

Portrayal of Weaker Sections in Secondary Level School Textbook of English

A Study

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Abstract

Textbooks can have a significant impact on how a certain social groups is portrayed through both literary and visuals means. To help students comprehend the needs and reality of every people, public institutions must provide a realistic and non-judgemental image of all in their curriculum. The current study set out to locate and evaluate, how the English textbook which is utilised for the CBSE Board, portrays the weaker sections of the Indian society. Using coding-based categories, a content analysis of the text and visuals from a sample textbook was carried out. The three main categories that steer the analysis are—socially disadvantaged populations, people with disabilities and gender identities. When we looked at the textbook, we saw that majority of the chapters were focused on men as compare to females and features just one disabled character in the textbook. The textbook comprises a chapters on poverty like chapter of 5 ‘The Snake and the Mirror’ by V. M. Basheer (Bechive, 2006 pg 56) where the narrator is a poor homeopath doctor with little money that comes under socially disadvantaged populations. Suggestions were also mentioned in the study for improvement of the textbooks.

Keywords: NCERT Textbook, Content Analysis, Weaker Sections of India, Inclusive Education.

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INTRODUCTION

The policy of inclusion has become a prominent component of government activities worldwide, especially in India. Despite spectacular development in every sphere of education in India, the goal of universal education is still a far distant goal that cannot be achieved without bringing weaker sections, such as gender disparities, disabilities and socially underprivileged groups together. (Para 6.2 and 6.6, NEP 2020). The Indian education system and subsequent government programmes have achieved consistent advancements in narrowing social and gender disparities across all levels of school education. However, significant disparities persist, particularly at the secondary level, especially for marginalised parts of society. Family, schools, friends, mass media, public opinion and religion all have significant influence on socialisation and education. Additionally, textbooks are also important in both the educational process and socialising.

Textbooks are regarded as the primary source of education in most nations. It provides students with academic knowledge and has the potential to be the best tool to fully achieve human potential, develop equality and social justice, and promote the national development of the country. The more planned the textbook, the easier is the task for teacher in making pupils acquire knowledge, and continued march to the top of the global rankings and

leadership position in the areas of economic development, social justice and equality, scientific progress, national integration and the preservation of cultural traditions. The content, visuals and exercises all portray the marginalised segments in the materials, which significantly influence how children perceive the function of these marginalised portions in society as presented in the textbook. The current study titled, 'Portrayal of Weaker Sections of Society in Secondary Level School Textbooks of English: A Study', aims to analyse nationalised textbooks from the standpoint of equality and fairness. The objective is to analyse the portrayal of marginalised groups in the English textbooks for class IX. The present textbooks, which have been rewritten after adhering to the rules of the National Curriculum Framework (NCF), 2005 are interpreted in this study.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Weaker Sections

India is large populace country where different groups of people are living together but most of the population faces social inequality. The term 'weaker sections of society' refers to a group that lags socially, economically and politically, compared to other segments of society. The weaker sections have been experiencing various forms of social inequality. The Indian government had divided the weaker sections into these categories:

1. Social Cultural Identities: Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other backward classes
2. Gender Identities: Women and transgender
3. Disabilities: Locomotors disability, acid act victim, deafness, low vision, speech and language disability, sickle cell disease, and others as specified in the scheduled of the RPwD Act 2016.
4. Social Economics Conditions: Migrants, low-income household, children of victim of trafficking.

The government is taking many initiatives to empower marginalised segments of the community by implementation of various policies. Articles 14, 15, 16 and 17 ensure the absence of any form of discrimination against marginalised segments of society. The states are putting a lot of efforts to improve the political and economic status of weaker section of society. Education is the best preventive measure for improving the strata of weaker sections by including them in textbooks.

Significance of Textbooks

The most significant teaching resources among other learning resources are textbooks (Thang.et.al., 2013). Textbooks do not only impact what and how students learn, but also what and how teachers can teach. Without using the textbook, skills, concepts and content required by the curriculum, it cannot be delivered. Textbooks can help students gain

understanding of their experiences by presenting appropriate questions and tasks that encourage introspection, provide explanations, and inspire and encourage students (Iqbal, 2009; Mahmood, 2011; Saeed, 2009). In addition, Yamada (2006) indicated that a textbook is not solely a commercially accessible reference book used in a language teaching programme. Furthermore, it serves as a crucial instrument for expressing political and intellectual viewpoints. She further state that “textbooks can be understood and examined as curricular materials, which project images of society and culture. They reflect historical, social, cultural, and socio-cultural, economics and political contexts” (p.20).

In addition to education and the acquisition of knowledge, pupils also dedicate a significant amount of time to engaging in post-school study by perusing educational materials for the purpose of reviewing and reinforcing information to acquire knowledge. These textbooks contain text and illustrations that provide reviews, structures and renderings of knowledge in a specific subject for a particular age group. The purpose of these textbooks is to establish the basis for standardised acquiring knowledge and a shared culture. Therefore, it transfers a cultural aspects of society knowledge and values to its youngest members at a very specific point in time. According to Arnot (2002), “students who use textbooks spend a quarter

or semester reading them, which results in a greater amount time in comparison to other time spent with media, such as flipping through a magazine". Textbook messages have a longer-lasting impact compared to the short regular exposure to a television broadcast and magazine promotion or movie. Thus, it enables access to a wide range of information. In addition to fostering literacy skills, they also promote critical thinking, autonomy and innovation.

Importance of English Textbooks in Portraying Weaker Sections

The textbook is the most important tool in the hands of a teacher of language. A global language called English is spoken most extensively and is taught as a second largest language in India. English as a language enjoys as the important language as it is used by people all over the world. Thus, the English textbooks encourages language development as well as portrayed various groups of society through prose and poetry. English textbooks are tools which help in representing the middle class and underprivileged class.

The English textbook, which includes fictional narratives, stories, poems and writings, curated from renowned authors across many literary genres, leaves a lasting impact on the young readers. Therefore, the language textbook has the potential to significantly influence the mindset, convictions and ethical principles of young learners.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Internationally and nationally, the representation of diversity in English textbooks has a significant role in educational settings, since it helps students to learn about the world they live in. In this sense, people who do not share the same race, religion, sexual orientation, cultural patterns or socioeconomic status may feel identified and represented in material used for learning. Critical education theorists and practitioners have long argued that group depictions in instructional materials lead to view on what is 'normal' (Loewen, 2007; Osborn, 2016) and that representation of various groups, issues and events of people in school textbooks can influence students' views of themselves and the world (Hickman & Porfilio, 2012; McLaren, 2015; Tintocalls, 2011; Yosso, 2002). Gulya Nikoletta and Fehervari A, (2023) aims at determine and evaluating the content of 'English as Foreign language' (EFL) textbook from presentation of disability point of view. For analysing the samples, a content analysis method was used for analysing the text and images by using coding-based categories. The result demonstrated that there was extremely limited representation of individuals with impairments in written and visual materials. While in the context of secondary physical education textbooks, according to Palomares G. A and Cao R. A. (2022), it is important to establish the primary qualities that are associated with the

portrayal of people with disabilities. For this, they included a total of 6773 photographs as the sample for their research. The study employed a content analysis methodology, supported by a scientifically validated qualitative instrument, which was pre-tested in a pilot study. The study revealed that the representation of individuals with disabilities in physical education textbooks is severely limited, both in terms of how often they are included and the range of their involvement.

Shah and Mehraj Ud Din (2019) conducted a study to analyse the English language textbooks utilised by the Jammu and Kashmir State Board of School Education for Grade VIII students, specifically focusing on gender-related aspects. The 'Gender-Wise Occurrence of Evidence' evaluation tool was employed to analyse the number of pictures, references, stereotype and non-stereotype activities, and occupational activities portrayed for males and females in the English Language Textbooks of the Jammu and Kashmir State Board of School Education for Class VIII. The content analysis method was descriptive and statistical in nature, and it was used to examine the total pictures and references. The hypothesis was put to the test by means of the Chi-squared test, and the findings of the investigation indicated that the language textbooks contain a much greater number of depictions of males than representations of girls. On the

same notion, Bhattacharya S. (2017) investigated gender representation in his study, which focused on the examination of textbooks used in India for the Class VIII. For the analysis, the Critical Discourse Analysis framework was utilised. Blossoms, Honey dew, and Read Now, were the three English textbooks that were evaluated for this sample. Based on the findings, it is evident there was still a gender bias or stereotype evident in the English textbooks used in Indian schools. The researcher who took part in this study also gave some recommendations and educational consequences. Srivastav Gouri, (2016) conducted analysis on textbooks used in Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Odisha, Maharashtra, Manipur and Rajasthan. This examination of textbooks was based on the gender perspective and its primary objective was to investigate textbooks of school in the field of all disciplines from the standpoint of gender bias and stereotypes via the lens of the gender perspective and found gender disparity. In order to control any disparity, if any, in the acquisition of knowledge, development of skills, and ultimately the all-around development of an individual child's personality, Kharbanda R (2015) investigated to uncover the gender bias that exists in the content of the Social Science textbooks that are used at the Class IX level in India. The researcher conducted a content analysis on all the chapters from

both books, and the findings made it abundantly evident that there is a significant difference between stereotype and non-stereotype activities indicated in the textbook of social science at Class IX in Indian certificate of Secondary education (ICSE) books.

The critical review reflected that the majority of English textbooks including other subjects represent weaker sections in a biased, skewed and stereotypical manner. The information in textbooks is limited, biased or inaccurate, and students are negatively affected. We cannot ignore these negative themes, that emerge after reviewing the studies which definitely effecting our society in a certain way. In today's world, inclusive and equitable education which is indeed an essential need that can be achieved through education as education is the single greatest tool for achieving social justice and equality.

TEXTBOOK USED AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The objective of this study is to examine how the English textbook for Class IX of the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) Board depicts marginalised groups. The current study examines, *Beehive*, an English textbook for Class XI, in accordance with the revised English syllabus that was developed as a continuation of the National Curriculum Framework, 2005. The research questions that were posed

aimed to investigate the depiction of marginalised groups in English textbooks of the CBSE Board.

- RQ 1. How many female characters as compare to male characters, appear in the English textbook of Class IX of the CBSE Board?
- RQ 2. How many characters with disabilities appear in the English textbook of Class IX of the CBSE Board?
- RQ 3. To what extent the content with reference to visuals portraying weaker sections (female, people with disabilities and social underprivileged groups) in English textbook of Class IX of the CBSE Board?
- RQ 4. Are weaker section (female, people with disabilities social underprivileged groups) presented in a stereotypical way in English textbook of Class IX of the CBSE Board (As dependent, less happy, passive, and helpless).

METHODOLOGY

Content analysis is a systematic, objective and quantitative analysis of message characteristics (Neuendorf, 2017). It is designed for the investigation of message contents to elucidate 'what they mean to people, what they enable or prevent, and what the information conveyed by them does.' The researcher used the content analysis method in the present study because this

method is designed for this purpose (Krippendorff, 2013, p.2).

Primary Categories

The guiding three primary categories for the analysis are gender identities, disabilities and socially under privileged groups:

- 1. The first category is of gender category which is the essential component of an equivalent and appropriate representation of male and female, with a focus on the portrayal and assessment of women as well-known personality.
- 2. The disability category investigates whether and to what extent people with disabilities are considered and given consideration.
- 3. The question of whether and to what extent social inequality is portrayed in the textbook and is raised by the last category of socially underprivileged group.

DATA INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS

Textual Analysis of Textbooks for Class IX (*Beehive*)

The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) is

the organisation that is responsible for publishing the NCERT books of English for Class IX. These textbooks were developed in accordance with the academic standards of the CBSE for the Class IX. A great number of state boards and CBSE institutions recommend and adhere to the curriculum that is outlined in these publications. Class IX students are required to use the English *Beehive* (NCERT, 2006) textbook as their primary class book. To determine whether or not English textbooks connect all aspects of society, including gender, caste, class and disability, in a manner that is inclusive, the objective of this analysis is to investigate this question.

Gender

Although, the textbook *Beehive* tries to incorporate all types of literary works, such as plays, travelogues, diaries and biographies, which may have great literary values, it does so at the expense of compromising gender equality. Table 1 displayed the total number of characters with number of male characters and female characters, the characters belonging to feminine gender were

Table 1
Total number of characters in content in book of English (*Beehive*) portraying weaker sections of society

Name of the Textbook	Total no. of Characters	Gender		Disable	Social Class
		Male	Female	Disability	Under Privileged
<i>Beehive</i>	35	20	15	1	5

Note: This table shows the number of characters belonging to weaker sections existing in the text of the English textbook of Class IX, titled ‘Beehive’ (first edition 2006, reprint January 2021).

less as compared to the masculine gender. Out of a total of eleven chapters, the female characters were totally missing in four chapters and present in the rest seven chapters as lesser in numbers in stories.

With the exception of three chapters based on biographies about Santosh Yadav, the youngest woman to summit Everest (Ch. 8, part I para. 1, pg. 99), and Maria Sharapova, a tennis Champion (Ch-8, part- II, pg.104) and aspiring musician Evelyn Glennies, who overcame her deafness to become a skilled percussionist (Ch 2, part-I, pg. 18). However, some chapters can be claimed to be unique to men. These include those from the lives of Albert Einstein, APJ Abdul Kalam, Bismillah Khan and an excerpt from Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat*, Packing, and Vikram Seth's journey to Kathmandu (Ch 4, 6, 7, 10 and 11). Male authors outnumbered female authors in terms of quantity.

The Chapter 3 'The Little Girl' in the textbook normalises violent masculinity, portrays women as 'stereotypical ways' and instruct students to accept violence at home, among other things. As mentioned in the chapter when the father hits or yells at Kezia, the main character, both women— her mother and grandmother are submissive and powerless to stop him. The mother is shown as supporting the patriarchy and maltreatment in the home. The grandma claims her granddaughter with love and sympathy, but she never stands up for her. Despite

being older, her grandmother appears helpless in front of her son. Because the father works too much, it teaches the kids to tolerate violence at home. The passage does not in any way empower girls, and in fact, it sets detrimental examples that girls and young women can forgive those who have committed acts of violence, while boys can learn that they will be forgiven even if they are violent. Every single figure seems to be confined within a context that is known to be mentally hazardous. Conversely, the chapter-'The Reach for the Top' explored the two most fearless women who had defied every sports cliché. The first starts with Santosh Yadav 's biography; she came from a village where girls are seen to be a curse. She was subjected to gender prejudice from a young age and made the decision to forge her own path. Despite her parents' strong desire for her to marry young, she chose to follow her goals and moved out of the house. She worked part-time to pay for her studies on her own. She registered for a mountaineering course at the Nehru Institute of Mountaineering in Uttarkashi (para. 6, pg. 101). She reached the summit of Mount Everest in 1922 but she did not stop with that as she scaled it for the second time in 1993, and was awarded the Padmashri award.

Disability

Students with disabilities encounter unique challenges since they have less access to traditional education

settings. The provision of sufficient technology and materials is a requirement for their integration. People with special needs are hardly ever included in instructional materials, despite the facts that many countries have special integration programmes. In this context, the analysis of the sample chosen for the present study includes the second chapter, 'The Sound of Music', divided into two parts. It was written by Deborah Cowley' which details the dedication of a seventeen-year-old girl with hearing impairment who aspires to be a multi-percussionist. Her biography, which was included in the book, sent a message that anything is possible if we have strong will power and never give up. She is still an inspiration to those who are handicapped as it was mentioned on page no. 20 (para. 10) in the textbook. It is admirable that the NCERT includes a story of a person with disability, showing that the world offers opportunity for all no matter which disability they belong but needs to include more chapters.

Social Underprivileged Groups

Other conditions, in addition to gender and physical or mental handicap, should also be covered in textbooks. Full involvement in academics can be seriously hampered by social class, poverty, homelessness, disease and old age. The textbook comprises a chapters on poverty like chapter 5

'The Snake and the Mirror' by V.M. Basheer where the narrator is a poor homeopath doctor with little money. He was living in a small, rented room without electricity and lots of rats in it.

The following is an excerpt from 'My Childhood' (Chapter 5 and page no. 68) in APJ Abdul Kalam's autobiography, '*Wings of Fire*', which describes the famous scientist's early years in vivid detail and with appropriate illustrations. In addition, the unit instils in us a sense of religious harmony and group acceptance. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, whose family was Muslim, claims that when he was a child, every child from Hindu Brahmin Homes was so close to each other that they never felt like they belonged to separate religions. The chapter conveyed a lovely message encouraging all Indians to maintain the unity and integration of their country. It, simultaneously, calls on us to put aside all social and religious barriers and coexist peacefully. It is written to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood among all the people of India, transcending religious, linguistic, and regional or sectional differences, and to renounce practices that are derogatory to the dignity of women. The textbook contains a paragraph on Article 51-A of the constitution, which states that education is a fundamental human right, and to which all Indians are entitled. This paragraph is inserted in a large font size.

Table 2
Total number of visuals in content in book of English (Beehive) portraying weaker sections of society

Name of the Textbook	Total no. of Visuals	Gender		Disable	Social Class
		Male	Female	Disability	Under Privileged
<i>Beehive</i>	93	64	23	1	5

Note: This table shows the number of visuals portraying weaker sections existing in the text of the English textbook of Class IX, titled 'Beehive' (first edition 2006, reprint January 2021)

Visual Analysis

It was during the second phase of the analytical process that we went through all 93 of the photographs contained in the textbook titled *Beehive* and chose the ones that depicted weaker sections. The images that were used for the analysis were the units of analysis, and they were coded independently by selecting one indicator from each category.

Gender

Based on gender focused analysis of the textbook, one may legitimately argue that the textbook's illustration is gendered. Visuals portray unequal representation of genders in the textbook. Out of the total 93 visuals, 64 visuals show males whereas only 23 visuals showing females, this is because the textbook is primarily male oriented, with men serving as a main characters in the majority of the lessons. The visuals were also examined whether the achievements of female gender were depicted. After analysis, the researcher found that there were about 5 visuals

portraying achievements of women in the textbook (pg. 18, pg. 21, pg. 99, textbook *Beehive*)

Disability

The analysis of the sample selected for this present study reveals that out of 93 visuals, only 1 visual was related to hearing impairment mentioned in the caption on a page no. 19, where the protagonist, Evelyn, the musician was performing so effortlessly without hearing.

The visuals were also examined to see whether the disabled individuals depicted in them were common people or well-known figures. One of the 93 images showing individuals with impairment featured a well-known or well-liked individual where one was a famous musician.

Lastly, the visuals were analysed in terms of whether a person with disability was alone or with company. The person (Evelyn) with disability was with her mother and mentor, as mentioned in the Chapter 2 (The Sound of Music, para no. 3, pg. 18)

Social Under Privileged Groups

After analysis of the textbook, visuals portraying social under privileged groups is totally missing. Though, the author depicted a protagonist who belongs to poor family—for instance, the homeopath doctor in Chapter 5 of 'The Snake and the Mirror'—there was no visual in the chapter showing poverty.

The textbook includes Chapter, 'My Childhood' which give information on caste system, but the chapter did not expressed as discriminatory, in fact, the chapter promotes the message of not spreading the poison of social inequality and communal intolerance (para. 7, pg. 71), which can be clearly seen in these two visuals.

The picture on page on. 18 is an example of an inclusive classroom where all students, whether they belong to any religion or background is studying together in a classroom. The teacher, himself, identify as Hindu Brahmin seems accepting feeling of all students as students seems enjoying studying with him.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Gender sensitisation in textbooks considered to be an important key factor of inclusiveness. The researcher analyses the textbook from gender lens, found that the textbook including most of the chapters were male oriented and there were few chapters depicting women's achievement also. There were no chapters on transgender, lesbians and gay.

The researcher concluded that the way persons with disabilities were portrayed in the written and visual content was highly lacklustre. Only once the people with disability were portrayed in the textbook but the character was portrayed in stereotypical way. She was shown as a famous singer who was neither dependent on anyone nor felt helpless. The textbook should include other chapters on other disabilities like speech and language disability, specific disabilities, autism spectrum disorder and other disabilities, according to the schedule that was included in the Rights of Persons, with Disability (RPWD) Act of 2016.

The textbook did not promote any social inequality, as it included a Chapter, 'My Childhood' an extract from *Wings of Fire*, which states the message of religion tolerance and communal harmony.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The textbooks should include all sections of society as it not only imparts knowledge but makes the students identify values held by society and political identities, and understand the history and the world. The underrepresentation of people with other category of gender identities, social identities, geographical identities and disabilities, indicates that the English textbook of Class IX do not strive for inclusive content. Thus, the textbooks should be revised and include new chapters based on other

social issues which are currently prevailing in society. The textbook is expected to include other categories of weaker sections of society like gender identities— transgender and sociocultural identities— scheduled caste, scheduled tribes, other backwards class, disabilities like— speech and language disability, specific disabilities, autism spectrum disorder and other disabilities as specified in the schedule of the RPWD Act 2016.

These following suggestions will help in designing the textbooks for future:

1. Textbooks highly expected to play a key major role in highlight to promoting peaceful coexistence and social cohesion, so textbooks should include explicit and implicit messages of peace, inclusion, and reconciliation.
2. There should be no discrimination or bias against women, or any other gender in textbooks. The advancement of gender equality,

and the empowerment of women and transgender individuals for the purpose of social and economic development should be represented by it.

3. The textbooks should be designed to encourage multicultural education, and teach students to respect diversity by addressing issues of equality and equity, emphasising the importance of empowering underrepresented groups and minority groups.

The study is limited to the analysis of 'Beehive: A Textbook in English' published by the NCERT in 2006 for Class IX used in the CBSE which constitute the population of the study. The further study might look into the differences and similarities between the textbooks used in other boards when it comes to the portrayal of weaker sections. Further studies might also include analysis of textbooks related to other subjects.

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