the other. The relationship between tradition and modernity is not viewed as entirely antagonistic, but as a more complex process of assimilation or even complimentarity/continuity.

The two categories nation and tradition and modernity were closely tied to each other as, in the recounting of the nations past, notions of tradition, culture and heritage are created. History was a key site where this process took place in educational curricula, yet Geography and Political Science too charted the domains within which modernity drew on spaces and ideas of progress to locate the present. Yet many of these processes of progress and development meant different things to men and women; for that matter, the preoccupation with the marking of resources presumed a common sharing across genders and class as national wealth. This points to twin processes of unmarking gender from critical points of a socio-political or economic context, and at the same time bringing it in strategic ways to emphasise its significance. Were women really mentioned in a particular context because it related to them per se? Many like Patricia Oberoi (1993), Kumar Jayawardene (1986), N.Y. Davis (1989), Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan (1993), and Rubina Saigol (1995) have argued that women fulfil a metonymic function: symbolically standing in for something else. It was this that we hoped to interrogate through the acts of silence and mention in the tradition and modernity category.

## The Body

The classic sex-gender divide as representing the biological versus the social – so popular amongst gender experts, trainers and theorists- has been challenged by those working on issues of sexuality. Of particular significance have been the experiences of transgender communities in questioning this essentializing of the body as a given, fixed entity. They have argued for a viewing of the body as a site that is neither purely biological nor natural but as socially constructed or fashioned. It

is through the repeated performance of specific acts or by a cataloging of particular experiences on the body itself that specific identities are created. Socialisation and sexualisation of the body feature as important concerns not only in the Moral Science and Adolescent Education textbooks, but also inhabit the language textbooks. As bodies perform different tasks, are described, visualised or embedded in different contexts in the textbooks, they create the frameworks for normative behaviors. How particular gender codes are established in this process – in which the body is implicated, both explicitly and implicitly- informed the analysis of the textbooks. Bodies, however, are never purely male or female, they bring with them class, caste and other identities as part of the creation of norms or in affirming particular frameworks as appropriate or acceptable. Who performs which task, who is given agency to act on others? which bodies get repeated mention or representation? This was observed, in contexts as different and varied as health, food, dress, fiction, hygiene. All these contexts carried within them moral judgments that replicated ideas of hierarchy and power amongst different bodies and experiences.

## Labour and Violence

The nature of power relations between the sexes and the persistence of patriarchy is located in two significant domains—that of labour and violence. In the case of violence, active intervention and politics of the women's movement has impacted the understanding and writing on the subject over the past four decades or so. The argument that informed our understanding of violence is that there are key connections between everyday forms of violence against women and those related to community and State. Kumkum Sangari's (2002) questioning of the compartmentalisation of violence into caste, communal and State-based violence—typical of different social groups and movements—rightly distracts attention from viewing violence as a systematic and foundational feature of contemporary society. She has argued that patriarchy has depended on crafting together 'the warlike and the domestic' in such a manner, that the threat of violence as the ultimate disciplining strategy ensures submission, obedience and acceptance for the punishing of transgression. The fragmentation of violence into different types fails to make the links between different systems of coercion and consent. Therefore, often in the context of nationalism, the elisions between patriotism, bravery and violence perform the task of effacing the constructed nature of national pride and honour. Often, violence against women is also seen as a soft area, creating implicit hierarchies between forms of violence: more masculinised forms of violence either acquire higher status, or then there is a naturalised acceptance of violence against women as part of existing social norms. An outcome of this perspective was that in textbooks, all acts — whether self-identified as patriotic or non-patriotic; moral or immoral, protective or attacking—would need to be marked and analysed in terms of how they unpacked violence from a feminist standpoint.

### Milani

It is the night of 20th December. There is teeming crowd on platform no.2 of Old Delhi station. People are waiting impatiently for the Pathankot-Hatia train. People heading to Jharkhand constitute the largest chunk among them. They are going to their respective villages for Christmas and New Year celebrations. Women and girls, working mainly as domestic help in Delhi, are also part of the crowd.

(...) [Milani] spent many years looking for minor government jobs. Then some girls of her village told her about Delhi. Here they used to earn around 1500 – 2000 rupees by working in people's homes. Milani liked the idea of this work. She came to Delhi with them and after some days they arranged a job for her in a house nearby.



Fig. 8

This excerpt from the SCERT Civics textbook for Class 7, tells the story of Milani, a migrant domestic worker in Delhi. It is an attempt to visibilise this very gendered form of labour.

In the case of labour, women's work has been under scrutiny, both in terms of challenging economics as a discipline, and in highlighting the nature of economic activity that women engage in. Both theoretical and empirical research has informed this domain. This research has dwelt not merely on the sheer quantum of work women do, but also the nature of the work and how that impacts the very definition of work, which is often market-driven. The analysis of intra-household economics is at the heart of the critique by feminist economists. The home

is typically understood as a unit, where mutually beneficial activities construct the economy of the household. Classic dualities of the public and private are confirmed within this unit, with the activities of the household economy associated predominantly by women's labour being based not on competition and self-interest (as in the public free market), but on reciprocity and voluntarism. Implicit in this treatment of the household as a single unit by economists is that it ignores struggles within the household for access to resources.

At another level, labour as a category becomes critical in the context of education, where there is ample proof that a middle-class sensibility and perspective pervades the curriculum. This can be seen as the aspirations implicit in the textbook — for a modern, technologically-driven, English-speaking, consumerist life — or for that matter in the values communicated regarding what form of work is desirable (engineering, science, art, teaching, law, etc.). National development and ideas of progress too get informed from this perspective, and much of Social Science focuses on articulating a hegemonic, male view of nation,

community, family and the individual.<sup>12</sup> It is in this context that we see clear links between the invisibilisation of specific forms of labour and its implications for gendered work or for gender at work (See Fig 8).

## Methodology

### Partner States

The study was conceived as a critical reading of the textbooks—both private and government—across five States. One of these would be Delhi, which would involve an analysis of textbooks produced at the Centre by the NCERT. The criteria for selection of the other four States were their political context, developments in education and the vibrancy and academic rigour of their Women's Studies departments. The States finally selected were Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Gujarat. Virtually all States chosen for the study have experienced large-scale educational interventions, like District Primary Education Programme, textbook revisions and teachers' trainings, in the last ten years. As education is a State subject, the political context and history of a region becomes an important and interesting background against which to analyse how the gender question is dealt with in textbooks, and the specific way it intersects with class, caste, religion, ethnicity and so on, to create a certain regional/national subject.

West Bengal has the longest-serving democratically elected Communist government in the world. Initiatives have been taken to change the content of textbooks to reflect the ideological thrust of a Left understanding of structural inequalities. West Bengal textbooks have undergone revisions, and in a stable political environment, these have been sustained over a period of time. Some studies have been done previously to look at how class permeated the perspective of textbooks. However, gender has been largely sidelined. Therefore, West Bengal was critical in studying the interplay between nation, class and gender.

Gujarat—labelled by some as the 'laboratory of Hindutva'—represents the other end of the political spectrum. It has seen specific revisions in textbooks in the last decade. The assertion of a national identity closely linked to religion-based identity has been an area of concern and study. While there has been a keen interest in the last four years to study the construction of nationalism in textbooks, the inter-linkage of national identity with class, caste, ethnicity and so on has been overshadowed by a focus on the content of History textbooks. Gujarat, however, locates nation, religion and gender on an axis that demanded an in-depth inquiry.

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12 Scrace's (1993) study of West Bengal textbooks too points to the singularly middle-class nature of textbooks in a State committed to workers' rights.

The evocation of a rational, enlightened moment is also seen in the representations of gender in the Bengali textbooks. Women writers like Rokeya Hussain communicate the ‘woman’s question’ and the struggle for education which was at the heart of the debate in the nineteenth century (See Fig. 8). Mahashweta Devi voices the exploitation of the tribal, part of an accepted critique of the nation. But these allowances, so to speak, are more in the interest of communicating the regional identity as a modern and progressive one, rather than to provide any critique to patriarchal structures or other hierarchies of power.

The freedom movement is one way in which the larger nation makes itself visible in Bengali textbooks, but even then on the region’s own terms, through the stories of its battles and its martyrs. These battles are described entirely revelling in and celebrating the violence involved and the bloodshed, seeing it as evidence of patriotic action and feeling. Even the more progressive writers/textbooks glorify violence, even if only to add dramatic charge to the narration of the story. The assumption then is of a particular ‘national’ history and struggle, which the region validates, and also seeks to be a part of by intertwining its own heroes and ‘local’ battles of resistance into the master narrative of the national struggle. The only times when this narrative is layered or complicated (by caste, class, gender, location) is in the Madrasah books, or in rare instances, where popular rebellion is written about, or rebellion by leaders outside the urban, Hindu, male trope—for example, the piece on the Ho tribal leader Elishaba Qui.

## Landscapes of the Nation

An important objective of History and Geography in school is to lay out the nation—its contours, exact boundaries, its bounties, its moments and points of glory and defeat—to the young learner. Language textbooks too map out the nation, bringing together its histories and its landscapes in charged and particular ways. Literature has always been instrumental in creating and recreating a desired geography of the nation, and also in rousing feelings of patriotic (and other) passion for this geography. The way in which the nation is conjured in literature is almost always gendered—it is a mother, a lover, a wife, its rivers and hills known intimately, and from time immemorial, and to be protected from

Fig. 8  
Path Sankalan, a Bengali textbook

Begum Rokeya.

1880-1932.

(...)

Rokeya wanted to stand on the same footing as men in a patriarchal society. She once said that for women the ideal to be reached was an equal position in society. She wanted both the son and daughter in a family get equal importance. That is why she continuously paid importance to education, which she believed would get women the respect and esteem that they aspired for. She said, “Because we women tend not to exercise our brains we have tended to lose our sharpness. We must study and educate ourselves to recover that.”

(...)

foreign touch. In any case, what this study has shown is that, like all literature, textbooks too create and reference a known landscape of the nation, in metaphors that are specific to each language and its own politics.

In the case of Sanskrit and Hindi, the ancient past and its 'sacred' features, or rather sacred geography, dominate. Similar to Geography texts, certain Sanskrit texts too begin with the globe, quickly move to the continent and zoom into the space titled 'Bharatbhoomi'. Its features are presented to have existed since time immemorial—the lofty Himalayas, holy rivers and so on. The river Sindhu is present in most books, while the river Saraswati is added depending on the ideology of the book. (In the post NCF 2000 NCERT Sanskrit book (Shreyasi Part 2) reader, not only was the river Saraswati included, proof of its existence was added as well. The NIOS book Sanskritam Part 1 goes as far as to outline a map of India at the time of Valmiki (See Fig. 9). Myths, as a result, become histories, and get mapped on to generate a long, continuous geographical existence.

The task that Hindi sets upon itself is to communicate the nation, and here one of the elements that nationalist poetry draws on is the sheer antiquity of the nation (primarily north Indian) through its timeless, pure rivers, the Himalayas and Vindhya ranges. In the Tamil Nadu Hindi Samba reader, this land of Ganga and Yamuna is also the ‘punyabhoomi’ (the land which is pure), ‘dharmbhoomi’(land of religion, spirituality) and the janam-sthal (birth place) of Raghupati and Sita. Clearly a corollary of this antiquity argument is that it points in the direction of Hinduism as the origin—and therefore the core—of the Indian nation. In Sohanlal Dwivedi’s poem ‘Rashtra Devta’ (Nation God) which appears in the Tamil Nadu Samba reader 7, the nation is god, one among the galaxy of gods in Hinduism (See Fig. 10).

Thus we see a layering in of religio-cultural symbols on to the described terrain, infusing the nation's past with myths and epics that seek a historical status of sorts. Gujarati takes a leaf out of Hindi texts and we see various protective gods on all four sides demarcating the boundary



Fig. 9

### Rashtra Devta (Nation God)

Greetings to you, my nation God.  
 Beautiful Himgiri rides on your head  
 Ganga and Yamuna adorn your chest.  
 Constantly extending out to the incomparable seas  
 Perfect and imperturbable for ages

Fig. 10

of Gujarat: Amba Mata in the north, Kali Mata in the east, Kunteshwar Mahadev in the south and Somnath in the west. Thus the past becomes part of a ‘present’, where the need to define the boundaries of the State somehow naturalises the logic of its outlines along religious markers. Rivers like Tapti, Narmada and Mahi indicate the prosperity of the land. In fact, the narrative of the river is a genre of writing particular to the Hindi textbooks. The river speaks in first person, a living proof of the (Hindu) civilisation it carries, flowing to the present, transacting the link between history and geography. Therefore the origins of both the nation and the river are intertwined, and it becomes difficult to say which came first. Here gender too comes into play as the river, a feminine symbol, informs or rather addresses the reader—the future male citizen—as to how, as a mother, she is willing to be tied down and dammed to nurture the nation; how his actions have polluted her.

The Urdu textbooks, in a masterstroke, invokes a desh, which carries none of this highly Hinduised symbolism or imagery. It carries the sight, sounds and smell of a land one would call one’s own. Evoking nature, with a judicious absence of the more specific political grid of the nation, it manages to perform this feat. In fact, the metaphors used to evoke this desh are those with regional, rather than religio-cultural, specificity—see how the excerpt from a Maktaba Jamia book uses

Fig. 11: From Maktaba Jamia

Hamara Watan, Dil ka pyara watan  
 Our Country, Our beloved

Hindostan ...the light of our eyes and hearts  
 Hindostan ...Our country our beloved

....  
 voh savan mein kaali ghata ki bahaar  
 voh barsaat ki halki halki phuvar  
 Dark clouds of the monsoon the seasons of rain  
 The drizzle and the slow showers of soft pain  
 Hindostan our country our beloved

Where the cuckoo lives in the orchard  
 And the jungle is the peacock's abode  
 The waves of Ganga match the Jamuna's force  
 Hindustan our country our beloved

language distinctively north Indian (See Fig. 11). The geography, and the linguistic registers used to evocate this geography is distinctively north India - this 'watan' or desh in the poem could located anywhere across the Northwest frontier to the plains of the north. The poem evokes, as we saw earlier with reference to Bengali, a notion of language not limited by national boundaries.

This strategy of tying nostalgia with nature in order to transcend the particular demands of national boundaries can be seen in the Bengali textbooks too. There too, the ambiguous term 'desh' is used, which was part of Bengali vocabulary in the colonial era. For the present-day reader, it is difficult to say whether the Bangladesh of 1947 or 1971 is part of this desh; just as in the case of Urdu, it could mean a village in Uttar Pradesh, or anywhere across the Indo-Gangetic plain, stretching from the banks of the Indus to the delta of the Ganges, breaking political boundaries. Here the nation is ensconced in an emotional symbolism, strongly linked to the sense of being 'at home' (See Fig. 12).

As language and Tagore, in addition to other literary writers, are part of a shared history, particularly the literature that emerged during the anti-colonial struggle, Bengali positions itself as a language of the region. In the Bengali textbook, the landscape of the Bangla desh is distilled into the Bengal village, pastoralised and imbued with traditional values of familial love and communal harmony. The West Bengal report points out that the village comes to symbolise a 'timeless borderless idyll, more subjective than real, heavily imbued with the tropes of motherhood. It is a dreamscape protected from the depredation of colonial and feudal oppression, where the male subject of these texts is protected, sustained and loved unconditionally'. As we can see in Bangla, in the superimposing of nature on the desh, the nurturing mother is evoked as the essential component in providing a sense of goodwill and positive affirmation of this abstract idea of all, including the reader, as part of a national community.

English, as discussed earlier, creates and recreates a desired nation quite distanced from the one we see around us. So how do we begin

### Bangla Desh Satyendranath Dutta

...  
 Which nation's distress makes us  
 Sadder than aught else can make?  
 And which nation's glory makes our hearts  
 Burst with more pride than we can take?  
 Where do our ancestors lie at rest-  
 With the sacred dust that's blest?  
 It is our land of Bengal.  
 It is our land of Bengal.

Fig. 12

From the Bengali textbook,  
 Kishalay 4



**Bells.** The jingle of tonga bells. Bells in the hills. A school bell ringing, the children's voices drifting through an open window. A temple bell, heard faintly from across the valley. Heavy silver ankle bells on the feet of sturdy hill women. Sheep bells heard high up on the mountainside.

Do falling petals make a sound? Just the tiniest and softest of the sounds, like the drift of falling snow. Of course, big flowers, such as dahlias, drop their petals with a very definite plop. These are show-offs, like the hawk moth who comes flapping into the house at night instead of emulating the butterfly, dipping lazily on the afternoon breeze.

There are sounds that come from a distance, beautiful because they are far away, voices on the wind — "they walketh upon the wings of the wind". The cries of fishermen out on the river. Drums beating rhythmically in a forest clearing. The croaking of frogs from the rain-water pond behind the house.

Fig. 13:

From Ruskin Bond's 'Life's Sweet Sounds', Madhuban English Reader 8.

to describe this peculiar landscape of the English textbook? Here are some pictures that you're likely to see if you skim through an English Language textbook: a girl in a pink frock, or a field of daffodils. What can be quickly observed from these is that the landscape English evokes is one distanced from any 'real' world that the child may know: in terms of economics, geography, history, and the specific culture informed by these—language, dress, lifestyle and so on. In comparison to the strenuous nationalism espoused by the Hindi textbooks, or the stratagems in the Tamil textbooks, there is a striking lack of overt political and geographical location in the English textbook. At a microcosmic level, this can be seen in the fact that, more often than not, a selected piece will have no context provided, and its meaning is not reflective of the particular time and place it was written in. This perhaps is common to all Language teaching in school—the disavowal of any connection between language, literature and the socio-political time it's located in.

With English, though, this has the effect of invisibilising the nation, and locating the English book in a timeless landscape of meadows (at most, idyllic Himalayan mountains),

or a slightly eerie, technology-ridden future. the kind of authors and selections we see in the English textbooks are those which evoke a depoliticised countryside, or a one far from what the reader would recognise (Ruskin Bond's pastoralism is as close the textbook comes to evoking an Indian landscape; See Fig. 13) As other languages draw on and recreate a history and geography that is desired rather than real, English too evokes a landscape of (mostly western) rural bliss, or of modern Indian consumerism.

## The Past in the Present

*Novels are a continuation of history, uttering what history could not. Indeed, we can hardly say that the first type of history is serious and*

nation. The partition, the wars with neighbours, the status of Muslims in economic spheres—it's as if a large part of the present and its context is erased in these books (See Fig. 22).

## Patriotism and the Language Textbook

The nation is most stridently visible in the nationalist fervour or patriotism that is communicated as a necessary value in the Language books (here and earlier we discuss how this value is more effectively expressed by the Language readers, rather than the Social Science ones). Different languages 'do' patriotism differently, depending on the relationship they have (or aspire to have) with the nation. Within the ambit of the patriotic story is also the setting up of the ideal patriot: men, women and children. In essence then, not only do Language textbooks tell you how you must feel for your nation, but the physical and moral qualities that being patriotic involves. For instance, Hindi books across States do define and describe what types of ideal women and children are part of this nation, or serve it best. In fact Hindi, in its self-imposed role as 'national' language, articulating a nationalist history and identity, is pre-eminent in defining a patriotism adequate for the modern nation.

What is seen as patriotism is deeply gendered, and even the present-day Language readers communicate an extremely dated version of who is patriotic and in what terms. As feminists scholars on the nation have said (Mayer, 2000; Walby 1996), while men carry the prerogative of the nation, women carry the obligation. They have through history, and they continue to do so. Patriotism is ideally a masculinised and violent expression of attachment and sacrifice to the nation—almost always demonstrated by men. While men die for the nation, women continue to live, giving birth to others, or betraying male lovers in a show of loyalty to the nation. Again we see how the relationship of women, in terms of how they are allowed to be patriotic to the nation, is deeply fraught. Their value and contribution is always less, somehow, than the desired masculine patriot's. See for instance a chapter titled 'Meri Maa' (my mother) in the NCERT Hindi reader, Bharti Part 1 written by the revolutionary Bismil, where we see a son writing about the greatness of his mother. After a rather brief sketch of how she was a self-taught, hardworking and nurturing mother, we are provided with a more powerful sense of Bismil and how, as her son, he is able to perform the all-important act of dying for the motherland. Her greatness is in having birthed and nurtured him—although, it is mentioned in passing that she did not agree on the path her son adopted, of violent protest. Bismil promises that, with his martyrdom, his name will be etched in the annals of the history of the nation. Ironically, we are never told what his mother's name is.

The Hindi books also include some classic examples of stories that pit women's love for the nation against their romantic love. In the Tamil

### From Maalav Prem

(...)

Vijaya: Hide and seek is played with eyes shut, but this is a different type of play. In this game hands have to be tied. Now give me your hand. [Shreepal puts his hand out, Vijaya ties his hands tight.

Jaidev (Vijaya's brother) enters from the other side]

Shreepal: [without looking at Jaidev]—Now, What next?

Vijaya; My brother will play the remaining part of the game. [points towards Jaidev]

Shreepal: Vijaya! That you can practice such deception was beyond my imagination.

Vijaya: I am proud that I saved my love from sedition.

Jaidev: You want to punish your motherland for my crime.

Vijaya; And the country has decided to sentence me for your crime.

Shreepal: Jaidev! You are brave. You are the dignity of Maalav jati community/race, which is famous for its courage and manliness. Do you like to trap me by your deceit?

Jaidev: Shreepal! Presently the country is facing the problem of life and death. There is no room for compassion.

Vijaya: [To Shreepal] My love! I beg your forgiveness for my sin [Taking the necklace from her neck and putting it around his]. This is the final evidence of my love. Today is our swayambar (choosing of one's bridegroom by the bride from among several suitors). Today I put the wedding garland around the neck of the farmer's son against the tradition of the Maalav race. I have been yours and would remain so.

Shreepal: Vijaya! My hands are tied so I cannot offer you anything in return. I cannot give you any evidence of my love.

Vijaya: Love does not need anything in return. Can I have the dust from your feet? This itself is invaluable treasure for me. [Touches his feet]

Fig. 23

Nadu and Gujarat textbooks, women perform the ultimate sacrifice of handing over their lover (a potential enemy of the king), as proof of their patriotism. However, in one case ('Maalav Prem' by Harikrishna Premi, Gujarat Class 9 Hindi; See Fig. 23) the protagonist demands that she too be killed as reward for bringing in her betraying lover—thus affecting a masterstroke, where her love and loyalty to the nation and her integrity as a woman are both left intact. She sacrifices her love for the nation and her life for her love.

Gender and violence, then, become barometers to measure how patriotic one is, and whether patriotic enough. Preetilata Wadekar's story in the Bengali Class 5 reader (Kishalay) is a dramatic instance of women proving their love for the nation by being imitative of men—in a way, the only way that women can be the ideal patriot. The piece shows the common figure of woman as freedom fighter, assistant to 'Masterda'. Here, the break from the 'normal' woman character—Preeti is active, out in the public, and violently fighting for the nation—is made possible by (cross)dressing Preeti in male clothing to legitimise her transgressive role (See Fig. 24). Also, as we see in many other instances, the woman is permitted to bend certain rules when playing a different role from that of essence and physical reproducer of the nation and its values (for instance, the woman-social activist-brahmachari of the Hindi textbooks).

As the Bengal report points out, these bloody instances of women revolutionaries do not really alter gender roles or male-narrations of history. They are merely among the many tests women must undergo to prove their patriotism and worthiness.

In the case of children, it is in the potential they carry as future actors. The male child, who is the subject of most of the stories, carries the potential, and the nation's desire of becoming the ideal patriot. Preparing for this becomes part of the play of defending the nation. In Hindi Language texts, nationalist

poetry dominates till Middle School: it is invariably the inaugural piece of the book. In the Gujarati books, we see 'Karo Remakda Kuch Kadam' (Class 3), a marching song by Makrand Dave, filled with the thrill of marching boots and advancing armies (See Fig.25). An inclusion since the Seventies, it has a child leading a toy army to 'protect hind desh'. The child, dressed in military greens complete with books, spiked helmets and a soldier's rucksack, is the next generation to be protecting the nation. In an interesting way, the nation too, like family property, becomes the inheritance of the male child. Another poem titled 'Sainik Sainik Ramiye' by Prakash Dave (Class 4) adopts an even more aggressive tone, stating how 'the stick' would be used on anyone found nursing 'bad intentions'. A sense of vigilantism permeates the poem. This imagining of the young child in khakis defending the nation is yet an element that points to a more Hindu/right-wing understanding of protecting the nation.

The important concern here is whether the learner at such a young age is able to appreciate the context in which such nationalist poetry emerged. As discussed earlier, the lack of any historical or political framing of much of the content in language readers means that the piece is read in a vacuum. Here, a nationalist moment infused with passionate emotion is transposed on a contemporary context, its empowering, rich oratory set to a different tune of the present.<sup>13</sup>

Another pattern that we traced over various language textbooks was the link between civic moral values, and a sense of patriotism. In



Fig. 24

<sup>13</sup> See p.117 in the chapter on Patterns of Violence in the Textbook for an interesting reflection on an extract from the lesson 'Apna Paraya' on the subject of violence in the name of nationalism.

Karo Remakda Kuch Kadam  
Makrand Dave

Dolls, forward march!  
Tarr...Tarr...dham dham  
Dolls march forward!

Hathibhai in front  
Behind the camel riders,  
Horses gallop—  
And oh! Our style!  
Dolls, forward march!

Above the airplanes thunder  
Below the military vehicles  
Soldiers march, guns fully loaded  
Ordering all to be 'beware'!

Mother puts her finger on her lips  
Father is amazed;  
Elder brother asks, "Which village have you attacked?"  
Tell us in God's name".  
Dolls, forward march!

Fig. 25

English textbooks, for instance, when nation is not immediately visible as such, and patriotism is not directly linked with cries for blood (and so on, as we have seen in Hindi books), patriotism makes itself seen as a moral value. This value is demonstrated by various acts of unspecified 'good' (by this we mean that, it is not necessarily explained why the act is good)—like planting trees or showing other forms of concern for the environment; being non-violent and 'tolerant'; by various acts of bravery and uprightness—all of which go into making the model young citizen of the modern nation. As the Tamil report mentions, this is also one way in which different regions moor themselves to the idea of a (less abstract) national allegiance.

## Conclusion: Gandhi as a Strategy for the Language Textbook

The representation of Mahatma Gandhi in the textbooks reflects the intermeshing of different strategies that textbooks—consciously and unconsciously—use. It's also a fascinating site to see how the various objectives of the Language textbooks contradict each other. So while Gandhi is as large a national icon as you can get, in the textbooks he is more of a moral, rather than nationalist or patriotic, voice. In terms

environment, at most times, in denial of all religious markers. These open up questions for reflection and debate on the nature of negotiations that textbooks effect in matters of faith and religious difference.

And finally and most importantly, gender emerges as constituent of and constituting all the domains of tradition and modernity, determining the boundaries and continuities between the two. How and who handles which kinds of technologies? When are ‘new’ technologies appropriate or desirable for women? When do men acquire real sainthood, and do women have a role in this? Therefore, a gendered tradition is played out: the fashioning of the modern man and woman is a continued exercise in the textbooks.

## Textbook Heroes and Heroines

An important aspect of the task set out for the textbooks is to provide the learner pegs on which to pin an understanding of that complex idea called the nation. An effective pedagogical strategy that the textbooks employ is the lives of great men and women. The ‘national icon’ becomes a vehicle to communicate the nation, and is symbolic of a desirable patriotism and nationalism the learner must inculcate. Through these various bio-narratives, the Language textbooks lay out a landscape, naturalised for the learner, dotted with historical processes and moments deemed important. Yet, because the site of this landscape creation is the Language textbook, it is not just in terms of what these personalities did or contributed to the nation (politically and historically) that is important, but also the values they stood for. Iconic figures from a charged and particular moment in the past collapse into moral mascots: but through this strategy, a tradition is established for our modern, moral selves. We have seen how Gandhi emerges in textbooks as burdened with the task of morally developing the new generation of learners.

The challenge that textbook writers face is—given the need to incorporate larger-than-life figures from the past, but also somehow maintain the status quo (crucial for maintaining the unquestionability of the ‘Indian nation’)—how does one present the complex political, cultural and, at times contradictory, lives and acts of these people in the space of the textbook? It’s a question worth asking that, if icons like Ambedkar, Phule or Savarkar—all who had strongly political views—are to be included, how exactly should their ideological positions be reflected? One way of course is to shift the focus from political impact to a moral lesson to be learned—as mentioned above. Another more interesting strategy is to round off the edges, or simply elide the most political (read problematic) of their views.

Periyar is a figure the Tamil books cannot ignore, but must find a way to tame. A hagiographic tone is used to describe his life. His anti-caste

politics are represented as a response to upper-caste cunning, and the accepted black mark on the caste system—untouchability. Thus Periyar becomes a righteous victim, working for the ‘uplift’ of the lower castes—a suitable insertion of moralism, and foreclosing of any critique of a structure that is based on inequity. His distinctive critical position outside of the caste system, what he saw as the problem with caste, how it led to inequity, or his rejection of religion, is silenced. Instead, the textbook focuses on Periyar’s Gandhian phase—which in fact he later moved away from. In the UP textbooks, Ambedkar’s inclusion reflects a similar process. Here, what is adopted is the ‘bio-data’ strategy. This is a box where all the different committees that Ambedkar was on are listed, in a sense to establish his credentials. This saves the piece from having to dwell too much on Ambedkar’s struggles and critique of caste. Therefore, textbooks selectively spotlight parts of the lives of prominent figures, as one strategy to manage the supposedly problematic or radical aspect of their politics.

Birsa Munda in the Bangla texts becomes a symbol for the struggle against the British, despite the fact that the piece by Mahashweta Devi characterises his rebellion as one against all ‘dikus’ including zamindars and mahajans. The narrator in the text frames the rebellion by Birsa as part of an ongoing process of protest against exploitation. However, the line at the end of the piece emphasises the real importance of the rebellion. It states, ‘Because this was not only a rebellion against the dikus or the outsiders—it was against the real outsiders and enemies of India, the British.’ The story therefore is finally rehabilitated, according to the West Bengal report, as a middle class narrative of nationalism, rather than problematising the notion of the nation itself. Birsa Munda’s rebellion and his protest against all who exercised power over tribals gets selectively tailored to meet the imperatives of the task of nation-building that textbooks are mandated to perform. Inclusions of those on the margins classically follow this tailoring to suit an existing format of national hero/heroine as can be seen in the case of Ambedkar, Periyar or Birsa Munda.

In the Gujarat Hindi textbooks, we have Acharya Narendra Dev’s memoirs of travels with Gandhi and Nehru. In his piece on Nehru we have a selection where Dev comments on how Nehru wrote a letter to his sisters after the death of his father, about how he did not see himself as the sole inheritor of his father’s property but as a mere trustee. But Nehru’s radical view on daughters’ claim to their parents’ property, his critique of patriliney and how he acted upon this in his own life, becomes more a reflection on how Nehru was a man who sacrificed his rights. ‘Tyag’ (sacrifice) is the word used to describe Nehru’s behaviour. Thus we see a blunting of the critique that Nehru had of inheritance and women’s rights and a reading of this as a pious, saintly act. Somehow the fact that a man of such stature took this step, in and of itself seems to add to the power of this act, enhancing Nehru’s status even further, rather than highlighting the issue.

Fig.2

From Gujarat Class 8 Hindi textbook



Charumati Yodha

Charumati Yodha was one such woman, who dedicated her life to the welfare and protection of women. Here we share some inspiring aspects of her life.....

A mother in law or sister in law beat the daughter-in-law, an angry and ill-behaved husband beats his wife. The life of such women is submerged in darkness and there is no hope. In this situation there seems to be no way out for the women. But how can one live like this? For how long? Women start thinking of ending their lives. Charumati used to get information about such cases. She used to march off to save these women who had no support. She would knock sense into the husband, mother-in-law and sister-in-law of the woman. Charumati had an amazing moral force and strength. She truly was a warrior. Till her last dying moment she kept battling those who insulted women and made them suffer.

...  
It was her habit to take on challenges. This is reflected in a special characteristic that she possessed, which was that till the age of twelve – thirteen she wore clothes like boys.

In the case of women too we see a similar blunting of their acts or decisions by locating them in the domain of the feminine. In the case of Charumati Yodha—who appears in the Hindi language textbooks of Gujarat as the only regional female icon—we are informed that, from a young age she refused to wear girlish clothes, that she was influenced by Gandhi and chose not to marry. But her actions are claimed to point to her desire ‘do service’ (सेवा भाव). Yodha’s single status makes her the ideal candidate to serve society: she has not the primary responsibilities of wife and mother. Her interventions to support women suffering from domestic violence is seen as the desirable act of ‘uplifting’ other women. As a result, Yodha becomes a ‘safe’ icon despite her cross-dressing, her rejection of marriage and her support to women facing violence (See Fig. 2). Gandhi comes in to validate the lofty ideals that inspired such a ‘different’ woman. In Tamil Nadu, Avvaiyar, a fiercely independent and intelligent bard, comes to represent the glory of classical Tamil. The fact that she is not beautiful, young and attractive makes it possible to focus on her wisdom and character. Two rich men test the incorruptibility of Avvaiyar, to see if she will sing praises of their non-existent valour and munificence. Avvaiyar instead turns her act, commenting instead on their worthlessness. In a sense, Avvaiyar’s grandmotherliness makes her a wise icon, suitable and accessible to children.

Therefore, we see different strategies being used by textbooks, to domesticate certain personalities: focusing on aspects of their lives that were not critically related to their politics; ignoring ‘controversial’ acts or converting them to mean something other than what they are meant to be; by pushing the icon outside the boundaries of ‘ordinary’ men and women and according them high stature; by making their politics stand for something else; by using them as a trope to talk of other issues mostly the nation.

# Constituting Tradition

Tradition in the primary school textbooks emerges as something that exists around us—an effort to naturalise the concept of tradition, bring it as close as possible to the mundane. Through familiar, daily practices children are introduced to what is ‘custom’—in the case of Tamil Nadu, it is going to the weekly market, making rangoli, celebrating festivals, etc (See Fig. 3). In Sanskrit this might emerge through daily religious rituals or ablutions, or the manner of interaction that is required between the guru and student. Tradition is also outside the realm of the everyday: tradition can be heritage, when it draws on a past, and sees it as worthy of passing it on to children. Here there is the more familiar list of either forms of dance, (like the chapter on Chau dance in Bengal, on therukoothu in Tamil Nadu) or literature or buildings. Yet there are other ways in which languages assert and mark tradition. This can occur at the level of the language itself.

For instance, tradition and the past are selectively adapted or imagined in keeping with the contemporary moment in Tamil history. So if the modern moment (and the Tamil identity within the nation) necessitates a flattening out of social differences like caste and religion, then these are relegated to a forgotten or irrelevant past, which is obviously not drawn upon to forge the contemporary Tamil identity. As a result, the Tamil books draw the learner into a rich Tamil, chosen and manipulated depending on the particular Tamil identity and politics desired to be articulated. Kamban’s Ramayanam is a way of prioritising a kind of Tamil language sought to be learnt, along with certain power structures inherent in it. A specifically Tamil version of a text of great cultural importance is used to not only talk about the universal, or pervasive nature of Tamil literature and culture (even Tamil Muslims celebrated this version of the epic), but also to draw attention to the rank and deference which is a specific feature of Tamil rhetoric.

Again, Tamil icons, which seem to illustrate an even balance between tradition and modernity in their Tamilness and espouse little of the radical politics that some modern Tamilians did, are repeatedly included in the textbooks (See Fig. 4).

In the case of Hindi, Sanskrit and Gujarati Language textbooks, there is a consistency in the understanding of tradition: a Hinduised tradition is repeatedly drawn on or referred to for the nation as a whole. This is located in institutions like the gurukul, where a particular mode of

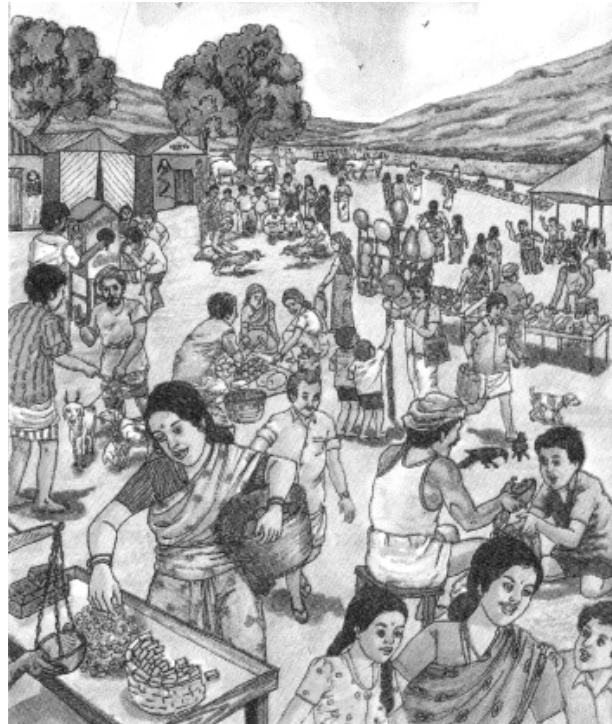


Fig. 3

From TNTC Tamil Reader  
Class 1 textbook

### Dr Guruswamy

(...) Many doctors followed English medicine. But he (Dr. Gurusamy) respected and helped Indian medical systems such as Ayurveda and Siddha to flourish. He possessed the marvellous faculty of being able to diagnose what was wrong with a person, merely by seeing him. Diseases that resisted the scalpel and the knife disappeared under his care. ... He respected people as people. He did not observe differences between rich and poor and assisted all of them equally. Poor people consulted him at his house for no charge. He was a dear friend of the very poor.

Fig. 4  
From TNTC Tamil Reader  
Class 7.

In a classic attempt to accommodate tradition with modernity, the above personality typifies attempts by Tamil and other State textbooks to accommodate the two in a manner where conflict is minimised. Here modern medicine exists in remarkable harmony with Ayurveda and Siddha, while the social service component adds to Dr. Guruswamy's commitment to ideas of equality and possibly anti-caste 'modern' or progressive views.

Fig. 5



interaction, acceptance of hierarchies and forms of learning constitute the subtext of the description of chapters. In Gujarati texts, the gurukul appears repeatedly, recalling with nostalgia a system where the teacher's authority was sacred, where students worked and lived together, etc (See Fig. 5). That this system is associated with a brahmanical system of learning is never articulated. Sanskrit's claim to tradition is all the more potent as it maintains itself as a language that represents the spiritual traditions of India, which can help deal with the materialism of the west. Various literary forms like the sukti, nitivachan (that lays out ethics and norms in any domain of society), etc. provide efficient ways of communicating this 'traditional wisdom' efficiently and economically to the young learner. This tradition professes to a past where kings were fair and just. They were capable of taking actions for the benefit of their praja, or subjects. Through innumerable stories, folktales in Hindi, Sanskrit and Gujarati, we see a benign rajdharm (duties performed by state) emerge as part of our illustrious heritage.

'Bali' is an important tradition or practice that emerges in the Tamil Nadu Hindi textbooks published by Dakshin Hindi Prachar Sabha. Here, young boys are constantly called upon to sacrifice themselves to save the 'desh', and kings too are willing to uphold their role as protectors. In the Class 8 text, a 'deshbhakt' (patriot) called Manya is asked to give his life so that drought can be overcome. A 'narmegh yagya' is to be performed. He agrees, but as the moment arrives, he is saved. Yet the pride his parents feel at his decision to give up his life becomes linked to how the country could raise its head with pride at the bravery of this boy. As a matter of fact, these texts constantly vacillate between chapters where kings, saints, gods interact with men and boys. All manner of yagya and pooja form the backdrop of interaction. A continuity is formed and naturalised between a great and spiritual Hindu tradition, and love for the nation—somehow implicitly locating true patriotism in a Hindu tradition.

## Nasiruddin

... One day the fortunate wife of the Sultan requested, "It would be better to buy a slave girl to work in the kitchen. My hands burn while baking the bread." The Sultan replied "The state treasury is the property of my subjects. I have no claims to using the money to buy a slave girl. My personal expenses are borne by earnings from writing the Quran Sharif. Only living expenses can be borne by this...." Through his entire life this king lived like a Fakir. He was absorbed in prayer and renunciation of worldly desires. For his own personal needs he never took even a single bit from the [state] treasury.

Fig. 6

The Urdu textbooks, whatever their school of thought (Jamaat, Iqkra, Maktaba Jamia, etc.) primarily present a very defined notion of Islam. Islam is presented through its purity, Id and the Prophet. Any diversity in the practice of Islam as a faith is absent. The individual who emerges as the consensus candidate to represent Islam across Urdu textbooks (Madrasah and State books) and also across time, is Nasiruddin (See Fig. 6). Clearly, in the Urdu Language textbook, tradition is constituted primarily in the sphere of religion, and so Nasiruddin's religiosity is a key factor in his inclusion in even the Jamaat texts. Political conquests, power and alliances are all subsidiary to his faith in Islam. He stands in for the good Muslim ruler—filled with piety, living the life of the dervish, with none of the grandeur, opulence and love of art, music and dance that Akbar and other Mughal kings embodied. The life of the Prophet is also described in both the State publications and Madrasah books. The Jamaat texts, and to some extent the Iqra books, focus primarily on personalities who belong to the religious domain. Here values like justice, social service, religiosity, simplicity, etc. are highlighted through these icons. The only other religious figure who appears in the Jamaat books is Jesus Christ. Apart from this, other religions are absent, thereby representing the insularity of the Jamaat books particularly from other cultural influences (See Fig. 7).

From Merathi's Urdu book 4

In the West Bengal Madrasah Board readers, we find a diverse range of concerns and representations of both Islam and its followers. There is a piece on Muslim contributions to technology (Class 7, Sabuj Path) cataloguing inventions associated with Islamic culture. The water wheel, windmill, irrigation systems, compasses and other technological achievements feature here. The idea of a forward-looking community engaged in trade and technological advances is refreshing and rare. There are pieces by Lalan Shah (a famous fakir), representing a key cultural facet of the spread of Islam in the region, which draws on Sufi ideas and spiritual quests. There are also critical pieces, like Nazrul's poem 'Khaled', which indicts the community for its petty bickering and talaqs and fatwas. Rokeya Begum's 'Parabao' is a text on the need to educate Muslim girls. These pieces are interspersed with articles on Hindu mythology like 'Kaalketur Bhojon' by Mukundaram, a piece on religious integration with Ramakrishna, the nineteenth-century reformer, etc. We get a flavour of not just the nature of Islamic practices and faith in

Only in the NCERT Urdu Class 8 book do we find a chapter on Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti. Here the humane aspect of Islam is emphasised and links between his ideas and Guru Nanak's life and teachings are made.

(...)

Hindustan is a great country. Its Ganga-Jamni culture is respected across the world. Believers of all the world's religions have lived here together for centuries. Despite the differences in religions, cultures and languages, they all take pride in being Hindustani. Venerated sufis, saints and ascetics have been born here in all the ages and have given people the message of brotherhood, love and peace. One such pious and venerated person was Hazrat Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti. He was born in the city of Sanjar in the Kharasan province of Iran....

...Khwaja sahab used to say:

Sympathise with those who suffer in the pain of destitution. Take part in their grief, it is worth a thousand prayers. God favours those who feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty and provide clothes to the unclad. The biggest sin is to insult any of your brothers or consider them lowly.

Drawing inspiration from Khwaja's enlightened teachings, Baba Gurunanak once said: "To gain salvation, each individual needs to carefully study and practise his (Khwaja's) teachings."

Mahatma Gandhi visited Khwaja Sahab's dargah in 1933 and said: My spirit has experienced a lot of peace here ...it's sad that we don't make an example out of Khawaja Sahab's life."

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru visited the dargah of Kahawaja Sahab and said: "Hindu Muslim unity can be achieved in practice only at such a destination."

Fig. 7

Bengal but also of the common influences, and matters of faith of the 'other'—the Hindu Bengali. We see how constituting an appropriate tradition in the Language textbook is a complicated and deliberate process. Tradition is located in the mundane and the everyday, it is also located in the exceptional—this may be people, language, culture, heritage. According to the identity the language is trying to forge, the tradition sought to be communicated to the learner may be progressive and 'scientific', or it may be located in the realm of spirituality and religion. At every point, the tradition we see strategically selected and reiterated in the textbook sheds light on the modern selves who seek to constitute it—their desires and anxieties in the present nation.

## Confronting Modernity in the Textbook

Modernity within the textbook is a fraught concept, and a slippery one. At one level, it seems necessary for the nation to embrace modernity, but when modernity is antithetical to the 'tradition' so painstakingly held up in the textbook, then the textbook seems incapable of dealing with it, and contradictions in the wholehearted acceptance of the modern occur. In this section, we have tried to analyse the sites where modernity is confronted in the textbook, or where the contradictions in the treatment of modernity occur.

## Pheriwala

Pheriwalas are hawkers who stack their goods in containers and carry them on their heads, in their hands or under their arms as they walk the streets and bylanes calling out for buyers. This tradition is prevalent in all the countries of the world, more in poor countries than in the rich ones. Pheriwalas don't have enough money to set up shop. You need money to pay rents and keep the stocks full or else empty shops will look bad. It's a daily struggle to earn. Whatever little comes goes into feeding their hungry children. They subsist on the bare minimum: scraps for food and rags for clothing. Little children wait all day at home for their father. The father slogs it out door to door on an empty stomach. If they manage to sell and make little money they are fed, else they have to fast. Allah wakes one up hungry, but never lets one sleep unfed. It his children's fate he is able to earn whatever he can with hard work. He returns home with a bit of grain in the evening. Keeps the container in one corner. She makes him wash his hands and feet. In the hot summer days, she sits beside him, fanning him as he eats. She attempts to meet all the needs of the tired man.

Fig. 3

From Urdu Book 8 Maktaba Jamia

What we do see are more conventional Marxist celebrations of labour and the working class through Bangla poems like 'Kuli Mazdoor' ('Porters and Labourers') by Nazrul and Sukanto's piece titled 'Runner'. Here there is a portrayal of the working class, yet they do not specifically address the theme of labour. The emphasis is on the nation, where the working class is portrayed as an integral part of the social fabric. The West Bengal report points to how the two poems that do focus on the working body are located in a liberal, non-Marxist framework. For example, 'Lohar Byatha' speaks of the pain of the iron-ore as it bears the pain of the blows hammered on it to transform the metal into a product. While this may represent one aspect of the outcomes of human labour, in the absence of pieces addressing issues of labour, a middle class continues to dominate Language texts in West Bengal.

## Gendering Labour

Gender is another social structure that necessitates the romanticisation of labour. In continuation of its bhadralok view of labour and class, even gender gets articulated through a similar prism in West Bengal. The domestic space is romanticised in Tagore's piece, 'Saontal Meye' (The Santhal Girl, Sahayak Path 9 and 10). The poet observes a tribal girl working on a construction site carrying stone chips, and feels that she would ideally be lighting up someone's homestead with 'womanly sacrifice and gentle care' rather than be engaged in paid labour. Here, in addition to identifying femininity as 'domestic', we have the poet envisioning it as the desired end of women's lives. It is a cocoon in which women will be protected; their labour would be towards such a noble end, that it would be priceless. In other words, it would be immeasurable in monetary terms—invisible. Also the domestic presumes maintenance by husband with the nuturant service by the wife.

Assumptions regarding the nurturing role as being inherent to women's nature and being emerge powerfully in examples that draw on the natural world. In the discussion on animals and their behaviour, norms

regarding gender and the sexual division of labour get transferred. In a Sanskrit text, the description of the cuckoo identifies her as 'parbhrit' which translates to 'upbringing by another', to refer to the fact that the female bird deposits her egg in the nest of a crow. This is seen as the cuckoo not performing her own task as the mother. The cuckoo is deemed clever, where the conscious act by the bird to delegate this role to another carries a negative connotation, much in the same manner in which women who do not play such domestic roles are viewed. The negative view that clever women or non-nurturing women evoke is transferred on to the bird, where her escape from reproductive labour is seen as unethical. (Surubhi, Class 8).

As domestic space is envisioned as an ideal space for all women, we also see a clear demarcation of the public and private, particularly in the Urdu textbooks. Here the sexual division of labour, an ideal for a middle- and upper-class section, is inserted into a working class reality, with all its dreams and fantasies. The fantasy that the moment you arrive home, tired from the struggles of the outside, there is someone to tend to you, uncomplainingly. In the case of the hawker (Maktaba Jamia 8), his wife awaits the arrival of her man, who comes with whatever he may have earned during the day. 'She makes him wash his hands and feet. In the hot summer days, she sits beside him, fanning him as he eats. She attempts to meet all the needs of the tired man.' (p. 74) From the ordinary woman, the wife of a working-class man, to the extraordinary Bibi Fatima—who also is shown to be performing these mundane, everyday tasks, as a result of which her hands are calloused.

Fig. 4

Sanskrit shows a similar commitment to this sexual division of labour. Here the image of the mother too adds to the idea of domesticity and the role of women in nurturing,

visiting temples, attending to guests, and so on. Yet attempts to show a more equal sharing of tasks occasionally slips through. For instance, in an NCERT Sanskrit chapter (Swasti 3, 2000), Manohar's family come to help plant saplings in their fields. After Manohar has finished the male activity of tilling the land, his wife and children get down to planting the saplings. New images of women show them stitching while their daughters play with their friends (See Fig. 4). This is a more positive assertion of a gender identity, yet still tied to a 'new' kind of domesticity.

From Gujarat State Sanskrit textbook Class 8



## 6 வீடு கட்டுவோம்!



Fig. 5

Where there are more self-conscious moves to include women in the public sphere, there is a management of the inner and outer world that is attempted, in order to make the transition as non-threatening as possible. For instance, the modern woman Shailja's daily routine partly resembles that of a 'bhadra mahila' in Bengal, with the inclusion of her reading a book, having some mobility, music and other cultural pursuits and also performing her responsibilities at home by washing clothes, etc. Shailja is also a teacher, thereby following a desired profession.

Where women are involved in wage work, they find themselves represented in only the subordinate roles they occupy. The Class 1 Tamil reader has a cute cartoon-like illustration of animals dressed as labourers on a construction site (See Fig. 5). The interesting aspect of this visual is the accuracy with which female characters are performing all the unskilled, hard manual labour, while the male animals are busy with more skilled tasks like masonry etc. Industries where women form a substantive section of the worked force, like tea, still feature them in only a supportive role. Therefore, while the domestic space is the primary location for women in a middle-class world-view, the working

class woman's place is at the bottom of the hierarchy of labour. What the above two examples indicate is that women play a subsidiary or merely supportive role in the work force. What these also indicate is the maintenance of a public-private divide even here, with women performing roles in the public that replicate their 'innate' feminine qualities.

In the Urdu textbooks, we see how gendered and classed perspectives on labour intersect: the dimension of class emerges through the domestic space, where the Mama (domestic help, chef) is allowed to cook other food items, but not meat (Islamic course for girls No. 1). This is partly to ensure that she cannot sneakily eat some of the meat in the process of cooking it. Therefore, how middle-class women are to deal with working-class women is defined.

## Conclusion

What is evident is the almost unanimous agreement across Language textbooks that the sexual division of labour and women's location in the domestic sphere is critical to the maintenance of an ethical, dutiful and service-bound society. In this context, it is interesting to look at the question that Rokeya's piece in a Bengali textbook, 'Kupomanduker Himalay Darshan' raises, regarding who writes for whom and about

Fig. 6

In the NCERT post-1986 Hindi textbooks, we see a conscious effort to include pieces that touch upon issues concerning the common man and woman, the rural poor or those marginalised, and it is here that we see the inclusion of a piece by Ramvriksh Benipuri titled 'Mangar' (Kishor Bharti 3). This is a character sketch of a harwaha (tiller) in a feudal system. In addition to being a powerful, highly-descriptive sketch, the author depicts the subtleties of feudal relations through Mangar, how exploitative they can be and yet provide spaces for more emotional, humane interactions between feudal masters and their workers. Mangar's wife, Makauliya's description too carries both an understanding of gender relations, while recognising the agency poor women have in oppressive structures.

### Mangar by Ramvriksh Benapuri

Makolia and Mangar were an ideal pair, not only in the make-up of their bodies but also in their nature. There was a time when she spoke sharply, walked briskly, was neither friendly nor tolerated insolent behaviour. Who ever happened to tease her, tread on the hood of a black cobra. But Makolia merely hissed – the accusation of her biting and poisoning would be a grave injustice to her.

But in contrast to men, women can mould themselves to circumstance more easily and readily. Makolia is an illustration of this. Today Mangar is the same as he was – as uncouth or blunt as ever, but Makolia is no longer like that. She now tends someone's child, does threshing and grinding for others, makes cow dung cakes and fills water in people's homes. Whatever is received in lieu of such services, she feeds Mangar and then sits to eat whatever is left. But in spite of doing so much she is always at the receiving end of Mangar's wrath. Mangar vents all his bile and resentment on her. (p.80)

also need to challenge standard assumptions regarding the culture of violence, and possibly open up discussions on how and when violence gets to be perceived as justified and desirable.

## Of Animals and Humans

In the English textbooks, in several fables where humans and animals interact, the point of view is that of humans. They also arrogate certain powers to themselves. This is reflected in the manner in which human violence against the natural world is rendered legitimate. Jim Corbett's account of a snake slithering into a toilet, an evil presence and Norah Burke's story of how a girl hid from a wild beast (in Gulmohar English readers 6 and 9 respectively); the story about the domestication of the dog (Class 3 Sambha Matric Term Book) are examples of these. In the Gujarati language books too we see the classic man-animal power framework: the donkey and the potter story stitches together power and violence with labour (Class 3, pp 6-7). The message—that laziness and dishonesty is to be shunned — is communicated with the potters' repeated beating of the donkey. The potter of course has the power to decide that the donkey is lazy. The donkey carries the burden of an identity that marks him as mindless and thick-skinned. As the donkey is seen as devoid of 'feeling', it becomes all that much easier to beat and whip him, in comparison to, perhaps, a rabbit. Also, the act of (possibly) being lazy or unwilling to work becomes a near-death experience for the donkey. A worrying aspect of this is that, in the battles between the good and the bad, the weak and powerful, defeat becomes linked to destruction. Death as an outcome of defeat in umpteen animal fables can lead to students understanding failure in such stark ways. This black and white picture can have a serious impact on young people's ability to deal with challenges in their own lives.

The Guy de Maupassant story of a hunt in the Gulmohar English Class 6 Matric reader (see Tamil Nadu report) presents a layered and complicated account of a hunter killing a bird and then experiencing remorse for its mate. His companion kills the mate too and both are buried by the hunter. The hunter claims that he loves nature and also loves to hurt! The strangeness of the story lies in the hunters' empathy and subsequent actions being focused on the feelings imagined for the bird's mate, which are not open to discussion. Indeed, the complexity of the story, and what its position is on the issue of hunting and violence is thrown without warning on the unsuspecting child.

It's useful to contrast the violence in two stories, one from Tamil Nadu English textbooks and another from Bangla, to indicate how, if morals are to be extracted from stories and fables that incorporate violence, certain constructions of identities will not be challenged. One involves the representation of a bully and the other of a wife. The bully story (Class 7 TNTC reader) is set in an English working-class context. The story is about a classroom bully and tries to explain why he is the way

### The Bear's Wedding

by Saradindu Bandyopadhyay  
(...)

The wife confined herself to the bed. She wouldn't eat, and began to grow thinner by the day. The bear felt very sorry for her.... So he told his wife, "I'm going to the village to fetch rice, dal and curry for you."

The wife sat up. "Where will you get rice, dal and curry? Do they grow on trees that you will go and pick them from there?... Rice, dal and curry are cooked in the kitchen."

"Let's drop the idea, then," said the bear.

"There's a way out, though," said the wife.... "Take me along. I'll show you where the kitchen is, and you can steal rice, dal and curry from there?..."

"Do you promise to come back with me?"

"I promise."

The bear then proceeded towards the village with his wife in tow.... It was afternoon, and the villagers were enjoying their siesta... The wife pointed towards a room and said, "That's the kichen." No sooner had the bear entered the kitchen than the wife bolted the door from outside, and woke up the entire village, shouting, "Come quick, everyone. I've locked the bear inside the kitchen." Everyone came running with sticks in hand.

"Where's the bear? Where's the bear?"

"I've locked him in that room."

"We're going to kill the bear today."

The men went to open the door. The wife said, "Don't kill him. The bear is a good dancer. I'm going to keep him as my pet."

In the meantime, the bear was feeling helpless and cornered. He had tears in his eyes, and pleaded with the villagers, "Please spare my life. I love my wife. I'll do whatever she says."

His wife said from outside the door, "If you agree to live in the village, I'll see to it that no one kills you."

The bear said, "I agree."

"I'll tie a rope around your nose and make you dance in villages."

"Agreed."

The wife unbolted the door.

Ever since, the bear has been living in the village, eating rice, dal and curry. His wife ties a rope around his nose and takes him to neighbouring villages, where the bear performs in front of villagers. The villagers watch him dance and give him money.

(...)



Fig. 2

he is. Apparently, he is haunted by a ghost and his intelligent 'brainy' friend helps him get rid of the phantom. Unfortunately the phantom enters his friend's head and a strong punch from the bully drives the ghost off. The Bengali story, 'Bhaluker Bhiye' (Sahitya Navoday Class 8) is an allegory by Saradindu Bandyopadhyay, where a bear marries a human girl and sells his soul and his freedom to her (See Fig.2). In a startling story of role reversal, the bear becomes uxorious to the point where he allows his human wife to earn a living by making him dance.

If we look at the two stories, one takes on the issue of the bully, the other that of relations between men and women. In the first case, there is a recognition of the acts or situations a child might confront in her everyday interactions and a conscious attempt is made to see what the textbook can do to provide some space to discuss or read about this. There is some thought too, as the story does not demonise the bully. Nor declare him a coward. There is a tender, fearful heart that flutters in the bully's breast! Clearly there is a perception that it is critical to: a) reduce the power of the bully in the mind of the learner b) not pit one child against the other by marking one child as 'evil' or bad and c) possibly present a story that provides a creative resolution to the problem that many children face in school or other spaces. For all these reasons, there is a strong rationale to question the stereotypes around the construction of the bully.

In sharp contrast, 'Bhaluker Bhiye' draws on male-female relations, partly focusing on the humour in the interaction between the two. Even through humour, and by not representing her as victim, there is no effort here to represent the wife outside of the stereotypes that come with gendered relations: the story is stuck in the hen-pecked husband/nagging wife framework. There is no attempt made to reduce the power of the wife on the 'bear' in order to break the tyranny that she unleashes on the husband (she makes him dance to earn money, whips him). In fact the violence in the story, laced with humour, indirectly reaffirms that this equation between men and women is unnatural, and far from ideal. As the story, through an inversion of existing power relations, creates fears and anxiety regarding what is in store for mankind if women are given power over men, it only reiterates the acceptable nature of the given norm—that men keep their power over women. The most significant difference between this and the previous story is that, in the bully story there is an awareness and recognition of an existing power dynamic and also that it effects children's lives. In this story there is a misrecognition of the existing power dynamics between the sexes and women are viewed as outside the world and concerns of the child. This is indeed ironic given how valorised they are in ensuring the moral development and education of children. As a result, no new or creative situations are imagined to break out of the existing matrix of power relations.

Though it is not appropriate to compare a story and an allegory, as their form enables them to speak in different ways, there is a larger observation to be made. While textbooks can and do take on board different ways of representing and questioning certain stereotypes, on certain fronts they continue to operate and regurgitate classic constructions. Here, we see that the (male) bully can be humanised, stripped of his stereotypes, but this can never happen with the wife, who carries her gender with her. 'Humanising' the bully is easier than humanising the wife. Misogyny is so deeply entrenched that, despite research, information on gender issues and on violence, common sense continues to operate in old and familiar ways. Similarly, in the case of

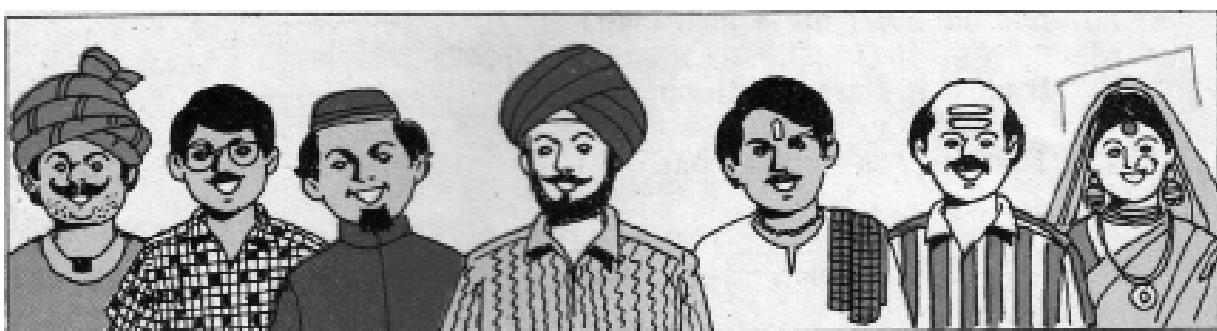
## Of Caste and Other Identities

It is in the performance of acts, from a predetermined script, that structures such as caste come into being. As we said earlier, not just the body, but where and how the body does things is what causes it to become gendered, or for that matter, caste or class to be defined. Only in the physical embodiment of an identity does it come into being. We see in this section what acts and markings are described in the textbook, and how they serve to normalise a certain social identity and pathologise others. Food and body markers reflect a deep and abiding commitment to upper-caste notions of what is good and worthwhile. Textbooks show a remarkable lack of concern with issues of poverty and resources, and of course of structures that may limit what a body can wear or consume, as they outline ideal aspects of diets, dress and skin colour. Dress, according to Valerie Walkerdine, is central to boys' definition of girls, and textbooks seem to replicate this in a regional context (Walkerdine, 1992). The only diversity that is visible in the textbooks—and this is possibly true for Sanskrit but also for EVS and Social Science textbooks—is that images of north, south, east and west are a favourite feature in the readers (See Fig. 1). The southern girls with veni (flower garlands) in their hair and long skirts, the Gujarati men with their 'pagdis' (turbans), and the Naga tribals in the east.

Sanskrit textbooks are perhaps the most direct in their marking and normalising of an Aryan, upper-caste body. They elaborate on different types of people, identifying their facial or skin type, placing them into categories charged with meaning: all Europeans are fair, the Mompas of Arunachal have strong bodies, and so on. In the elaboration of personalities, it is pointed out how Chandragupta had 'Kshatratej' (the aura of a Kshatriya) and Chanakya had 'Brahmatej' (the aura of a Brahmin) (Manika, Class 3), which is evidently absent in lower-caste bodies. Caste markers are embedded in descriptions of leaders like Madan Mohan Malviya, whose pure white clothes, shoes, white tilak on forehead speak of his Vaishnav upper-caste status. Typically, while depicting a believer and an atheist, the Brahmin features as the believer with his 'dhoti and chutiya' and the atheist is dressed in pants and shirt, clothes identified as western and therefore marked as

Fig. 1

From West Bengal Esho  
Ingreji Sikhi English textbook





### अनुप्रयोगः (ACTIVITIES)

- केषाज्ज्वत् त्रयाणां उपाहारगृहाणां (रेस्टरां) भोजनसूचीन् सञ्चयित्वा, तेषां त्रिविधं (सात्त्विक, राजसिक, तामसिक) विभाजनं कृत्वा लिखतः—  
(Collect the menu-card of any three restaurants and enlist the food items in three categories (Satvic, Rajsic and Tamsic))
- सप्ताहपर्यन्तं यत्किमपि त्वम् खादसि, तदविषये स्वपुस्तिकार्यं लिखत। अन्ते रविवासरे स्वस्वभावे व्यवहारे च तस्य प्रभावस्य विषये अपि लिखतः—  
(Enlist in your note-book for one week whatever you eat. In the end on Sunday. Write how it has affected your behaviour)

Fig. 2

From Sanskrit Manika 3

on the regular availability of women and girls to perform this task, a realisation that is even more distant for the writer. The Tamil Nadu text (Sanskrit Dwitiyadarsh, Reader 2) also discusses food, referring to jatharagni (the fire in the stomach) and points out that rajas food, despite being sour, hot and spicy, is appropriate for soldiers.<sup>2</sup> Soldiers need to be aggressive, only then will they be able to protect the nation. Here tamsic food is likened to the food of the demons. Eating meat, of course, is undesirable, as it constitutes a major section of tamsic food. Activities to encourage young learners to reflect on their own diet are suitably geared to a middle-class, if not upper-caste sensibility—the two overlap often in the textbook.

an outsider. Atheism is seen to be a western influence.

The farmer occupies a liminal space, not identified with any caste: in most cases he is romanticised as bare-bodied and frail, a pure smile on his face. His shoulder bearing the plough, and pagdi on his head. Regional diversities do not mark his body. As we have seen in the labour section, the farmer is imbued with a general significance—a marker of a lost rural past.

Consumption is an act that clearly defines social identity—what you eat defines who you are. It is with food that we see a clearly Brahmanical perspective in the division of food: rajsik, tamsic and saatvik (See Fig. 2). Food cooked the night before becomes a marker for tamsic food. Those people who belong to the Tamas category, they eat food that has been cooked earlier the night before (not fresh). This food is tasteless, smelly, leftover and untouchable.' (Manika, Part 3) That those who come from poor families might be forced to eat food cooked before, or children with both parents working might not be in a position to get a freshly cooked meal every day, escapes the writer. The system is also built

<sup>2</sup> Dharmashastra and other popular literature categorise three types of fire. *Jathatragni*, *Davagini* and *Barhvagini* possibly connote natural forms of heat and fire.

The relationship between food, men and women too emerges in the national Hindi textbooks. Women appear as instruments to act out the scripts written by men—never questioning these sometimes bizarre rules. But it is in women's doing, that the act becomes sanctified (and all it represents), even as it affirms the greatness of men. Thiruvaluvar's wife serves him unquestioningly until her death. With his meals, she provides him a bowl of water and a needle. Only on her deathbed does she dare to ask why. The reply affirms Thiruvaluvar's greatness, as he explains his efforts to eat every grain of rice, even those that she might mistakenly have dropped on the floor. Her remarkable skill in serving prevents him from doing so, as she never drops even one grain ('Sant Kavi Tiruvaluvar', Bharti Part 1, NCERT, pp 77-88). In a graphical sketch of Rajendra Prasad by Mahadevi Verma, his wife emerges as the perfect partner full of feminine virtue: a sadhvi, simple, forgiving and full of maternal love for all ('Rajendra Babu', Kishor Bharti Part 3, pp 14-19). We are informed by the author that she insisted on a Brahmin cook, as she was unable to eat food cooked by anyone of another caste. As the chapter comes to a close, we see how the first president of India is fasting and being served a humble meal by his wife. The first lady has created her own kitchen, cooks her own food and serves others like an 'ordinary Indian housewife' in the Rashtrapati Bhawan. Her domesticity and caste purity both have a serious bearing on the decision to cook herself. Observance of caste rituals and rules is cloaked under descriptions of humility, nurture and care—the tropes for the ideal Bharatiya naari.

Bodies that labour and hunger, and that suffer as an outcome of this, rarely appear (See Fig. 3). If at all suffering bodies appear, physical reasons will be invisibilised under the cloak of moral values. The poetry section in the TNTC Tamil reader for Class 8 includes an extract from *Asiya Jyothi*, where the Buddha accepts water from a low-caste herder and preaches that the same blood flows in all our bodies and how we are determined more by what we do, rather than our birth. Yet, as the Tamil report points out, while there is considerable poetry that can be read in ways that unpack social inequities, the exercises attached to the poems rarely address this potential. At most they concern themselves with formal criticism or with rules of grammar. They do not cover questions regarding morality, social meaning, myths, etc.

## Processes of Acculturation: Gender and Class Identities

Certain physical acts mentioned or represented in the textbooks form part of a process of acculturation into certain class or gender identities. For instance, in Urdu textbooks, the acquisition of a particular 'tehzeeb' (etiquette) is central to being educated. The purpose is to fashion and discipline the body in order for it to be civilised. As a result, the Merathi books (Urdu Zubaan, 2nd book) instruct on the proper deportment of

achieved fairly un-self-consciously and enables an owning up of the past as “ours”. In the following section we shall explore how remembering, and piecing together a certain past—mostly a political past, driven by political power—comes to be central to the objective of History teaching in schools. Our analysis also shows how the obsession with political power eclipses other relations of power at play through History—power within structures like gender and caste for instance.

## Power and History

History, across all states and all textbooks, is overwhelmingly a narrative of power. Whether in the domain of political processes, regarding the ruler and the ruled, or in the nature of production, or in structures like the family and society—centralised, paternalistic male authority is posited as the basis of stability, expansion and well-being. The absence of these elements is associated with chaos and fragmentation. Our analysis of the History textbooks showed that, across the states, History foregrounds a particular idea of power, mostly political power, as central to understanding the past. This notion of power, and the history formulated around it, is deeply gendered, as well as being incomplete: people and processes outside the arena of political power are written out of History. Social and economic history is subsumed into the political drama of expansion and conquest. Links between social, economic and political realities are rarely made. Given the limited role of women in the politics of territorial control, they are subsumed within the social or cultural domain. This section will argue that women appear and disappear in textbooks in specific ways, which reiterate and affirm a masculinist and deeply patriarchal view of power and control. This view can be traced through History to the modern nation State—with the evocation of an all-powerful, centralised patriarchal node of power as the most desirable.

### Unpacking Patriarchal Narratives

Power primarily emerges in History textbooks in the form of conquests, annexations or then in terms of alliances that rulers build: kings are at the heart of the play of power in the History texts. Often even the idea of the State gets sidelined as school texts focus their attention on individual rulers. Certain aspects of a king are often focused upon: for instance, Sher Shah Suri is discussed for his administrative measures, Akbar for matrimonial alliances and relationships with Rajputs etc. Yet, over a five-year period of studying History (from Class 6 to Class 10), what comes to be idealised and affirmed is the combination of a highly centralised rule and a king who brings together military strength and valour with qualities of a benevolent patriarch.

### Centralisation of Power

All states and all textbooks we analysed affirm periods or events that lead to the emergence of vast empires, centralised leadership, and

nationalism continues to determine the objectives of History teaching in school. Militant ideologies, as a result, will continue to underpin and be an inherent constituent with little critical analysis to challenge some of these ideas. As long as we keep shying away from addressing conflict and violence in its different avatars, it becomes easy for people with different ideological motivations to appropriate nationalism into more aggressive politics. Here, terms like patriotism, pride and ‘ardent nationalism’ can bolster more dictatorial and authoritarian forms of control and politics. The narrative of decline and resurgence of a people guided by a ‘saviour’ resonates with Hindu nationalist ideology, which clearly had a presence in the textbook writing project after 2002.

One of the few sets of books that do not shy away from accounts of violence in the course of History are the OUP books. The drama of conquest, of courtly intrigue, the mercilessness of rulers over rebels is discussed. For instance, the massacre of 20,000 to 30,000 Mongols in Delhi by Alauddin Khalji—due to rumours of rebellion reaching the Sultan—is mentioned. Even in the case of Akbar, the violence involved in the consolidation of his power is there for the reader (See Fig.8). For instance, in the description of the Battle of Panipat in 1556, the book states, ‘The leader (Hemu) was personally beheaded by Akbar and a great slaughter took place, the heads of those slain being piled to form a ghastly “victory tower”’ (OUP Class 7, p. 63). However, in the absence of discussions on violence in a larger context, many such details feed into becoming isolated acts—of valour, military success and sheer, brute force. It certainly brings alive the moment and the persons involved for the learner, yet over the middle-school course the links between violence and social and political structures are rarely made.

In a majority of textbooks political history dominates accounts of battle, death and destruction, where social and civil violence is seen as marginal to this. Social groups are relegated to the domain of the non-political, stripped of any power to effect change. Many groups or communities are to merely follow norms, traditions and systems. Violence then, if and when it appears in this context, is appropriated to suit the historic moment. As a result, child marriage and sati are termed ‘social malpractices’ in the nineteenth century, when emphasizing Indian (read Hindu) reform efforts to embrace modernity, while *jauhar* is still recognised as an act of valour and honour performed by Rajput women during the the medieval era. (Kundra Class 7)

### Men, Women and Power

Opposite: Fig. 8

From OUP Part II History textbook. Akbar’s attack on the Ranthambore Fort.

*‘Akbar had one great quality. He was fearless. He showed boldness and courage in physical feats when he rode and tamed angry elephants or swam across rivers in full flood. He also showed courage when he opposed those who used their power and orthodoxy in trying to keep back new ideas and preventing changes from taking place in Indian society and Indian thinking.’*

NCERT Class 7, p. 94. (pre-NCF 2000)



Kings such as Akbar, Ashok, Chandra Gupta or Shivaji are ideal male icons who combine the power of the male body to perform physical feats along with their ability to play a decisive role in public affairs. Governance, decision-making, managing conflict and controlling others comes (seemingly) effortlessly to them. This represents the nature of power recognised and validated in historical accounts.

'Weak' men, especially those who are unable to even claim control over their own women, are deemed failures by the historian. Chandra Gupta II's battle with the Sakas over the surrender of his elder brother's wife, Dhruvadevi, is mentioned in the Class 6 NIHOI and the Tamil Nadu textbooks. Not only does the heroic Chandra Gupta II kill the Saka king, he kills his brother to go on to marry Dhruvadevi himself. The historian describes the elder brother as 'weak'; Dhruvadevi emerges as a character in a historical drama—a mere catalyst, not the centre of any historical inquiry. This, to a large extent, describes the manner in which women appear as subjects of History (See Fig. 9). They are tokens of exchange, or trophies to be claimed at the end of hard-fought battles between men. Honour and shame is at times linked to their presence and capture in war. Marriage alliances too find mention, as one form

of political alliance. However, rarely do History textbooks explain how marriage alliances worked or why women were part of the exchange between ruling families and what this indicated about women's role in the policy or society at that given moment. This is true of textbooks across states and across publishers.

Women who appear as significant in the political struggles for power are exceptional, and must fit within the militaristic mould. Rani Jhansi and Rani Ahilyabai in the Class 6 and 7 state textbooks of Gujarat tie into a patriarchal framework, bringing together their own

#### ***Chandragupta II***

Chandragupta II was the next important Gupta ruler. He ruled from 380 to 412 AD. There is an interesting story about how Chandragupta became king. The story is told in a play called *Devichandraguptam* written by Vishakhadatta. Ramagupta became king after Samudragupta. The Sakas, who were ruling in some areas in Western India, defeated Ramagupta. Ramagupta agreed to lend his queen Dhruvadevi to the Sakas. His younger brother Chandragupta was very unhappy over this hurt to the Gupta family pride. So he dressed up like queen Dhruvadevi, visited the Saka ruler and killed him. Later, Chandragupta killed Ramagupta and married Dhruvadevi.

Chandragupta's daughter Prabhavati married Rudrasena II, the ruler of the Vakataka kingdom in Central India. When Rudrasena died, his son was a minor. So, Prabhavati managed the affairs of the Vakataka kingdom with the help of an official sent by her father Chandragupta. Thus, Chandragupta had indirect control over the Vakataka kingdom. He crossed the Vakataka kingdom while he was going to Gujarat to defeat the Sakas there. He added the Saka territories on the west coast to his empire. The Guptas now became very rich. They could control the profitable sea trade with the Middle East.

Chandragupta called himself **Vikramaditya**. Kalidasa and Amarasimha were famous scholars in his court. It was in Chandragupta's time that the Chinese pilgrim Fa-hsien visited India (399-414 AD) and wrote a long and detailed account of our people.

Fig. 9

From OUP Part I History textbook

devoutness and faith as Hindu women with their military struggle. The critical point here is that they were 'like men' but were not men. Laxmibai's daily prayers during her 'act' of battling foreign forces, makes her story all the more tragic and heroic. Laxmibai's description in the battlefield is that of a 'Ranachandi' or a goddess at war. Razia Sultan as the singular example of being anointed successor to her father's throne is mentioned in textbooks. However, Razia's battle with the nobility does not carry the sheen of battling 'foreigners' for the

nation. Razia provides the possibility of exploring the ways in which the nobility exercised power in consonance or in defiance of the Ulema, in addition to the difficulty that women, even from powerful sections of society, faced in accessing political power. However, Razia remains at best a passing reference in a majority of History textbooks.

Noor Jehan finds mention in only a few school History textbooks, but in the texts where she is mentioned, she appears as a powerful presence in the Mughal court. In Medieval India (NCERT pre-2000) coins jointly issued in Jahangir and her name is as far the historian takes this (See Fig. 10). However the OUP Book 2 discusses Noor Jehan's presence in imperial politics in some detail, particularly her tussle with Shah Jahan (Khurram), though even in OUP, Noor Jehan is an intruder in terms of being a woman interested in political matters. 'Shariyar was seized, blinded and imprisoned, and realising that her power was at last at an end Noor Jehan had the good sense to retire from active politics ... the civil wars that darkened the closing years... [were] largely the result of Noor Jehan's ambition and Jahangir's own weakness in allowing himself to be influenced by her...' (p. 74. See Fig. 11).

It is evident that there is a discomfort with women who forayed into the arena of political power, and this holds through ancient and Modern History. Participation of women in the freedom movement is tied to particular icons like Sarojini Naidu, Madam Cama etc. The diverse ways in which women engaged in the nationalist movement gets short shrift in school textbooks.<sup>8</sup> In the Gujarat Class 7 Modern India book, it is stated that women participated in the boycott of foreign goods, as Gandhi wanted them to be part of the movement so that it would be non-violent. This yet again demonstrates the manner in which women are denied any form of agency, which exists not merely in the political domain

*Nur Jahan's influence.* Nur Jahan was a beautiful and talented woman. She was highly educated and wrote Persian poetry; she was artistic and designed clothes, jewellery and even carpets. She was a fine hunter and shot tigers while riding an elephant; she was generous and gave away large sums of money in charity, especially to poor Muslim girls.

She was also extremely ambitious. Before long her name appeared along with Jahangir's on the imperial coins and the easy-going emperor used to say that he was quite content to let Nur Jahan run the administration in return for a bottle of wine and a piece of meat. Nur Jahan's father, Itimad-ud-Daulah, and her brother, Asaf Khan, were soon given the highest posts in the government, and Asaf Khan's daughter, Mumtaz Mahal, was married to Jahangir's third son Khurram—the future Shah Jahan. Fortunately Nur Jahan and her brother and father were very capable persons and Khurram was a brilliant general. The influence of these four people on Mughal government—at least in the beginning—was really beneficial.

Fig. 10 (above) & Fig. 11  
(below)

*Death of Jahangir, 1627.* Nur Jahan managed to free her husband, but this brought her little advantage. Jahangir's health had been failing for some time, and he died in 1627 soon after his escape. Jahangir's brother-in-law, Asaf Khan, at once placed Nur Jahan under arrest and proclaimed Shah Jahan emperor at Lahore. Shariyar was seized, blinded and imprisoned, and realising that her power was at last at an end, Nur Jahan had the good sense to retire from active politics.

The civil wars that darkened the closing years of Jahangir's rule had been largely the result of Nur Jahan's ambition and Jahangir's own weakness in allowing himself to be influenced by her, but on the whole his reign was a stable one.

During Jahangir's reign, there was no departure from the sensible policies laid down by Akbar. The administrative system, it is true, was not as sound as it had been. Though the empire had not expanded much, the number of civil servants had been increased from 800 to 3000, and the practice of paying officials with *jagirs* (estates) which Akbar had stopped, was revived. The efficiency of the administration suffered in other ways. Nur Jahan introduced the practice of *nazars* or gifts which the nobles had to give the emperor to secure his favours, and bribery and corruption soon became widespread.



Nur Jahan

<sup>8</sup> This is despite the existence of substantive historical research on the nature of women's participation in the Nationalist movement. See for instance, *A History of Doing* by Radha Kumar (1998); *Secluded Scholars* by Gail Minault (1998); 'Daughters of Aryavarta', Madhu Kishwar (1986); *Womens Writing in India Vol 2*, Eds K. Lalitha, Susie Tharu (1993).

### **Self-Study**

**Answer the following questions :**

- (i) Housewives, help in upkeeping family traditions. Explain this through the character of Sita.
- (ii) What were the vows made by Shri Rama in his role of a kshatriya ?
- (iii) What does Shri Rama, who always loved his subjects, say on hearing the plea made by the rishis ?
- (iv) What inspiration do you get from the example of the life of Rama as given in this lesson ?

Fig. 23

From Gujarat Social Sciences Class 5 textbook

lovers belong to the Kshatriya caste. We are also told that women like Savitri ‘became famous for their character, righteousness [‘satitva’], while the men were famous for their ‘wisdom, strength, bravery and knowledge’. (p. 5) Being pativrata is tied to ensuring that there is a maintenance of caste purity. These women, all Kshatriya or Brahmin, become symbols of Indian female virtue,

where the key term ‘chastity’ ensures caste regulations and a control of women’s reproductive capacities within these norms. Acts of defiance, of accessing knowledge, choosing partners on their own efforts by some women are framed within the overarching trope of the ‘good wife’, their challenge blunted. For instance, Apala the daughter of a rishi, is banished from her marital home due to a white spot on her body. Her prayers convert her to a saint, and she refuses to go back to her parents’ home. Apala’s refusal to go back to her parents is no concern of the text. Her domesticity is emphasised in the exercises that follow the narrative (See Fig. 23 and Fig. 24).

In the discussion on Bhakti, when there is a link between the social and the religious, women feature as a category. For instance, the Medieval India (NCERT pre-NCF 2000 Class 7) book mentions Kabir and Nanak objecting to caste rules and the low status accorded to women. Yet this is only in passing, and both appear as precursors to the male modern reformers who attempted similar critiques of caste, intolerance and women’s status. Clearly History textbooks have not developed a vocabulary to discuss women outside of ‘nationalist’- or ‘male’-oriented articulations of women’s lives.

#### The Low-Caste Nationalist

In the Modern Period, a discussion on caste finds its way in the textbook, through Phule, Ambedkar, Swami Sahajanand and a majority of the reformers who urge people to give up discriminatory practices. Guru Gobind Singh too is seen to be championing against casteism in the UP textbooks.

The hindsight that caste is counterproductive to national unity is present in the medieval account of History. In this period of so-called ‘Muslim’ rule, the lack of unity amongst Hindus is seen to be the reason for defeat at the hands of the Muslim invader. The classic example is Ahmed Shah Abdali commenting on the numerous fires burning in the Maratha camps as a result of different castes preparing food separately—‘those who can’t cook together can’t fight together’ Gujarat (Class 6, p. 102). This insider-outsider logic provides the setting within which a staunch

**The Status of Women :** In the Vedic Aryan society, women held a high and respectable position. The birth of a son was indeed a festive occasion in the family. And yet daughters were not neglected. Girls were given a good education. Monogamy was the established tradition. Child marriages were not an acceptable custom. Widows were free to marry again. Women took part in sacrifices and other religious rites on a footing of equality with men. Learned women like Apala, Ghosha, Lopamudra and Vishwawara have even composed verses which are included in the vedas.



Apala walked out of her husband's house. Apala's husband was under the impression that she would go back to her father's place. But Apala was a woman of different type. "Why should I go back to my father's place ?" Apala asked herself. Why not lead an independent life with self-respect ?

Apala built a small cottage in the forest. She plucked flowers and after having a bath in the river, she stood there offering her prayers to the Sun. The Sun God is a god who is present everywhere. The heat of the sun purifies your body.

When Apala sat in meditation, verses, sacred mantras came naturally to her. The Sun God Himself, the destroyer of all darkness, the one who sustains life would appear before her.

#### For Teachers

The following points should be kept in mind in teaching this lesson :

- As human beings, man and woman are born equal. From the point-of-view of sense of self-respect also, man and woman are equal. A woman is always dependent, she has to depend on her husband for all her happiness, she cannot lead a life of self-respect once her husband rejects her. All such notions should be rooted out.
- Apala, in this lesson, reminds us of the fact that self-respecting women with a great sense of independence lived even in Vedic times in our country. This is the main point that the teacher should keep in mind while teaching this lesson.

Fig. 24

From Gujarat Social Sciences Class 5 textbook

critic of the brahmanical structure, Jyotiba Phule, is constructed as a nationalist. His analysis of caste as a system of appropriating the productive labour of the 'kunbi' (this includes both peasants and 'lower castes' which he termed as the majority—the Bahujan Samaj) by the 'upper castes', particularly the Brahmins, is neither acknowledged nor identified as unique to him. Most importantly, Phule's views about the liberatory potential of British rule for 'lower castes' is absent or silenced in all History textbooks as potentially being seen as 'anti-nationalist'. There is a moving chapter on Phule in the Gujarat Class 7 textbook, which hints at his critique of the appropriation of labour of the Bahujan Samaj, but this predictably shifts to a more reformist tone (See Fig. 25). Phule is recognised for his contributions to challenging 'undesirable social practices' like widow remarriage, female infanticide etc, which makes him indistinct from 'upper-caste' reformers of the period. *Textbook Regimes:* Gujarat points to how the chapter on Phule sits between K.C. Sen on the one hand and Dayanand Saraswati, Ramakrishna Paramahans and Vivekanand on the other. He is yet



Even before Govindrao could offer a hearty welcome to those visitors, those orthodox 'Karma-kandi' (Ritualist) Brahmins showered on him a series of questions.

"Are your son and his wife not able to make floral garlands? Are you unable to earn enough livelihood through your profession of being a gardener?"

Govindrao paid obeisance to the Almighty, and replied with folded hands: "I am happy due to your blessings."

"Your happiness will not last long as you are trying to snatch away our means of livelihood."

Yet another Brahmin butted in -

"Do you wish that your children should do our work and our children should do your work?"

"Why should he not wish so, now that the British have invited him to go ahead on the path of social reform?"

• • • •

They opened one school after another. In such schools children were admitted without any discrimination of class, caste, creed, colour or economic background. Children of the poor and the weak, girls and the untouchables, everyone could join these schools without any discrimination. It was something unprecedented in those days. Jyotiba's feelings were hurt when people kept him at a distance on social occasions and feasts inspite of the fact that he too was equally educated. He could understand the pangs of pain of those who were always subjected to the humiliation of being treated as untouchables throughout their life. One of his close friends invited him to his wedding feast and then remarked: "Take care not to touch, you know, who we are, and who you are." These words shocked him and also made him understand what his mission in life should be.

Fig. 25

Textbooks skirt Phule's radical critique of the caste system, preferring to present him as a nationalist and a reformer

another among many reformers urging people to break caste barriers and shed corrupt practices. That Phule broke away from the authority of the Vedas is an insignificant distinction. As a matter of fact, a quasi-religious strain informs his social actions: 'Universal religion: Truth to Everyone: while exposing hypocrites and pseudo pundits (the work of the satya shodhak samaj) he began to say that no agent was needed between a devotee and the almighty'. (p. 40) The radical nature of Phule's critique is blunted as he falls into the category of saints, pious and learned men urging us to draw on our 'humane' self, thereby denying the active role that Phule saw in the Bahujan Samaj wrestling or creatively, through political action, inverting the power dynamic between castes. The link between Phule and Ambedkar's work is commented on, but only as an inspirational mentor.

Predictably, Phule's support and radical views on women too are absent, not only in the UP and Gujarat textbooks but in all state and national textbooks. Phule inspired many Dalit women to educate themselves and view their lives differently from the idealised 'upper-caste', chaste, Hindu woman. It is indeed disturbing yet symptomatic of the 'fictional' mode how the UP textbooks subvert Phule's efforts to educate Dalit women. Phule becomes the instrument to

fulfil the textbook writer's own motivations regarding educating girls today: that women's education serve the needs of the family. '[Jyotiba Phule] believed that culture instilled in a child by the mother decides the future of that child, hence it is important to educate girls.' (BKMV 7, pp. 55-56). What these values are is left suitably vague so that the reader can form their own judgments on the desirability of educating women, based on present day assumptions. Flattened statements like this prevent the reader from accessing what Phule envisioned as the role of education in women's lives. It was anything but to instil conformity to existing structures of power, particularly caste or patriarchy.<sup>16</sup>

In the BKMV books, Guru Gobind Singh too is seen through a similar lens. '[he] felt that the division of society into castes, is harmful to the unity of the nation... he instructed his disciples to drop their last names

16 According to Phule, women were the last frontier in any community's effort to move to equality. Opening a school for Dalit women and girls, whom Phule understood to be the last 'beneficiary' of such efforts, was thought to be deeply symbolic. Not the Dalit male, but the Dalit woman, who was oppressed doubly—as a Dalit and as a woman, within her own community. Education for Phule was the process of opening the 'teesri aankh' (the third eye), the ability to critically understand structures of power and oppression.

that are indicators of a person's caste and made it compulsory for all Sikhs to add Singh at the end of their names, so that they all feel like Lions ... the result was that the Sikhs integrated into an army.' (Class 8, p. 43) Here nation and national integration are telescoped on to a time where no such understanding existed.

Ambedkar too emerges as an icon, more in a bio-data format. There is a box listing all the committees that he headed or was a member of. It identifies him as a messiah of the Dalits, but with not a glimpse of what actions he took on the part of challenging the exclusion of Dalits. Movements for Dalits to enter temple are conspicuously absent, as is Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism (as an outcome of his belief that Dalits would never achieve equality within Hinduism). The biographical sketch talks about efforts Ambedkar made in his education, what he was able to achieve personally—it does not even clearly state that Ambedkar came from a Dalit family. Therefore, individual brilliance defines Ambedkar, and there is a loud silence around his political beliefs, his conflicts with Gandhi or his political actions set in his community. This tamed version of Ambedkar integrates him more easily into the format that textbooks follow.

### The Limits and Possibilities of Secular Accounts

As mentioned earlier, Tamil Nadu textbooks locate a distinctive 'Tamilness' in the language textbooks only. A compromise seems to be reached, where History becomes the carrier of the nation while Tamil is the site for the articulation of Tamil exceptionalism. In this 'golden compromise' the Dravidian critique of the brahmanic culture of the Aryans is barely glimpsed, in fact obscured through the standard descriptions of the Aryan conquest of the Gangetic plain—largely bland accounts of how the Aryans brought agriculture to the subcontinent and Sanskrit, the status of women and so on. In sifting out the strengths and limits of the caste system, the Tamil report points out that there is no systematic effort to offer a historical or ethical context to understand caste. It makes this observation on the basis of the flat manner in which the basis of caste as profession and not birth is mentioned, and that Shudras were to serve the other three varnas. Historic 'facts' are mentioned in passing: for instance Sunga rulers are referred to as Brahmin kings who treated Buddhists badly—why and how is absent. As a result the past is mildly problematised but mostly protected, just as we see in the treatment of gender.

In contrast, the national books, written prior to NCF 2000, discuss the emergence of caste as an outcome of the interaction and struggle over land with the Dasyus. The NCERT Ancient India book (pre-NCF 2000) mentions how Dasyus were described by Aryans as dark skinned with flat noses, and enslaved. OUP Book 1 goes as far as to state that the Aryans realised the productive potential of the Dasyus: 'a living dasa was more useful than a dead one'. (p. 29) It mentions that they were made to do all the unpleasant work. Caste clearly emerges in OUP as an institution

Fig. 26

From NCERT Medieval India  
Class 7

In this description of productive activities, the textbook avoids any reference to the caste system.

The artisans lived according to their craft in a special part of the city. For instance, the weavers lived in one part, those that made brass pots lived in another, the goldsmiths inhabited a separate area, and so on. In many cities and towns even today, we find localities called after the type of artisans or merchants who lived there at one time. The artisans supplied the nobles and their families with whatever they needed, both luxuries such as rich silks and brocades and necessities such as pottery. The artisans also manufactured goods which were sent to other parts of the country or even overseas and became the basis of trade. Many hundreds of slaves were employed by the Sultans in the *karkhanahs* (workshops) for the production of a variety of things.

particular regions with their colonial past. So Hugli and Haldia are described as industrially developed regions in the Class 2 West Bengal book: 'The industrial belt along the Hugli offers ample opportunities for employment' (p. 51). Such references abound despite the decline of this region, with many units being declared 'sick' and large-scale unemployment over the last four decades. A more charitable analysis of this could be that Geography textbooks are sadly outdated, and have not included the latest information. However, the continuing descriptions of regions on the basis of their location in the flow of resources and goods, as part of colonial patterns of production, reflect the deeply entrenched nature of this colonial framework of understanding.

## Development, Nation and Gender

Within the subject of Geography, there is an increasing space and prominence over the past three decades being accorded to understanding development. This has emerged partly as a function of introducing the learner to new ways of viewing resource management, productivity and commerce. It also performs an important function of 'schooling' the learner into the established criterion for marking nations as developed or developing. It is this section that constructs women, farmers, poverty and labour in specific ways. The development-related chapters, as the report analysing the national textbooks points out,<sup>2</sup> are merely updated in terms of vocabulary and terminology associated with development. The majority of the textbooks, including West Bengal and Tamil Nadu books, do not take on board well-established alternative visions of development. Most importantly, feminist research and work in the arena is conspicuous by its absence. The Women in Development (WID) movement has for over three decades attempted to highlight how the exclusion of women's concerns in development planning and policies has resulted in their subjugation and continued poverty (Diaw 2002). Subsequently, WID advocated for 'equality of access and opportunity for women in development programs' (*ibid* p. 56). Substantive critiques now exist on the measurement of development primarily on the basis of economic indicators. The impact of development on marginalised communities, and the inequitable distribution of the benefits of development have challenged approaches that are market and productivity driven. Further, in the past 10 years, critiques of the WID approach itself have emerged, which have worked on developing a range of indicators that draw on concepts of human well-being, empowerment and citizenship, thereby broadening the domain of 'development' and what constitutes progress itself. The new approach, called 'Gender and Development' recognises that the sites of exclusion are manifold and intersecting, covering the social, political and cultural, in addition to the economic, in the case of women. It therefore argues for '... equity and empowerment in a more collective light, achievable only if women band together to transform the structures that make their subordination

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<sup>2</sup> *Textbook Regimes*: National Textbooks. Nirantar forthcoming.

possible' (Longwe 1998 in Diaw 2002). For this, a critical approach to how gender is treated in the arena of development is necessary, and education is a key area in which this critique needs to begin, which clearly is not the case in the existing books.

Feminists have 'substantively' argued for re-examining the idea of work and the manner in which household and unorganised labour contributes in subsistence economies. Given that a majority of women work in spaces that are either termed 'domestic', 'unorganised' or then are subsumed under 'family' enterprises, their absence becomes implicit in the exclusion of these spaces from the 'public sphere' or the market. Feminist geographers have also pointed to the complex relationship between architecture and resources to demonstrate how space organisation sustains hierarchies of class, race and gender (See Damosh and Seager 2001). By mapping the spatial relationship between how living and work spaces are organised, they have explored how societies articulate what constitutes productive and non-productive work. Practices of gender exist in a range of spheres: the organisation of rooms within the home, the layout of the city, the creation of workspaces like factories or then forms of leisure – all these contribute to fashioning or sustaining gender relations.

However, school textbooks continue to show scant interest in the geography of the everyday, of the local, prioritising abstract, regional comparisons to teach a discipline alienated from the world of the learner. This can be understood through the manner in which those who labour are viewed, especially peasants and women. (See Fig..4) The peasant or farmer is a critical marker of a nation's productivity and modernity. The NCERT (Class 8 post NCF 2000) contrasts the Indian farmer with an American farmer. This caricatures the difference in development between the two nations. One farmer is guided by science, research, rational choices and the market while the other is dependent on filial advice, government support and indebted to the money lender. The farmer in the USA as mentioned earlier works like a businessman and not like a peasant farmer. This successful farmer is an expert in farming. He maintains proper accounts of expenditure and income' (*ibid* p. 172, Hindi version). In opposition to this, his Indian counterpart is described thus, 'The farmer takes advice of his friends and elders as well as government agricultural officers regarding farming practices... This farmer like a majority of farmers did not get proper education. He



Fig. 4

From Kundra Social Science textbook class 7.

Despite the standard visual of women working on fields in geography textbooks, women are viewed merely as labourers, wives and family members. Their participation in Agricultural production is glossed over, making them insignificant in the counting of what contributes to agricultural production in a region.

does not have sufficient capital to undertake modern farming' (*Ibid*). Stereotypes abound in this contrast. Tractors, fertilisers, pesticides and genetically modified crops form part of the extensive wishlist of the less well-to-do farmer. There is silence on the massive subsidies the farming sector receives from the US government in order to maintain low prices in international grain markets. This description validates the model of development and growth aspired to in the textbook. The specificities of the geographical conditions farmers face in India (which are extremely diverse) are absent and by and large the farmer is held responsible for the state of agriculture. In a rather simplistic link, literacy and education are seen to yield sound farming practices and the labouring farmer is marked by his ignorance. Extending the logic of this model, the chapter comments on how families merely 'help' the male farmer. The labour of women and children is swept under the category of 'support', negating the considerable role of both in the process of agriculture.

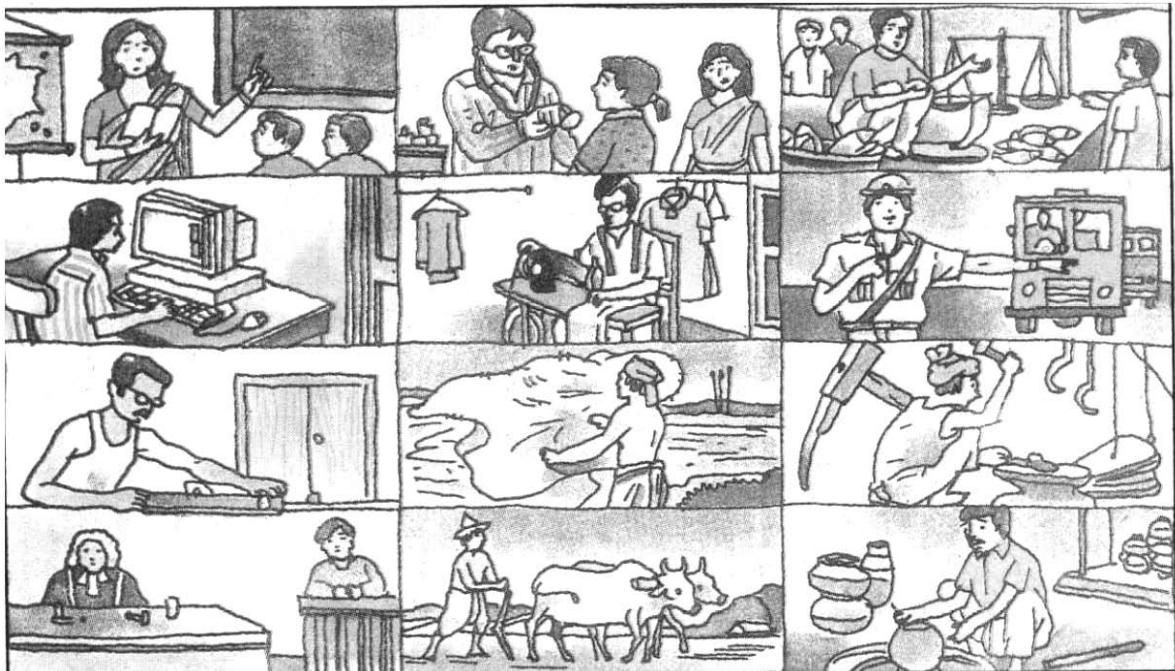
Fig. 5

From West Bengal Class 3 textbook

The sexual division of labour is clearly operational in the visual given below.

Big and heavy industries dominate and in the listing of outputs, the role of labour is assumed as a given, not worthy of mention. Positive references to employment in sectors like the tea industry make them appear as havens for the working class. Statements like 'labour is cheapest in India and easily available in comparison to the industrially advanced countries' (West Bengal Class 9 OB; p. 270) are not unique to West Bengal, but can be found in the national and Tamil Nadu textbooks as well. Ironically, labour is tied to the promotion of capitalist and global enterprise, even in the West Bengal textbooks. It is not viewed as human enterprise but as a resource to be tapped and exploited.

In this overall picture that documents large gains, the contribution of



as women are feminine. However, a person who is born as a man will not necessarily identify as male and someone who is born as a woman will not necessarily identify as a woman. Gender transgression is not recognised, and if addressed at all, then it is ‘managed’, as is the case in the story ‘Samapti’ (The Ending) by Rabindranath Tagore, included in the Lifestyle material, West Bengal. Although a sensitive tale about the sexual awakening of an adolescent girl, ‘Samapti’ can also be read as the domestication of a wild and tomboyish girl through the ministrations of male sexual love. Her taming and capitulation is seen as the appropriate and grateful response to her husband’s one-sided and impulsive decision to love and marry her. She initially resists the marriage violently, since it puts an end to her wild wanderings in the village, her games with the young boys, her freedom to climb trees, ride on swings and play with animals. Slowly, however, she is brought round to the traditional closure of romance and surrenders submissively to her, by now much-frustrated, husband. Thus the ‘happy’ ending (‘Samapti’), enjoined by traditional gender arrangements in society and in literature, is achieved at the cost of Mrinmoyee’s defiant and free girlhood.

While, we find that women are often excluded in these texts, transgendered people, including hijras, are not even mentioned. This exclusion is important for the construction of the idea of the normal, which as discussed below, is deemed necessary for the construction of the nation.

### Constructing the Norm

Certain common notions of bodily, social and cultural norms—what is acceptable, and what is not—are required for a stable, non-threatened nation. There are numerous ways—some direct, most indirect—in which these norms related to the nation have been constructed in the texts. When these ideas of normality are constructed subtly, they are particularly insidious and powerful, because they determine who is included and who is excluded in terms of citizenship of the country. For example, one of the ways in which ideas about the normal are constructed subtly is through invisibilising. The exclusion of transgendered people as a category serves to strengthen the gender binary of male and female, a central construct on which the nation rests. There are other examples, such as in the section below on Hindu normativity, where we see that even as some of the texts claim to be secular, the ‘default’, as it were, in terms of religion, is inevitably Hinduism. These more subtle ways of construction of norms are more insidious precisely because they are not apparent and they tend to pervade the text and so their power is not limited to certain, more obvious references here and there.

#### ‘hindu’ as the default setting

While the AE material is secular in the manner that it evokes the nation, the Moral Science books—excluding the Macmillan and Joy of

Fig. 15



Living (which is used in Anglo Indian schools in UP)—talk about the nation in a religious way as well. National symbols are imbued with religious symbolism: ‘Our National flag is as important as our gods; Our National anthem is our greatest bhajan or hymn...’ (Value Education, Gujarat Class 3, p. 35; See Fig.15).

The equation between the nation and Hindu religion is stark and overt in the RNS UP text. Of the 84 chapters, only one makes a brief reference to other religions. Similarly, in the Gujarat Value Education books, there are several references to other religions, but there are other ways in which Hindu normativity is constructed. The greatness of India is evoked by Hindu practices and symbols. ‘In Indian culture, any visitor to the house is to be treated as God: Athiti devobhaya’ (Class 6, p. 33), not stepping on books as they represent the goddess Saraswati—these evoke ancient India, which effectively means a Hindu India. In the Class 3 book, the ‘great tradition’ is explicitly identified as Hindu: ‘Ancient India had only one religion: Hinduism. But the Indian people have always been very large-hearted. They allowed all religions and races to come in and live peacefully’ (p. 38). Knowledge of the shlokas (Sanskrit hymns) constitutes an explicit intent (listed in both Class 6 and 7 books as a competency to be achieved). In addition to the more direct references which establish the dominance of the Hindu religion, we also find that Hinduism is established as a norm in more subtle ways. In addition to the focus on traditions associated with Hinduism, there is an ubiquitous use of the collective pronouns ‘we’ and ‘our’. In the Class 7 text, in a chapter on healthy foods, coconuts are referred to as being used in religious rituals and as offering to the gods. (p. 35) It’s also suggested that if you go to the temple in the morning, you have the added advantage of fresh air!

In the AE material, there are almost no direct references to religion at all. There is, however, normativity operating in terms of names, traditions, etc. This comes into focus consistently in discussions where the foreskin comes into prominence. In the chapter on bodily hygiene in Class 6, boys are instructed to ‘retract the foreskin of the penis to remove and clean the cheesy and ill smelling substance from the glans penis.’ (Yuva, Vol. 1, p. 19) No mention is made of the possibility that some boys might not have a foreskin to retract. The same is also true of the NCERT material, which presumes a foreskin (NCERT, Part II). While mention is made of non-vegetarian food in one place, in another chapter on healthy food, only vegetarian food is mentioned as being a source of protein (Yuva, Vol. 1, pp 85-87). These glaring omissions reinforce the assumption that there is a dominant Hindu male body being referred to, which is not necessarily inclusive of men of other communities. When encouraging teachers to utilise cultural/religious symbols, Yuva material states that ‘Many gods and religious heads are dark complexioned, eg. Lord Krishna.’ (Yuva, Vol. 2, p. 28)

The only text to talk about violence with relation to religious identities, is the Gujarat Value Education text. ‘The biggest crimes are being

**It is very important for you and for others to always look clean and tidy! When you are clean and tidy, you feel fresh and alert all day. Others like to see you look clean and tidy. Would you like to be near someone who is dirty, smelly or untidy?**

perpetrated in this country today in the name of religion. If every Indian child can grow up with an education that convinces him or her of a national identity first and foremost, much futile violence and hatred can be stemmed.' ('Note for teachers', Value Education, Class 7, p. 70) Such a generic macro observation leaves it open to being construed in ways that could either slide to conservative or progressive readings regarding communal violence.

linking caste and class

The other sets of normativities that the texts create, which enable an idea of the nation to emerge, relate to caste and class. In the Value Education and health and physical education books, definitive statements are made that show how the poor are being imagined and how class, and the closely-linked, caste biases operate. There are clear links made between being poor and being dirty—and notions of dirt and cleanliness, we know, are loaded in terms of caste. 'In summer, labourers should have a cold bath after hard physical work' (Gujarat Health and Physical Education Class 6, p. 12; See Fig.16)).

There are also problematic constructions that relate health, poverty and caste. In the oft-repeated social factors affecting health, such as filth (a term often used), lack of sanitation, etc., there is no attempt to situate these factors within a context of poverty or sexual or caste division of labour. Another offensive assumption is that poor, uneducated men spread sexual diseases. 'Illiterate people have no knowledge about sexual disease' is what we are told in a chapter on 'Personal Health'. (Gujarat Health and Physical Education Class 10, p. 7) The same section continues, 'Sexual adventurism, consumption of intoxicating substances, low standard of morality etc. play an important role in spreading sexual diseases among young boys and girls.' The first sentence about illiterate people per se equates illiteracy, almost always associated with the poor, with ignorance. This is a questionable assumption. Even though the reference to 'illiterate' people does not appear in the following sentence, the strong statements about the spread of sexual disease do implicitly place a focus on the illiterate.



Fig. 16

From Macmillan Garden of Life Class 4 textbook



## IF I HAD JUNK FOOD EVERYDAY.....!

### Utilizing PMI

#### **Methodology**

##### **Step 1:**

Greet the students and tell them that they would be carrying out a fun filled and humorous activity. This is called PMI which stands for Plus, Minus and Interesting.

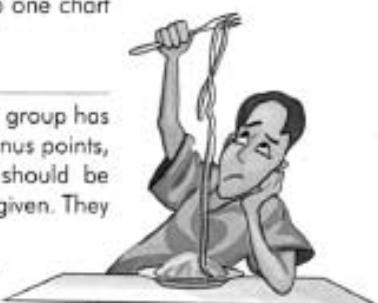
##### **Step 2:**

Divide them into 4 groups. Give each group one chart paper and markers.

##### **Step 3:**

Tell them that they will be given a topic. Each group has to think of 5 plus points about the topic; 5 minus points, and 5 interesting points. All these points should be written/drawn colourfully on the chart papers given. They will get 10 minutes for this.

The Topic for today is "If I had 'junk food' every day....."



#### **Objectives**

By the end of the session, the students will be able to

- ✓ Practice the life skills of creative and critical thinking

#### **Time**



35 Minutes

#### **Life Skills Being Used**

Fig. 17

From Yuva AEP (Teacher's Handbook) vol. 1

Class-related norms are also affirmed with reference to clothes in the Gujarat Health and Physical Education textbook. It is recommended that clothing should be appropriate for the weather, 'suitable for our country, the environment and our social status' (Class 6, p. 6).

In the AE material, the class bias operates in a different way. It does not make outright anti-poor statements, but—the newer AE materials in particular—imagines the learner as someone who is urban and well-off. This is clear in the nature of the examples given. 'The unhealthy patterns that many students follow are—watching TV/playing video games for long hours, chatting with friends for hours at night on telephone/internet.' (Yuva, Vol. 1, p. 7) The bias is clear in the West Bengal Lifestyle material as well. The nutrition charts urge students to eat noodles, lettuce and grapes. There are references to diseases like anorexia, but almost nothing on malnutrition (See Fig. 17).

As a result, we see a silence and exclusion of particular realities and the visibilisation of specific worlds (here middle-class). The citizen gets cast as one that is Hindu, middle class and—as we shall see in the following section—primarily male, heterosexual and able-bodied. The significant point to note in the context of caste is that it gets subsumed within class, and even here the concerns of the poor or working class get pushed out of the domain of engagement of the textbook. Therefore, the

which must be borne and controlled. It must be guarded from disease and kept clean. The nation requires ‘normal’ and ‘healthy’ bodies. The introduction to Yuva, in keeping with the highly instrumentalist agenda of AE, says that the health of the adolescent body is important for the health of the country. ‘The loss, in social and monetary terms, to the nation is colossal.’(Yuva, Vol. 1, p. xviii) This is in essence a ‘human capital’ approach, which reduces the value of the need to address the rights of adolescents per se. Adolescents and their well-being become important only in as much as they relate to the health of the nation.

Even within this medicalised/clinical approach, it is not as though a range of diseases is addressed—the overwhelming focus is on HIV and AIDS. (We have already seen that, despite this focus, the material fails to adequately address HIV and AIDS.) There are references to other diseases, like diarrhoea, influenza, tuberculosis and some venereal diseases, but not much discussion on them (the omission of common diseases like malaria and dengue is surprising). Considering the target audience includes a large rural population who suffer from many of these ailments almost chronically, this glossing over seems inappropriate. Also the extensive discussions on obesity, anorexia, body odour and facial pimples as adolescent problems seem to have been given disproportionate importance.

The overwhelming focus on HIV and AIDS, particularly in the newer AE materials, means that even STDs and RTIs are not addressed. As evidenced by practitioners, adolescent girls have many questions about menstrual problems, vaginal infections and urinary complaints. However, the materials fail to address these concerns, or reproductive health issues related to adolescence. This is ironic and worrying given that adolescents are meant to be the target audience of the AE material.

### Creating the Disciplined Citizen

In addition to keeping the body free from disease, particularly HIV and AIDS, there is great emphasis on discipline in all the texts. The linkages with the nation are clear. Not only does the nation need bodies that are normal and disease-free, it needs them to be disciplined—in terms of body and mind. The idea is that of a self-controlled, submissive citizen of the nation. According to the Value Education material from Gujarat, ‘Discipline is necessary to strengthen the nation. Drills and parades infuse the sense of obedience and discipline in the students.’ (Class 7, p. 85) The articulation in the UP Moral Science material is more religious, and the dos and don’ts are overwhelmingly Hindu: look at your palms immediately after waking up; bathe in the Ganga and Jamuna and in ponds; don’t eat onions and garlic, etc. The chapter ‘Sote Samay Vichar Karo’ cautions students against the head of their bed facing north or west. On the same page students are asked: ‘Think whether you remembered God, whether you saluted parents, teacher, whether you

obeyed parents, elders, teacher.' (Class 2, RNS, p. 35)

While the articulation may not be overt, the theme of discipline runs very strong in the AE material. There is a more indirect construction of the ideal citizen. The innumerable dos and don'ts related to aspects of public health—reproduction, child and sexual health, AIDS, addiction, substance abuse, population control—go towards creating the future citizen. Being responsible on all these fronts is the duty of a good citizen.

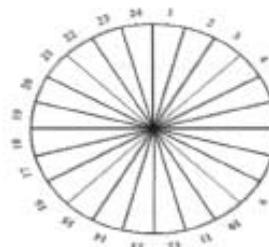
Another important aspect of being disciplined is to manage your life well. According to the AE material, everything, from time to anger, must be managed (See Fig. 20). The AE materials seek to control every aspect of life: 'Avoid beverages with caffeine such as coffee, soda after 4 p.m. Avoid interesting reading and computer games before going to bed.' (Yuva, Vol. 1, p. 8) The desire to control what the young person does before going to sleep is not limited to the Moral Science books, clearly!

The emphasis on discipline relates, of course, to controlling behaviour change and desire in the context of the HIV and AIDS agenda. For this, the mind has to be controlled. Discipline is, therefore, an important theme in the AE material.

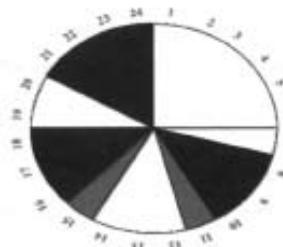
An important aspect of the agenda to control the lives of adolescents is that adolescence itself is presented as a traumatic phase of one's life in the AE material. (The Moral Science books do not seek to construct adolescence per se and, as can be expected, the adolescent as a category is strongly present only in the AE material.) 'Poor information and skills, lack of a safe and supportive environment, being sexually active, substance abuse, violence and injury, early and unintended pregnancy and infection with HIV and other sexually transmitted infections threaten the health and lives of adolescents.' (Yuva, Vol. 1, p. xvii) Adolescence is presented as a problem which must be managed. All discussions about it are joyless and 'objective' without often being adequately informative or accurate. Peers are also talked about only in negative ways and almost entirely in terms of 'peer pressure' to 'indulge' in undesirable (high-risk) behaviour.

Clearly the nation requires a certain kind of adolescent as its citizen: one who is disciplined, who can manage his/her life in accordance with the prevailing status quo, one who does not challenge critical aspects of his/her condition. There is a desire to tame a phase of life that could be

Ask each student to take a white paper. Instruct him/ her to draw a circle measuring 16 cms. in diameter in the lower half of the page using geometrical instruments. Ask each student to divide the circle into 24 parts indicating 24 hours with a pencil. Now ask each one of them to write down various activities of their typical day in the upper half of the page. For e.g., sleeping, washing, bathing, eating, helping in household work, playing, homework, reading, leisure and other activities.



Picture 1



Picture 2

Fig. 20

From Yuva AEP (Teacher's Handbook) vol. 1

Opposite, top: Fig. 21

From Yuva AEP (Teacher's Handbook) vol.2

transgressive, including sexually. Adolescence is approached fearfully by the writers of the material, as a phase in which young people can exercise greater choice, and which therefore needs to be controlled.

the non-desiring citizen

The citizen is also implicitly constructed as one who is non-desiring. The link between discipline and desire is a strong one. Desire tends to be seen as a subversive force that can threaten the efforts of those who seek to wield power. At one level, expressions of desire are seen as a powerful force, of an individual nature, which threaten one's to the loyalty that one must feel to the source of power, be it a political party, religious organisation or the nation. In many contexts sexual desire has been seen as detracting from the love for the nation. The nation has often been likened to a mother, and sexual love been seen as a competing emotion.<sup>8</sup> In the case of the Hindu right wing, the focus on brahmacharya (abstinence for men) is meant to be about conserving vigour, through conserving semen. Sexual desire is also seen as a danger to the critical agenda of maintaining discipline amongst the cadre of Hindu right-wing organisations such as the RSS.

The manner in which the non-desiring citizen is sought to be framed in the texts reviewed is through the negative construction of desire itself.

In the UP Joy of Living text, a 'love affair', AIDS, cigarettes, drugs are all illustrated in a picture depicting undesirable things. ('You Ought to Know', p. 60) Macmillan has this to say about masturbation: 'Masturbation simply means that the boy misuses sex by touching his external sex organs for pleasure and self gratification.' It carries on to say, '...if unchecked, masturbation continues until it becomes a serious problem for the boy.' (pp 133-134)

When AE material does talk about sexuality, it is in negative terms. The materials suggest many 'strategies' to use to deal with 'temptation'. 'They may experience physical responses such as rapid heartbeat and warmth in the sex organs. It is normal to experience these feelings and to have the desire to have a friend of the other gender. Again, the issue is "What decisions will we make about these feelings?" Tell them that cultural and social sensitivity is important. Tell the class that adolescents need to learn to regulate their sexual feeling in a friendship. Both girls and boys can decide when to act on their sexual feelings and when not to. Discuss how to handle sexual or romantic feelings without engaging in sex. Discuss alternative expressions for sexual energies, e.g. sports, clubs, etc.' (Yuva, Vol. 1, p. 94) The AE material also suggests the following 'methods of avoiding sexual contact', as can be seen in the example on the following page (See Fig.21).

Opposite, bottom: Fig. 22

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, the introductory section of the chapter on Language and Nation, and the discussion on Tamil Taay in the section on Region and Nation

In addition to direct warnings, another strategy is used to try to ensure that young people desist from sex. Respect for the 'opposite sex' is a positive message, however it is problematic that it is being linked with the message that young people should control their 'sex drive'. By drawing upon ideas like respect and dignity, the material is, in an insidious manner, suggesting that young men either respect young women, or desire them. This is also based on the assumption that sexual advances by a young man towards a young woman are always unwanted and not reciprocated. Boys are thereby the aggressors and girls passive recipients. This assertion becomes particularly problematic in a context in which young women's sexuality is marginalised in society as part of a discriminatory stereotype. Using the reality that sexual harassment and sexual violence are tools of patriarchy used by men against women, the materials seek to confuse the issues of gender equality and sexual desire at a sub-conscious level in a clever and dangerous manner. 'Sex drive has to be controlled, if it is to become a positive factor in defining interpersonal relationships with the opposite sex.' (NCERT, Part II, p. 35)

### manufacturing fear and shame

The AE materials reveal a fear-inducing approach to sexuality. Young people are urged to consider the evil effects of pregnancy out of wedlock, disease and social humiliation. The implication is that any and every sexual contact inevitably leads to pregnancy (See Fig.22). There is no serious discussion about contraception, which could prevent all these eventualities. The problems of adolescent pregnancy are merged with those of the unwed mother without acknowledging that while one is a health problem, the other is a socio-moral one. There is no discussion of the fact that many women in marriages in our country are, in fact, adolescent and unprepared for pregnancy medically, although they have full social support.

Other than direct dire warnings about sex, the AE material also generates fear about sex in other ways. A strong link is made between desire and violence. Adolescent sexuality is portrayed as one which can go out of control and spill over into abusive behaviour. Other than being an argument which is offensive towards young people, it also goes against what feminists and the women's movement have long established—that sexual violence is about abuse of power and not desire. According to the Lifestyle Education material, 'Adolescents are not only abused, they themselves, given the opportunity, instead of seeking proper



### Points for discussion:

1. Preventing sexual intercourse.

- Abstain from sexual intercourse or wait till marriage.
- Use other methods to express love, like – gift flowers, hold hands.
- On being repeatedly asked to engage in sexual intercourse, be firm and learn how to say no.

### Suman's Story

Suman is 18 year old and friendly with Ramesh, a handsome boy of 19 years. Ramesh had asked her to have sex many times, but she had been refusing. Suman loves him a lot and recently agreed to have sex with him. She said to herself, "Why not?" I am an adult and I can decide independently, and do as I want. This age is meant to have fun and experiment with life. Many other girls are doing it and I do not want to miss out on good life. Moreover I am in love with Ramesh and would like to marry him." She felt she was very lucky to have a friend like Ramesh and did not want to lose him.

However, yesterday something happened that has left Suman feeling very angry, hurt and scared. For two days, Suman had felt pain while urinating. When she could not ignore this any longer, she visited the doctor who asked her about her sex life and told her that she seemed to have a Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI). The doctor said that she would require treatment for STI and also need further test to rule out pregnancy. Suman, since she knew that it was from Ramesh that she got the STI, felt cheated and said, "My world has crumbled down. I should have refrained from being intimate with any man before I knew about the various consequences of sex. It would have been best if I had waited for sex till I got married."



## Language Textbooks

NATION AND ITS IDENTITY 1					
No	DETAILS	SIGNIFICANCE	REPRESENTED IN TIME AND SPACE	INDIAN IDENTITY	
LESSON	WHEN + WHERE	HISTORIES OF PAST -STATE, UNITY & IDENTITY -HERITAGE (MYTHS, MONUMENTS) -METAPHORS: TRADITION'S THREAD	HISTORIES OF NAT. IDENTITY -EDGE/MARGINALIZE/ DENY -SOME HISTORIES PRE-1757 -COLONIALISM & NATIONALIST MOVEMENT -HETEROGENEOUS NAT. MOVET-LOCAL LANG	PHYSICAL IDENTITY -EXTENT, FRONTIER -LANDSCAPE (SACRED, ROMANTICIZED..) -RESOURCES FOR MINGLING STREAMS	INCORPORATION/ABSENCES -REGIONS -GPS OUTSIDE DEVONOMADS, INFORMAL ECONOMY -DIVERSITY -DEMOCRACY

NATION AND ITS IDENTITY 2					
No	NATIONALISM		REFERENCES TO INDIAN PEOPLE/LEADERS	GENDER	GENRE, ADDRESS, TONE, REMARKS
DEMOCRACY	WELFARE STATE	DEV'T	DEFENSE DISSENT INDIA AND THE WORLD	NATIONALISM REST OF WORLD	REGION & EXTENT OF INFLUENCE 1. CONTRIBUTION 2. VALUES 3. INCIDENT INDIV/GRP 1 RURAL/ URBAN 2 CLASS 3 RELIGION 4 CASTE 5 GENDER