

Bihar Secondary School SCERT Textbooks: Through the Lens of Critical Feminist Research

*Smita Parashar**, *Sweta Tiwari***

Abstract

This paper highlights gender inequalities in education in Bihar, India, by examining its textual curriculum. A gender analysis of a secondary school English Language textbook developed by the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) Bihar has been undertaken for the research. Informed by a critical feminist research approach, the study unveils how the construct of gender remains embedded in the content of a textbook used by a large number of learners of the English Language at the secondary level of school education in Bihar. An analytical framework formalised through guidelines used in previous gender-audit textbooks examines gender biases in printed learning material. Applying Blumberg's (2007) model of gender analysis, the study will examine the text in terms of authorship, content and illustrations. The findings depict a picture of the gendering of textual knowledge reflected in terms of substantial female invisibility and gender role stereotyping. The textbook's content barely shows any significant changes in women's position in contemporary society, reflected in their achievements and struggles. The exclusionary disposition of the textbook, as uncovered in the study, leads to suggestions of substantive steps towards gender mainstreaming in education, which can help in reversing and stalling the regressive trend of gender discrimination in education. School education is an essential site for reproducing gender relations in society. It must be inclusive and critical to transform young minds and society.

Keywords: *Gender biases, Bihar SCERT school textbooks, critical feminist research, gender mainstreaming*

Introduction

Gender and Education

Gender is a fundamental element of the everyday representation of self and a lens through which others view us (Manjrekar, 2021). Gender refers to the "socially and culturally constructed characteristics of women and men which legitimise and sanction modes of 'acceptable' social behaviour" (Manjrekar, 2021, p.12). The gender system, according to Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin (1999), includes processes that define males and females as different in socially significant ways and justify inequality based on that difference. Gender inequality, according to Lorber (2010), takes many different forms depending on the economic structure and social organisation of a particular society and the culture of any particular group. Gender inequality is deeply rooted in the structure of society; gender relations are essentially relations of power defined by patriarchy, which one broadly understands as the system of social structures and practices by which men dominate, exploit and oppress women (Walby, 1990, as cited in Manjrekar, 2010, p.12). Manjrekar (2021) argues that patriarchal control has developed historically and is legitimised and reproduced by institutions such as family, religion, caste, education, media, law, and the state.

The major social and cultural institutions support the system of gender inequality. Like other institutions of family and the wider society, education makes gender and gender relations appear normal. In recent years, many scholars have explored gender and education. Various studies have examined the intersection of gender and education and the gendering of education across different historical and cultural contexts (Bank, 2007). Myriad theories have conceptualised gender and education and their interrelationship in different ways, which in turn have had implications for understanding gender inequalities and the role of education in maintaining or undermining those inequalities (Delamont & Marshal, 2007).

This paper attempts to study gender and education in the context of Bihar, India, through two critical approaches: critical feminist research and critical pedagogy. Critical feminist research challenges androcentric disciplinary knowledge through varied epistemological commitments, influencing what we know, how, and who can know (Wigginton & Lafrance, 2019). Focussing on one of the strands of what we know, this study draws on feminist empiricist epistemology to illuminate how gender remains embedded in the

context of school education in Bihar, India. Critical pedagogy has been instrumental in challenging the social, environmental, and economic structures and social relations that shape the conditions in which we live and in which schools operate (Kirylo et al., 2010). It calls for an active engagement with the oppressed and exploited groups and will help in questioning and examining how gender constructs operate in the educational context of Bihar.

Gender and Education in Bihar

Many research studies have established a strong positive correlation between female education and various dimensions of human development. Bandyopadhyay and Subrahmaniam (2008) maintain that "education has the potential to contribute to alternative socialisation, challenging conventional gender ideologies, levelling the playing fields between males and females about skills, credentials and qualification and allowing women the use of knowledge in diverse ways" (p. 3). Education empowers women and girls with a voice so that they can participate fully in decision-making, whether in the family or community, and it yields multiple dividends in terms of improvements in their health, economic status and realising their rights (Mahila Vikas Nigam, Bihar, 2019). Despite a plethora of such studies and research, gender-based deprivations in education prevail in many parts of India, with studies showing that gender inequalities in education are more acute in specific regions and states across India.

In a study conducted to analyse state-wise literacy rate and the gender gap in literacy rate in India, Census 2011 data indicates that Bihar at 63.8 has the lowest literacy rate vis-a-vis other states of India and the national average of 74.0 per cent (Islam & Mustaqim, 2015). According to Islam & Mustaqim (2015), Bihar, along with seven other states, falls in the category of the highest gender gap in literacy rates of 20 per cent and above, where the value of the gender gap in the literacy rate of Bihar at 20.2 per cent is more than the national average of 16.7 per cent. Various studies estimating the Human Development Index (HDI) and Gender Development Index (GDI) at India's national and sub-national levels indicate a very low ranking for Bihar. Chatterjee et al. (2019), in the empirical findings of their study, found that the value of the Human Development Index (HDI) and Gender Development Index (GDI) was the lowest in the state of Bihar in 2001 and 2016. Bihar's poor performance on the different indices of gender-related development necessitates investigations into gender inequalities in Bihar, focussing

primarily on gender inequalities in education, as education is a strategic pathway for women's economic empowerment.

Literature Review

The OECD report *Closing the Gender Gap: Act Now* (2013) states that gender equality and women's empowerment remain “unfinished business” across all countries (Silova, 2016). Gender equality, however, cannot be guaranteed through school access and academic achievement alone. Longwe (1998, as cited in Silova, 2016) maintains that schools perpetuate gender inequalities, whether advertently or inadvertently, through power relations, pedagogy, and stereotypical portrayal of male and female roles in textbooks, curricula, and learning materials. The work of critical feminist sociologists asserts that formal education acts to further “social reproduction, both structurally (through a stratified schooling system), as well as ideologically, both through curricula and teaching practices that emphasise dominant ideologies” (Weiler, 1998, as cited in Manjrekar, 2021, p, 22).

The issue of gender bias in curricula and teachers' treatment of students or the related problem of gender bias in textbooks may appear less urgent as compared to the remaining gender gap in parity. Blumberg (2007), however, based on an analysis of studies from both developing economies and OECD countries, argues that gender bias in textbooks is far more widespread geographically than the remaining gender gap in parity in terms of access, enrolment and achievement. Studies from the whole gamut of developing and developed countries find that “females tend to be greatly under-represented and both males and females depicted in such gender-stereotyped ways, that girls and boys' visions of who they are and what they can become are constrained” (Blumberg, 2007, p.4). Gender bias in textbooks and school curricula contends Blumberg (2007) is “one of the best camouflaged – and hardest to budge – rocks in the road to gender equality in education” (p. 4).

The fourth edition of the Global Education Monitoring Report, brought out by UNESCO, maintains that girls and women tend to be under-represented in school textbooks, or even when they include girls and women, they tend to be depicted in traditional roles in many countries across the globe (Women Under-Represented, 2020). The report, while pointing out the widely prevalent gender stereotypes in textbooks, observes that the textbooks depict women as nurses; in contrast, the men are doctors. The textbooks

portray women in subjects related to food, fashion, or entertainment; women are in voluntary jobs in contracts, while men are in paid jobs. The report also notes a few countries' attempts to revise the textbook images to reflect more gender balance.

Textbooks and teaching/ learning materials are powerful tools for conveying and mainstreaming the principles of gender equality. Thus, it is essential for “textbooks to be covered by policies which respect and include the rights of girls and women for their full enjoyment of a good-quality education” (UNESCO, 2009, p. 67, as cited in Silova, 2016). Silova (2016) maintains that "women's representation in the textbook content should be more balanced in terms of both visual and textual representation so that there is visibility and appropriately acknowledge women's contributions in all the fields of life including politics, economics, history, science, literature, arts etc. This representation should be carefully reviewed and monitored to eliminate gender bias and stereotypes."

Mineshima (2008), while investigating female invisibility and gender stereotyping in selected English language textbooks in a Japanese high school, notes that the materials in which males far outnumber females in many respects affect learners, especially females, negatively in their long-term development. According to Sadker et al. (1991, as cited in Mineshima,2008), invisibility is one of the most pernicious forms of bias. Mischel (1970, as cited in Mineshime,2008) asserts that exposure to traditional gender-typed symbolic models in children's books, television, and movies plays a role in the vicarious learning of traditional gender role standards. Porreca (1984, as cited in Mineshima,2008), in the same vein, warns that implicit conditioning of learners towards gender-role stereotyping is dangerous because children can quickly and easily integrate such gender biases into their value- systems. Andrews et al. (2022) observe that children often internalise stereotypes, which has a detrimental effect on academic performance through a phenomenon known as stereotype threat, which refers to awareness of negative stereotypes about one's group, undermining self-efficacy and performance.

Another study reviewing some selected textbooks of Environmental Studies (E.V.S.) and language (English and Hind) textbooks at the primary level from the three states of Bihar, Uttarakhand and Andhra Pradesh in India focuses on mapping how social exclusion has been addressed in these textbooks. Sharma (2015) notes that while textbooks alone cannot help assess how teachers use them pedagogically in classroom contexts and how children interpret them, the textbooks' contents indicate the nature of teaching and

learning they may facilitate. Regarding gender representation in illustrations and contents, girls and boys are shown in their traditional roles, particularly in Bihar's textbooks (Sharma,2015). The textbooks from Bihar and Uttarakhand present the social context as it exists without creating spaces for the children and teachers to examine social norms, institutions and stereotypes critically. Examining the contents of Bihar's E.V.S. textbooks of classes III and IV, Sharma (2015) notes that there is no reference to the variety of ways in which weddings take place and to the traditions and practices in marriages that are problematic from the standpoint of gender equity. Drawing another example from a chapter of a class IV textbook on a maternal uncle coming home, Sharma (2015) observes that the questions revolving around the change in women's residence after marriage do not facilitate a critical inquiry about this practice or aberrations to this norm or how gender roles shape the social institutions.

Objectives

Based on the literature reviewed above, this paper focuses on studying exclusion in school textbooks in Bihar, India. The paper conducts a gender audit of a school textbook developed by the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT), Bihar, brought out by the Bihar State Textbook Publishing Corporation Ltd. (BSTBPC), Patna. The primary objectives are:

- i) To examine the gendered nature of an English language secondary school (class x) textbook in terms of content and change, developed under the vision of Bihar Curriculum Framework (B.C.F.)-2008.
- ii) Attempt to decipher gender bias through two analytical categories of gender bias: i) invisibility and ii) stereotyping based on a model proposed by Blumberg (2007).
- iii) The research, being grounded in critical feminist research and critical pedagogy, will endeavour to highlight the asymmetries in power relations in the construction of gender in the language textbook.

Rationale

Textbooks and pedagogies are important inputs for school education and are also crucial for the gender socialisation of students. To improve the status of secondary education, the

Bihar state government has made arrangements to make textbooks available to all secondary school students at a low cost through the Bihar State Text Book Publishing Corporation's distribution network (BSTPC) (Karim, 2022). The current study is based on the textbook brought out by the BSTPC. *Panorama Part II- An Anthology of English Prose and Poetry for Class X* (SCERT, Bihar, 2015), which has been analysed in the research, is a reprint of the revised edition brought out in 2012-2013, and the books presently being used in the government schools in Bihar, reprint 2022-23, are no different from the textbook on which the gender audit has been conducted. The study has been contextualised in Bihar, as Bihar is India's third most populous state and faces several human development challenges. Achieving gender equality in Bihar is crucial for India to accomplish the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 (Anand & Mahavidyalaya, 2020).

There are three important reasons for choosing the English Language textbook published by the BSTPC for the research. Firstly, the cheap availability of these textbooks in government schools has led to their wide circulation and usage, making it significant for research. The district of Patna itself has approximately 522 government secondary schools. Secondly, English Language is one of the core courses at the secondary stage of education; thus, the English Language textbook analysed in the study reaches many students. Thirdly, the Bihar Curriculum Framework (BCF, 2008) developed by the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) titled '*Education for Equity, Harmony and Excellence*' (SCERT Bihar, 2008), provides the scaffolding for the content of the textbook. It is thus important to examine if the appeal for equity has been reflected in the textbooks developed, in this case, from the point of view of gender. A new Bihar Curriculum Framework (BCF) aligning with the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2023 has not yet been developed and is still underway.

Pandey (2005) contends that at a subconscious level, gender-biased textbooks are preparing boys to achieve while girls are being trained to be submissive and obey at home. She further argues that these gender stereotypes may adversely affect the emotional psyche of children by forcing them to perform a set pattern of behaviour in which boys are taught to associate with outdoor activities, and girls are confined to indoor activities. According to Srivastava (2014), secondary education involves the twilight years of adolescence, and the increasing share of adolescents and youth in India

need to be provided with quality education that promotes empowerment along with skills and employability. It is thus important to conduct gender audits on textbooks to avoid the perils of silencing adolescent girls in the formal education system owing to their subordination, as represented in the text.

Methodology

The research endeavours to examine how the construct of gender is embedded in the text and illustrations of a class X English language textbook used in schools in Bihar, India. Critical feminist research factors include specific key methodological considerations, which include a) the politics of asking questions, b) reflexivity, and c) mobilising research for social change (Wigginton & Lafrance, 2019). The study will navigate these methodological issues through feminist empiricist epistemology and critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy educates students to fashion them as active agents who can question and negotiate the relationship between theory and practice, critical analysis and common sense, and learning and social change (McLaren & Kincheloe, 2007). The research poses the principal research question of how the construct of gender and gender relations unfold within the text and visuals of the language textbook within the framework of critical pedagogy. Feminist empiricist epistemology, the epistemology chosen for the study, is based on the assumption that there is an objective reality or truth that we can discover and the researchers can detach themselves from the reality they observe and study (Campbell & Wasco, 2000, as cited in Wigginton & Lafrance, 2019). Reflexivity as a methodological concern will be addressed through the objectivity lens of the empiricist epistemological position. Findings derived from the research conducted within the empiricist epistemology can be used to mobilise social change by furthering the feminist agenda of gender mainstreaming in education.

Gender mainstreaming in education refers to a strategy and planned process for addressing gender issues in all stages and forms of education in order to fight gender discrimination and promote gender equality. According to Loan et al. (2010), textbook review and analysis are essential to an overall plan for gender mainstreaming throughout an education system. Textbook reviews and analyses from a gender perspective aim to collect evidence of gender biases in textbooks and provide examples of good practices in promoting gender equality. Textbook review and analysis can be performed by examining the textbook discourse, i.e., studying the messages delivered in and through

textbooks based on wordings, examples, illustrations and working methods (Loan et al., 2010).

Method & Material

The study bases itself on a set of Guidelines refined and formalised in a joint project of the U.N. / Government of Vietnam Joint Programme on Gender Equality (UN/ GOV JPGE) to carry out a national textbook study in 2009 from a gender perspective focussing primarily on primary education in the Vietnamese education context. The guidelines have been developed as reflective capacity-building tools for informing further textbook research agendas at different levels and types of learning materials within Vietnam and internationally (Loan et al., 2010). The guidelines suggest an analytical framework using quantitative and qualitative instruments to uncover subtle and blatant expressions of gender disparities and biases. The analytical framework, with its different components, will define and limit the scope of the study.

An English language textbook used at the secondary stage of education (class x) in schools in Bihar has been chosen for the study. The textbook *Panorama Part II- An Anthology of English Prose and Poetry for ClassX* (SCERT, Bihar, 2015), a core English course textbook for the secondary education stage in Bihar, is the selected sample. The textbook has been developed under the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) Bihar and the Bihar State Examination Board (BSEB). The SCERT developed the Bihar Curriculum Framework (B.C.F.)- 2008 and the new syllabus for English and other instructional materials for different school stages in consonance with the spirit of the National Curriculum Framework (N.C.F.)-2005. The book, which came out in 2010-2011, has been approved by the Director (Secondary Education), Education Department, Government of Bihar. The book under study is a reprint of 2014-2015.

Focus on language textbooks is an outcome of the potency of the subject to address social exclusion, as the sections on prose and poetry included in the textbook cover a wide gamut of human agency, actions and emotions. According to Kabira & Masinjila (1997), writers of textbooks, in order to facilitate learning, bring alive their texts by indirectly narrating a story about how people relate and organise themselves to survive. This practice of humanising subjects leads to the depiction of gender relations in a particular way, which learners easily recognise and identify. Text analysis of the language textbook

using the gender lens will help to understand the gender dynamics and the extent of gendering in the textbooks.

Analysis

The analytical framework used for conducting the textbook analysis consists of four elements: a) hypothesis, b) concepts, c) analytical criteria, and d) indicators that address the various forms of textbook gender biases. The underpinning hypothesis is that the secondary school textbooks prepared under the vision of the Bihar Curriculum Framework (B.C.F.)-2008 developed by the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT), Bihar, may not be inclusive from the point of view of gender. Gender bias, the primary concept used in the framework, is "flaws in judgement caused by different factors, including people's tendency to draw premature conclusions based on insufficient or irrelevant data, opinions and beliefs" (Loan et al., 2010, p.11). Prejudices are the distorted and unfair characterisation of a person, situation, or idea, and stereotypes refer to the distorted and unfair application of group characterisation to individuals. These are widespread forms of such biases. There are six analytical categories of gender biases as identified in a model proposed by Blumberg (2007), which include i) invisibility, ii) stereotyping, iii) imbalance and selectivity, iv) unreality, v) fragmentation and isolation, and vi) cosmetic biases. Two categories of gender biases, which are i) invisibility, implying complete or relative exclusion of a group, and ii) stereotyping, which means the unfair assignment of characteristics to a group of people at the cost of individual attributes and differences, have been used in the current study. The last component of the framework, the indicators, structure the research by considering different aspects of the textbook under examination. According to Loan, D.T.B. et al. (2010), textbook analysis aimed at identifying gender biases should consider the following components of textbooks: i) textbook authors, ii) textbook content and titles, iii) illustrations and graphic design, iv) assessment situations, v) suggestions for students' activities. The text analysis will be carried out by developing matrixes to help identify and register the presence of different biases in association with the following components of the textbook: 1) textbook authors, 2) textbook content and titles, and 3) illustrations and graphic design.

Data collection

The textbook *Panorama Part II- An Anthology of English Prose and Poetry for Class X* (SCERT, Bihar, 2015) caters to most English language learners at Bihar's secondary school education level. The textbook has three sections: *Prose, Poetry and Read, Think and Enjoy*, with eighteen chapters. The chapters will be examined through the lens of feminist empiricist epistemology using two analytical categories of gender biases: i) invisibility and ii) stereotyping. Analytical matrixes developed will aid in collecting and collating data from the sample textbook. The matrixes associating the two types of gender biases expected in the textbook with the different textbook elements are listed below:

Table 1: *Matrix for Gender-Bias in the Form of Invisibility in Three Components of English Language Textbook (Class X)*

What bias	Textbook Author	Contents and Titles	Illustrations & graphic design
Invisibility	Fourteen male author and three female author	Out of eighteen chapters only two titles are women-centric. Prose : Little Girls Wiser Than Man Poetry: Martha The text has a maximum usage of nouns, pronouns in the generic masculine of he, his, man, maharajas, king and names of boys/men.	Image in Chapter 2: Me and The Ecology Bit, depicts men and women actively engaged in a protest.

Table 2: *Matrix for Gender-Bias in the Form of Stereotyping in Three Components of English Language Textbook (Class X)*

What bias	Textbook Author	Contents and Titles	Illustrations & graphic design
Stereotyping	Fourteen male author and three female author	Chapter 8: Little Girls wiser Than Man, implying men are mostly wise. The text is replete with male protagonists and references to popular male personalities, ex. Gandhiji, Martin Luther King, Dr. Zakir Hussain, Perez de Cuellar.	Image in Chapter 2: Me and The Ecology Bit, depicts men and women actively engaged in a protest.

Findings and Discussion

Information gathered from the textbook regarding content and change shall corroborate the tables given above. According to Blumberg (2008), gender bias in content is found in the form of "(a) under-representation of females, (b) use of male words to mean all humanity, (c) traditional gender stereotypes about the activities of males and females in the occupational sphere and the domestic sphere, (d) traditional stereotypes about the traits and activities of males and females, and so on" (p.33). Concerning change, Blumberg (2008) asserts that in a world marked by globalisation and exponential rates of technological innovations, changes are happening worldwide in the form of (i) distribution of occupations by gender, (ii) women's rise in income and resulting empowerment (iii) organisation and activism (iv) community involvement, are largely absent from gender-biased learning materials. An examination of the textbook along

these two dimensions of (1) content and (2) change will be undertaken to reveal gender bias in the form of a) invisibility and b) stereotyping.

1) Content:

a) Invisibility

The chapters in the textbook have a substantial usage of the masculine norm of *he, him, his, boys, modern man, father, son, Mr., hero, policeman, postman, Chairman, Maharajas, mankind, kings, forefathers, happy men, and gentlemen*. Proper nouns used in the chapters are essentially names of boys/men, with very few female names used. The names frequently used in the textbook are *Tom, John, Rajan, Mohit, Sanjay, Mukul, Vinayak, Amar, Arif, Mr Williams, Mr Johnson, Jim, Ravi, Raju, Mohan, Sonu, Robin, Kamal, Mr Jha, Mr Sinha, Mr Behrman, Premchand Singh, Laxmi Narain*, vis-a-vis few names of females ex., *Rekha, Pooja, Rani, Mona Mrs, Greene, Malasha, Akoulya, Martha, Sue, Johny*.

b) Stereotyping

In the *Prose* section, in the first chapter titled *The Pace for Living*, the author, while portraying the contradictions of contemporary society, captures the "agony of *modern man*" (p.3). He mentions "how the fast movement of *men*, things and objects hurts the normal rhythm and exerts undue pressure on *men*, women and children" (p.3). The chief character in the story is a male, an elderly corn merchant. In the second chapter, titled *Gillu*, depicting the bond between humans and animals, *Gillu*, the squirrel, is addressed by the narrator as *he*. The exercises at the end of the chapter have two gender-biased questions, one asking the students to write a paragraph on the "relation between *men* and birds" (p.33) and the other to write a letter to the editor of a newspaper, drawing *his* attention to the gradual extinction of certain birds in the locality.

Similarly, in the third chapter, *What is Wrong with Indian Films*, the exercise section asks, "Write a letter to the Director of Doordarshan requesting *him* to allow You to participate in the weekly T.V. programme" (p.43). Another sentence in the chapter assumes stereotypically that all filmmakers are male. The author writes, "*He* has only to keep *his* eyes open, and *his* ears. Let *him* do so" (p. 41). The fourth chapter, *Acceptance Speech*, describes Aung Suu Kyi, the pro-democracy Burmese leader's acceptance speech on receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991. The leader's *son*, Alexander Aris, delivered

the speech in Oslo. The exercise section again poses a stereotypical question, wherein *Vinay*, the secretary of the cultural society of the school, has been asked to write a letter to the Mukhiya of the Panchayat or the Chairman of the Zila Parishad, inviting *him* to attend an award giving function in the school. The fifth chapter, *The Unity of Indian Culture*, uses the word *motherland*, referring to the stereotypical nurturant feminine trait. The last chapter, titled *Little Girls Wiser Than Men*, is an exception, where two little girls named *Malasha* and *Akoulya* are the protagonists, and they teach a group of fighting men to be more tolerant and humane.

In the *Poetry* section, the first chapter, *God Made the Country*, begins with the line "God made the country, and *man*-made the town" (p.90). In the second chapter, *Ode on Solitude*, the poet draws a beautiful picture of a *happy man*. The first stanza says, "Happy the *man* whose wish and care, a few paternal acres bound, content to breathe *his* native air, in *his* ground" (p.97). The exercise section, however, has an exception, where both genders are addressed in a question asking the students to "Write a letter to your younger *brother/sister* living in Patna about the effects of noise pollution due to congested traffic" (p.99). The third chapter, *Polythene Bag*, has four stereotypical sentences in the exercise section, "*She* is the moon on the earth, *He* is a lion in the fight, *He* is the star of the family, *she* is a bookworm" (p.107). The next chapter, titled *Thinner Than Crescent*, which describes Radha's love for Lord Krishna, is, however, an exception wherein the poet is primarily concerned with the intense passion of Radha's love, unlike Jayadeva's poems, which celebrates Krishna's love and pays comparatively little attention to Radha, the woman. The exercise section again has two sentences that differ from the stereotypical gender images. Each boy in this class has a pencil box" and "Each girl in this school has a bicycle" (p.113). In the chapter *The Empty Heart*, the poet highlights a tremendous human weakness: *man's* insatiable greed, which ultimately destroys *him*. The poem begins with the lines, "The *man* was rich, but not content. Morning, noon and night *he* went" (p.116). The next chapter, *The Sleeping Porter*, again carries a stereotypical image of the trials and tribulations of a porter. A twenty-five-kilo load on *his* back, spine double bent yet facing an uphill task, *he* is challenging the mountain" (p.129). The last chapter, *Martha*, revolves around a woman called Martha, who narrates stories dreamily but heavily emphasises Martha's physical features and beauty. Hers were those clear grey eyes; She would sit with her two *slim hands*, clasped around her bended *knees*,, Her *voice* and narrow *chin*, Her grave small *lovely head*". p.134). It further says, "Her *beauty*

far away would fade, as her voice ran on (p. 135). The exercise section asks the students: "Describe Martha's physical *features*" (p. 136).

In the *Read, Think and Enjoy* section, the first chapter, *Spare the Rod*, describes the educational experiments at 'Netarhat' school. The chapter references male personalities, e.g., Dr Zakir Hussain and Gandhiji, and male figures, e.g., Shri Dhar, Shri D.P. Singh, and Shri B.D. Pandey, Mr. Napier, reflects a total exclusion of female figures. The second chapter, *The Last Leaf*, tells the story of two female characters, Sue and Johnsy. The character who performs the heroic act and saves the life of Johnsy is a male figure, old Mr. Behrman.

2) Changes:

The Preface to the book clearly states that though the textbook has pieces from foreign writers, an attempt is made to select only those pieces that closely resemble the Indian context. It further contends that those articles have been chosen which can be used to link up with the issues we are grappling with in our contemporary society. However, none of the three sections, *Prose*, *Poetry* and *Read, Think and Enjoy*, have any chapter that deals specifically with women's issues, a contemporary issue or revolves around the changing gender dynamics in present-day society. In the *Prose* section, the chapter *Pace for Living* describes at length the contradictions and the paradoxes of the fast-paced modern society. However, there is no mention of women's changing roles and positions. The chapter *Me and The Ecology Bit* highlights the issue of preserving the environment and the difficulties involved in ecological preservation. However, it again does not discuss women's increasing participation in environmental issues and movements in recent decades. The chapter has a gender stereotypical line that says, "Women use too many electric things" (p. 19). In the *Poetry* section, there is no single poem by a female author, nor does any of the poems reflect women's societal struggles. The *Read, Think and Enjoy* section describes the 'Netarhat experiment' in education, an *all-boys* school in Jharkhand, India.

The findings from the textbook indicate that the content is gender-biased. The different indicators of the analytical framework are 1) textbook authors, 2) content and titles, and 3) Illustrations that show a predominance of the masculine gender. Going by the empiricist tradition, an objective examination of the two analytical categories of i) invisibility and ii) stereotyping point towards a) higher representation of males *vis-a-vis*

females, ii) substantial use of male words to mean all humanity, c) reinforcement of traditional gender stereotypes about the traits and activities of males and females in the occupational and domestic spheres. Although the title of the chapters engages with a wide range of contemporary issues, ex., modernity, ecology, filmmaking, international peace, and the resilience of Indian culture, no single title addresses gender inequality in society. The findings indicate that the renewed textbook does not entirely reflect the spirit of the curriculum frameworks about incorporating concerns of marginalised social groups and criticality. Contextualising school curricula in the social reality of social exclusion will require the integration of gender issues in the content of the textbooks.

Conclusion

Schools are essential for the constitution of an individual's identity (Bhatia, 2021, p.184) any important questions that have framed the discourse on 'school knowledge' (Young, 1971; Apple, 2000) continue to hold ground even today (Sharma, 2015), one of them is "how to bridge the social gaps and strive for the ideals of social justice, equality, fraternity, liberty and democracy, through school curriculum?" (Sharma, 2015, p. 67). The relationship between school curriculum and exclusion has been a prominent concern in education research, policy, and practice. Krishna Kumar, the educationist, thinks that there is a distinction between education as an idea and education as a system, where the idea of education to be inclusive and fully universalised has achieved universality, but whether the expansion of this knowledge will create shared understandings or become a mechanism for regimenting the mind with specific standard parameters, is unknown (n.d.).

Textbooks are still the most viable and effective means of carrying knowledge in schools. They are usually the most visible component of a curriculum, representing the 'tangible' curriculum closest to the student's hearts and minds (Loan, D.T.B. et al., 2010). Gender is embedded in the content of textbooks and pedagogic practices. Gender biases in textbooks have detrimental effects on learners and also severe pedagogical implications. To tackle gender biases in the 'tangible' and 'hidden' curriculum, gender mainstreaming at different levels of the education system is critically essential for embedding a concern with gender in educational institutions (Unterhalter et al., 2014, as cited in Silova,2016). Although policies and practices cannot be changed overnight, evidence suggests that gradually introducing gender mainstreaming into the education system can transform

national cultures, including discourses, policies and practices (Silova,2016). It involves, among many other things, several rigorous review exercises to make the textbooks suited to address 'exclusion' critically. Lessons can be learned from a few states in India, which have taken concrete steps towards textbook revision to remove gender stereotypes. For ex., the grade two textbooks brought out by the Maharashtra State Bureau of Textbook Production and Curriculum carry images that show men and women sharing household chores, a female doctor and a male chef, and students have been asked to note these images and discuss them (Women Under-Represented, 2020).

This research study analysing textbooks developed by the SCERT, Bihar, through the feminist lens, however, has a limitation, as it approaches gender as a fixed 'stand-alone' category and does not look at the intersections of gender with caste, religion, class, ethnicity, disability. The simplistic 'parity framework' only gives an idea of the preponderance of gender- biases and exclusion in the form of invisibility and stereotypes in the selected components of the textbook. However, the idea has been to examine the 'gendered knowledge' in the textbook and highlight divergences between the Bihar Curriculum Framework (B.C.F.)2008, which draws its vision of 'inclusion' from the National Curriculum Framework (N.C.F. 2005) and the revised textbooks. The asymmetrical power relationship reflected in the textbook's content suggests that continued efforts should be made towards monitoring and evaluating the revised textbooks, including investigating the perception of education stakeholders, gender specialists and users like teachers, learners, and parents in Bihar. Only such a holistic approach can meaningfully contribute to the ongoing debates on 'quality learning' and 'inclusive education' in India's current educational (curricular) discourses.

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