

STORIES IN A SCHOOLBAG

A STUDY OF
**CHILDREN'S LITERATURE
IN LANGUAGE TEXTBOOKS**

Deepti Priya Mehrotra • Nisha Ramachandran

Sampurna Trust

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- networking and workshops in colleges, schools and diverse NGOs
- research on girls' education in Rajasthan, U.P., Bihar and Delhi
- research and peer education on youth and sexuality issues
- publications: on single mothers; the Indian women's movement; and a book of children's stories.

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This study, undertaken within the aegis of Sampurna Trust, was initiated as one step leading, over time, to the creation of a broad-based Centre for Children's Literature. CCL is being developed largely under the aegis of Eklavya, Bhopal.

Work on this monograph began in July 2009 and it was ready for printing by end-December. Since it has been written within a brief six-month period, it is, inevitably, only a small contribution. We have deliberately left the analyses of textbooks and text items brief and open-ended, rather than complete and closed. The monograph will prove successful if it is used by many other persons, in varied educational contexts, bringing in the benefit of experience and insights, enriching the overall analyses.

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Needless to say, shortcomings in the monograph are entirely our responsibility.

Introduction

This research comes in the wake of remarkable efforts by a number of non-governmental organizations who have contributed to experiments in schooling and production of teaching-learning material, including textbooks, viz Digantar-Rajasthan, Eklavya-Madhya Pradesh, Rishi Valley School-Andhra Pradesh, as well as the national-level effort at educational renewal under NCF-2005 (National Curriculum Framework-2005), undertaken by the NCERT.

Several scholars have pointed out the overwhelming importance and impact of textbooks within Indian schooling culture(s), and critiqued different sets of textbooks used at national and state levels. Some scholars have commented especially on Hindi language textbooks. We have tried to incorporate the critiques and major concerns when devising parameters and developing an analytic framework for the study of children's literature in language textbooks. We have also drawn upon insights from research studies on children's literature.

Textbook production is a complicated business, with many stakeholders. On one side are the producers, writers, illustrators and editors while on the other side are children, students, teachers, teacher trainees and parents. It is critically important to examine textbooks, since these are systematically produced in large numbers, have a wide outreach and undoubtedly influence children enormously. The literary quality, socio-political perspectives and pedagogic approach of textbooks helps reinforce certain methods of teaching-learning and attitudes towards reading, society and life itself.

This monograph is a fledgling effort. We are groping to understand many issues involved, and encompass a wide range of concerns. It is intended to be used, among a range of stakeholders: perhaps it will contribute to making a difference within mainstream educational discourse, and processes of textbook production.

This first chapter will provide an **overview** of key issues and insights, based on a **review of literature**. We are interested in the dimension of children's literature, including literary styles, genres, language and the elements of a story, a poem and so on; we are also concerned with pedagogical, ethical, social and political implications. In addition, visual aesthetics is a very significant—and generally neglected—concern. We go on to explore issues peculiar to *Hindi* language textbooks. Our literature review is representative, rather than comprehensive: we have dipped into the rich literature in each of these distinct areas, and drawn upon some of the treasures available.

Chapter 2 presents the **framework of analysis** we have devised, based on our understanding of the issues, with parameters suggested or confirmed by the literature review. This framework is fairly flexible and open-ended, and can be adapted for use in other language contexts as well--be it Telugu, Bengali, Manipuri, English or any other. The framework can also be adapted for analyzing different grades of textbooks.

Chapters 3 and 4 present **analyses of Hindi language textbooks, and of particular text items**, developed using the framework of analysis. A number of findings emerge. Yet on the whole, the effort presented here is illustrative rather than exhaustive. It suggests the lines on which further analyses may be undertaken, by any interested persons or organizations.

Chapter 5 presents **analysis of a particular issue** in some depth. This chapter illustrates some of the many possible subject areas and goals which the framework of analysis can help illumine. It is based on a paper presented as part of a think-tank meeting strategizing to intervene in the process of textbook production in Rajasthan (in December 2009, Jaipur).

The sixth chapter presents some **conclusions and ways forward**. We hope that this monograph will contribute to the agenda(s), collective thinking and action by diverse educational thinkers and practitioners.

Overview of Key Issues Based on a Review of Literature

- A. Children's Literature in Language Textbooks
- B. Children's Literature in Hindi Language Textbooks

Textbooks within School Culture

“The present day classroom practices are, in almost all schools of the country, totally dominated by the textbooks,” notes the NCF Position Paper on Curriculum, Syllabus and Textbooks¹. Over-emphasis on textbooks continues despite the oft-expressed need for diversity in teaching-learning materials and methods. The multitude of forms of life that children experience, at home and elsewhere, is seldom accorded space in the classroom².

Often, all that is taught in class is from the textbook. Portions are read and memorized. Questions have to be answered, reproducing words, lines and passages from the text.

For many Indian children, textbooks may be virtually the only printed matter available in their environment. Language textbooks may provide their only access to written literature. Thus textbooks are highly influential, and their quality is a matter of the greatest concern.

A. CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN LANGUAGE TEXTBOOKS

Exploring Literary Quality

Literature in textbooks should introduce children to a wide variety of situations, characters and perspectives. The matter should be coextensive with the world in which students live.³ It should be engaging, varied and playful.

Bhaadu⁴ discusses the following questions or criteria for text selection: (i) Is it a creative linguistic form? (ii) What is its central idea? (iii) The quality of its aesthetics. (iv) Is it representative of a wide variety of persons and perspectives?

Priyadarshini introduces some additional criteria: textbooks should be enjoyable, expose children to a wider variety of genres, and take into account children's cognitive levels.⁵

When analyzing stories, we need to examine various elements such as theme, plot, setting, characterization, style and points of view.⁶ In evaluating poems, we need to look at content, form, rhythm, language, imagery and literary devices used. What is more, "it is creativity of spirit, freshness of vision and intensity of feeling that lie at the heart of poetry..."⁷

Moralistic and didactic elements should not predominate in stories, poems or other text items. By making poems a source of didactic preaching, children's ability to appreciate poetry may get destroyed⁸. Stories must not patronize children in any way, whether in terms of language, content, moral or sentiment.⁹

Literature can provide a pleasurable path to familiarity with diverse meanings and language patterns¹⁰. It can help children develop a love for language and ability to use it creatively and skillfully. Language textbooks can introduce children to the existence of plural cultures and diverse languages. Earlier, bilingual and even trilingual textbooks were prepared and used in various parts of India, yet though bilinguality/ multi-linguality continues to be part of the lived experience of many children, today it is censored in the classroom.¹¹

Readers of textbooks should ultimately become lovers of reading: textbooks acting as gateways to the world of literature.¹² However, treasures of children's literature often remain entirely undiscovered by language teachers, and consequently also by learners¹³.

Nirantar's study of West Bengal textbooks notes that the selection and framing of texts is of utmost importance. The meaning of the text lies in the contexts like the historical period of writing, the politics of author, the tone of speaking--whether sardonic, humorous, solemn or sentimental, the kind of language used--formal, informal, dialect or standard speech, genre – whether it is fiction, fable, biography or travelogue. The ideology of the textbook's aesthetics, the tone and humor of its pieces and the pedagogical style of transacting texts, are crucial areas for nuanced enquiry.¹⁴

Educational Aims and Age-Appropriateness

Textbooks try to fulfill varied educational aims. Some of these are implied by Arbutnot and Scott, when they describe the kinds of literature children need:

“Children need books to widen their horizons, deepen their understandings and give them broader social insights. They also need books that minister to their merriment and increase their appreciation of beauty. They need heroism, fantasy and down to earth realism. They need information about themselves and their fast changing world. Adults may think in terms of what the child will learn, how the book may improve an attitude, correct a misconception or ease a fear.”¹⁵

Textbooks usually aim to encompass curricular goals--the subject-matter meant to be transacted during a particular year. Pedagogic and epistemological assumptions are significant: for instance NCF-2005 recommends a conception of knowledge that allows children “to respect the body of knowledge”, yet allow “flexibility to look for alternative and better-suited principles”. Through this, ideally “the process of acquisition of knowledge becomes the process of active creation by the learner.”¹⁶

Literature in language textbooks can help reflect developmental values, inherent in the process of growing up.¹⁷ Ethical reasoning is an important aspect of human development, and literature can educate by the working through of dilemmas. As Sebesta and Iverson note, literature presents “a means by which children can work through situations of conflict without risk, trying out alternative stances to problems as they step into the lives and thoughts of different characters [and] opportunities to relate to several points of view.”¹⁸

According to Piaget’s cognitive development theory, readers of the age 7 to 11 are in the concrete operational stage, where they shift from an egocentric pattern of thought and can more easily identify with different points of view. As they begin to develop a sense of time, they understand flashbacks and shifts in time periods, hence also develop interest in biographies.¹⁹ Historical fiction becomes more meaningful at this period, and stories about other lands become appealing.²⁰ However, clear and concrete plots work best, since children’s concentration span and powers of abstract reasoning are still limited.²¹ Schlager’s study of literature choices in middle childhood finds that the most popular books are those whose main characters reflect the emotional and psychological aspects of the young reader.²²

A textbook should use varied techniques to engage the pupil's feelings, stimulate intellect and imagination, encourage creativity, and enable development of an open attitude. It should convey appropriate information and enable the student to apply knowledge and check what is being taught. Both teacher and pupil should be encouraged to use the textbook in a flexible manner, and its matter should be such as to interest both children and adults.²³

Socio-Political Awareness

Texts and visuals should represent reality, and the present socio-economic fabric, in a way interesting and comprehensible to children.²⁴ Subaltern or marginalized groups, cultures and lifestyles should receive adequate representation. Stories and visuals should not promote caste, class, gender, communal or other prejudices, and in fact should build up a feeling or commitment towards equality within a democratic framework.

The CBE subcommittee on textbooks notes that textbooks should be in consonance with constitutional principles. They should not promote any values, socio-cultural or historical perceptions contrary to national policy, the notion of composite culture or the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-lingual basis of Indian nationhood.²⁵

A positive feeling for peace and peaceful conflict resolution should be developed, and aggressive, war-like mentality, revenge and violence discouraged. The textbooks should promote secular values.²⁶

Nirantar's study notes that "...literature teaching is a vexed field since it is primarily interpretative, subjective, easily politicized."²⁷

Competing ideologies, with their particular prejudices and biases, are represented in different sets of textbooks. Yet, if appropriately designed, textbooks can actually help nurture democratic values. Innovative textbooks would in the long run impact on schools and bring about change.²⁸

Illustrations and Design

Textbooks should have a bright and attractive appearance.²⁹ Cheap paper, shoddy production, language errors and unattractive illustrations can put off children.³⁰

The finest illustrators respect their child audience and realize that condescension—usually in the form of 'cuteness' and rounded, faceless, cuddly figures that all look alike—is insulting to children. The child audience deserves, instead, imaginative art that is both highly individualistic and skillfully executed. The artist's work includes the effective use of line,

colour, space, distance, depth, texture, shape, perspective, composition and so on. Distinct artistic styles can be employed to convey mood, context and so on. A variety of forms such as photography, folk art and cartoons can also be used.³¹

Illustrations in textbooks have educational significance. They should help to develop aesthetic sense, and promote understanding of the subject matter.³² Illustrations can simply freeze a moment, show a character, enhance a mood, or help children to decode words by providing additional information and context. The important thing about illustrations is that they should have vitality, imagination and freshness.³³

Illustrations have a strong influence on young children, who are drawn towards pictures more than text. A family shown as a typical middle class family, with invariably a boy and a girl, can create an image in the minds of the children that such families are the ideals. In fact textbooks illustrations should never inculcate prejudices in the minds of children towards particular sections of society.

Illustrations are seldom accorded due importance in Indian textbooks, as was reflected in the paucity of references and readings on this area. The educational value of artwork is hardly appreciated. Illustrations often lack originality, style and aesthetic sense. This detracts considerably from the value of textbooks.³⁴ Many illustrations are copied or clip art, with little relationship to the milieu of Indian children and their experiential realities.³⁵

Analysing Exercises

Texts, illustrations and exercises make composite chapters. In fact, exercises most directly reflect underlying educational aims.³⁶ As such, exercises should not be based merely on memory/ recall, but also on comprehension, creativity, imagination, critical thinking and expression.

Texts and exercises should focus on the pupil as an active rather than passive learner, whereby the expression of opinions and the use of discussion techniques are seen as important. Exercises should provide children opportunities to express thoughts, experiences, imagination and creativity.³⁷

B. CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN HINDI LANGUAGE TEXTBOOKS

Hindi textbooks produced by NCERT and State educational Boards have been at the centre of controversy. Several scholars have pointed out that the NCERT-2001 textbooks violated national educational policy by promoting values contradictory to constitutional norms, with negative presentation of deprived caste, ethnic, gender and religious groups.³⁸ They were moralistic and puritanical. NCERT-2005 textbooks are framed, in contrast, within a progressive educational, social and political understanding, and provide an opportunity for children to express their thoughts, feelings and ideas.³⁹ Perhaps for the first time since 1947, pedagogical perspectives have been accorded importance while making textbooks. However, Hindi language textbooks were subjected to intense criticism in Parliament, with objections to inclusion of words like 'chhokri' (for girl), and 'Chamar' (in a story by Premchand); as well as a story by Pandey Bechan Sharma 'Ugra' which makes fun of Brahmans: these had to be removed.⁴⁰ Rai finds the matter of these textbooks is engaging, varied and playful. He notes that the wall between the world and the school is finally broken and the child, the Hindi speaker, can bring in her rich experience of the world into the classroom.⁴¹ According to Vishvambhar, NCF-2005 has taken a giant step forward by viewing the child as an active constructor of knowledge.⁴² Bhaadu writes that these textbooks present harsh realities.

CABE analysis of language and social science textbooks from 11 states indicates that they are frequently communal, mono-cultural, promote middle-class norms, and reinforce inequalities by adopting the perspectives of powerful and privileged classes and groups. Facts are neglected, shared cultures and local histories ignored, and enmities, revenge and violence promoted.⁴³

Hindi-language textbooks of states like Rajasthan and U.P. project an India that is upper-class, upper caste, Hindu, masculine and militarized.⁴⁴ They promote superstition, blind faith and glorification of an imagined past. They are dry and inappropriate for children's cognitive levels, and fail to help children observe, analyse and question present realities, including their own experiences. Their language is stylized, pedantic and difficult to understand.⁴⁵

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FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS

This framework for textbook analysis consists of four main sections:

I. Literary Quality

II. Visual Aesthetics

III. Pedagogic Approach

IV. Socio-Political Concerns and Perspectives

Guided by these four sections, the framework can be used to analyse particular literary items or lessons in school textbooks; and the textbooks in entirety.

Comprehensive analysis of textbooks ought to examine not only text, which has so far been the focus of most textbook analysis in India, but also artwork and exercises. The broad framework presented here attempts to evaluate text, artwork, as well as exercises - all the component elements of the textbook.

Identifying data: Before beginning the analysis proper, some identifying information about the textbook should be presented: its name, price, number of pages, year of publication, print order, writer(s), illustrator(s) and producer.

I. LITERARY QUALITY

Literary quality of the textbook, and of particular text items, is analysed using the following parameters:

I. **Variety:** (a) of genres: stories, poems, folklore, drama, narratives, mythology,

essays, letter, biography, autobiography, travelogue or informative text. (b) Types of stories: adventure story, animal story, historical fiction, fable, satire, fantasy, humorous story, science fiction, realistic story or social realism. (c) Types of poems: performance poem, free verse, nonsense verse, couplet, sonnet, ballad, limerick, doha or any other.

2. **A. Elements of a Poem:** (i) Theme (ii) Setting (iii) Rhythm (iv) Imagery (v) Rhyme, metaphor, alliteration and other poetic devices (vi) Creativity of spirit, freshness of vision, intensity of feeling

B. Elements of A Story: (i) Theme, (ii) Plot, (iii) Setting, (iv) Characterisation, (v) Style, (vi) Point(s) of view, (vii) Creativity and vision

3. **Language:** (a) Spoken or literary (for example spoken Hindi, Sanskrit-ised/scholarly Hindi, Urdu or any other). (b) Is it easy to follow? Is it slanted towards any particular religious group/class/caste/gender? (c) Is the language dry or interesting? Will it develop children's playfulness and creativity with language? (d) Is the language patronizing or will children be comfortable with it? (e) Will the text help develop interest in language as such? (f) Will the text help develop reading skills (for example by taking children from smaller to longer stories; or from picture-stories to fully written stories)? (g) Do exercises help develop linguistic abilities – speaking, listening, interviewing and writing?

4. **Authorship:** (a) Is authorship assigned? Is there any information about the author, or the work and its context? (b) Is the writing by contemporary authors or older authors? Are the selections from any particular time period(s)? (c) Are there distinct literary styles in different text items, or is there a standardized writing style? (d) If there are translated texts, how is the quality of translation?

II. VISUAL AESTHETICS

5. **Textbook layout:** (a) Size (appropriate for children or not), (b) Cover (attractive or not, any messages), (c) Print quality and typeface (including size of font), (d) Paper quality and binding, (e) Color (balance, tone, appeal), (f) Composition and space (balanced, too little or too many illustrations, cluttered etc)

6. **Variety in Artwork:** illustrations, cartoons, photographs, collage, child art etc. Is the artwork attractive, appealing, clear, accurate, or not? Are the illustrations imaginative or unimaginative? Do they have vitality and freshness?

7. Are **artists** named and acknowledged? In what way? Is the artwork original, or is it clip art, copied art & so on? Are the illustrations characterized by individual styles or voice of the illustrator(s)?
8. Are illustrations drawn from life (if supposed to be realistic) or copied in a formalistic manner? Is there a sense of proportion? Do they flatten out humanity, showing homogenized expressions? Are there stretched-&-pulled pictures, or repeated use of an illustration, indicating use of artwork just to fill blank spaces?
9. Does the artwork help in understanding of the subject matter, or not? Are the illustrations in consonance with the stories, in terms of timing, events, characters, and so on? Is the representation misleading or inaccurate?
10. Does the artwork provide additional information or interpretation, supplementing the text –in terms of character, setting, context etc?
11. Does the artwork encourage love and appreciation for art, enhance children’s creativity, and encourage them to create art?

III. PEDAGOGIC APPROACH

For this section, we will analyse text, as well as exercises.

Text

12. Is the subject matter appropriate for the cognitive and psychological level of children of the particular age group?
13. Is the quantum of reading and study material in the textbook sufficient, insufficient, or too much?
14. Does the text relate with children’s experiential world(s)? Are diverse socio-cultural milieus represented, helping to widen horizons and enrich experiential worlds?
15. Does the text support children’s moral development, for example by presenting and resolving dilemmas in certain ways? Is the text didactic in terms of content, morality or sentiment?
16. Does the text expose children to various emotions and ways of coping and expressing? Does the text promote problem solving and critical thinking skills?

17. Is the text likely to be interesting and enjoyable to children? Does the text nurture children's creativity and imagination?
18. Are there accompanying notes for teachers which are likely to encourage appropriate pedagogic methods?
19. Does the text promote construction of knowledge by the child? Is the child seen as a passive or active learner? Is there a typical reader to whom the text is addressed?
20. What kind of adult-child relations are reflected in the text--authoritarian, democratic or any other? What kind of relationship does the text promote between humans and nature, including animals-- cooperative, competitive or one of domination?
21. Is the text likely to have positive or adverse psychological effect on (some) children?

Exercises

22. Variety in exercises: questions, puzzles, riddles, crosswords, fill-in-the-blank, drawing, complete a story, story-writing and others
23. Which of the following faculties are encouraged, in children, through the exercises?:
 - Memory (recall)
 - Comprehension/ understanding
 - Application
 - Analysis and critical thinking
 - Creativity and self-expression
24. Do exercises expose children to ways of constructing knowledge? Do the exercises encourage children to observe and explore their own experiences, including physical and social environments?
25. Do exercises try to enforce only one interpretation of the text, or encourage and facilitate multiple interpretations?
26. Are the exercises easy for children to understand? Are the instructions clear? Are there separate notes, instructions or guidelines for teachers to make appropriate use of the exercises?

27. Are the exercises enjoyable and interesting? Are they likely to nurture children's imagination and self-expression?

IV. SOCIO-POLITICAL CONCERNS AND PERSPECTIVES

To understand socio-political concerns and perspectives imparted by the textbook, we will use certain parameters for text and illustrations. Several of these parameters have qualitative as well as quantitative dimensions. We will also discuss some parameters for analyzing socio-political concerns addressed in exercises.

Text and Illustrations

Using the questions below, examine representation of the following categories. Some questions relate to one category other will link issues across categories, for instance gender and class, gender and disability, class and caste: (i) Gender; (ii) Class; (iii) Caste and dalit issues; (iv) Tribal/ Adivasi issues; (v) Disability issues; (v) Religion and different religious communities; (vi) Different regions and cultures; (vii) Nationalism

28. Does the text (and visuals) reflect reality, does it distort reality, or does it indicate possible ways in which reality could change? Are prejudices, stereotypes and discrimination (roles, attitudes, dress, passive/active etc) accepted, reinforced, questioned or challenged? Does it have the potential to stimulate to thinking regarding self, society, and social transformation? Is the representation mere tokenism, or does it stimulate understanding of social systems and structures? Are women, dalits, working class, adivasis, people with disabilities represented as victims/ dependents, or as thinking agents? (assess text and visuals through qualitative and quantitative indicators.)
29. For gender, make sure sexuality issues, body image, transgender communities are included in the analysis.
30. When examining class issues, look for the analysis of poverty—is it related to the system or to factors like individual incompetence, laziness?
31. For religion, look for evidence of secularism, versus communalism.
32. When examining perspectives on nationalism, look for associations—love for country, pride, jingoism, a glorious past, identification with a religion, a common enemy etc?
33. Are different socio-political movements represented--women's movements, dalit

movements, working class movements, adivasi movements, and so on? Is there a tendency to highlight or espouse particular ideological perspectives?

- 34.** Does the text tend to promote values of equality, justice and democracy, consonant with the Indian constitution, or the opposite? Does it encourage the child (and teacher) to be an active thinker and agent of social transformation?
- 35.** Are violence, war and/or militarism propagated as positive? What and how are social/ political conflicts presented? Are ways of resolving conflicts and building peace encouraged, or the opposite?
- 36.** Does the text represent monarchy, feudalism, capitalism etc without any explanation or historical framing? Would it tend to inform children of historical facts, or confuse them about different state systems and hierarchies?

Exercises

- 37.** Do the exercises explore issues related to gender, class, caste, adivasis, communalism, disability, nationalism and so on, in a way that encourages acceptance of stereotypes, discrimination and inequalities, or does it encourage questioning? Do they promote respect for the deprived people, and their independent agency?
- 38.** Do the exercises help and encourage children to contextualize texts, for instance monarchy, feudalism, folklore, mythology and so on? Are they helped to understand the contemporary realities, in relation to the past?
- 39.** Do the exercises encourage children to actively seek knowledge and build an understanding of diverse social realities? Do they promote solidarity and participation in social transformation?

Analysis of Hindi Language Textbooks

A. Selection of Textbooks

We have taken up primary school Hindi language textbooks, for analysis. To keep our focus on literary dimensions, we realized it would be best to take up the later primary years, that is, Classes 3, 4 and 5, rather than the early primary years. This is because literacy is an important component of learning in the early years, necessitating a different line of analysis.

We have taken up diverse sets of textbooks for the present analysis: those brought out by NCERT; textbooks produced by a state Board; and those by a private publisher. All these textbooks are being used at present, within different schools. NCERT textbooks are meant to provide guidelines for textbook production for all states of the country. NCERT and state Board textbooks are used within the government school system, while privately published textbooks, are generally used within a limited domain, that is, in public schools (including convent schools and other recognized privately own schools typically with elite clientele). As we will see, the privately produced textbooks invariably cost more, fitting as they do into the 'upmarket end' of the school system.

The NCERT textbooks we will look at are the latest crop, produced under NCF-2005. These textbooks have a common name, *Rimjhim* (a word with a gentle feel and rhythm, associated with light rain).

For state-level textbooks, we looked at Hindi textbooks from Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, and decided to take up the Rajasthan textbooks, which provide ample scope for critique.

For privately published textbooks, we made several inquiries, and then looked up the *Janta*

Book Store, for an idea of books being used by various public schools. We chose Savio Publications: the textbooks appear bright and attractive, with a common name, that is, *Satrang* (meaning 7-coloured).

We accessed another kind of textbook, brought out by NGOs active in the field of education, viz Eklavya (Madhya Pradesh) and Digantar (Rajasthan). These textbooks have been helpful in opening up our own horizons, and visualizing possibilities. We have not attempted, however, to include them in the present study.

B. Comparative Analysis of Textbooks produced by NCERT, Rajasthan State Board and a Private Publisher (Savio)

We will **focus on Class 4 textbooks**, though we will freely draw in examples from the Class 3 and 5 textbooks as well.

Identifying information:

- *Satrang Hindi Paatthyapustak*, 4, Savio Publications Pvt Ltd, New Delhi. Writer Dr Sukhpal Singh, Illustrator Anil Kumar, Year of publication 2009, Price Rs 65.00, No. of pages 72, Print order not given.
- *Hindi Kaksha 4*, Rajasthan Rajya Paatthyapustak Mandal, Jaipur. Writers Dr Kamla Jain (Coordinator), Smt Mayurani Bhatt, Sri Omprakash Joshi, Illustrator not given, Year of publication 2009, Price Rs 17.00, No. of pages 158, Print order 2,30,000 copies.
- *Rimjhim 4, Chauthi Kaksha ke Liye Paatthyapustak*, NCERT, New Delhi. Writers not given (authors of different lessons are named along with the lessons), Illustrators Joel Gill, Baran Izlal, Srividya Natarajan, Year of publication 2007, Price Rs 30.00, No. of pages, 128, Print order not given. [Names of Textbook Production Team are given: Head Anita Rampal, Chief Advisor Mukul Priyadarshini, eight Members and one Coordinator]

LITERARY QUALITY

Variety, genre, style, authorship: The NCERT textbook has 20 lessons in all, of which 6 have no accompanying exercises, and are meant, according to the `notes to concerned adults' (which can include teachers and parents), "to provide additional reading material

to children, so that they can read with enjoyment, free from the burden of questions"; a side-benefit may be enhancement of linguistic abilities. Of these 20, 11 are stories, 7 poems, 1 play, 1 information based text and 1 folk story. There is sufficient literary variety in the textbook, without burdening the child with any overload.

In Savio textbooks, there are a total of only 14 lessons, of which 8 are stories, 4 poems, and 2 information based texts. There is insufficient literary variety: moreover all the items are written by one author.

Rajasthan state textbook has 31 lessons in all, of which 9 are stories, 9 poems, 3 plays, 2 biographical sketches and 8 information based texts. Although Rajasthan textbooks seem to have maximum variety, in fact the textbook is full of heavy informative texts, which have very little literary quality. The literary content of these textbooks is in fact severely compromised.

Stories in the NCERT books include adventure, fantasy, humour as well as realistic tales. Both Rajasthan state and Savio textbooks, on the other hand, have a large proportion of historical-mythological fiction.

Poetry in the Savio textbooks is monotonous, and only a little more varied in Rajasthan textbooks. Most poems are monotonous, with standard metre and rhyme, language heavy and stodgy. The poems written by the textbook writer/ team of writers display a uniformity of style, and lack imagination or vitality. For Savio, popular contemporary or classical literary pieces have not been the domain for text selection at all. The case is similar for Rajasthan textbooks 3 and 4; only in the Class 5 textbook, has the team of writers been mentioned as having carried out 'compilation': one story (by Premchand) and four poetry lessons (by Damodar Agarwal, Gopal Singh Nepali, and Meerabai and Surdas) give evidence of this.

Apart from these five lessons, individual authorship is not assigned to any lesson in all three Rajasthan textbooks. In fact in Class 3 Rajasthan textbook, well known Kabir *dohas*, and in Class 4 Tulsidas *dohas* are included, without mentioning *authorship*! Savio assigns no authorship apart from the one textbook writer, and no credits or acknowledgements, although there are indications that the writer has borrowed story ideas, plots and characterization from other sources: river Ganga narrates her story in autobiographical style in *Behti Ganga Kehti Ganga*, Savio 4, very similar to *Meri Kahani Meri Jabani* in Rajasthan 5; the lesson on Varadaraj's tenacity as a student, *Abhyas ka Mahattva*, Savio is very similar to *Pathhar par Bane Nishan* in Rajasthan 3.

Authorship is assigned for each story or poem in the NCERT textbook, although no information is provided about the author, period or literary style. Stories and poems in these textbooks have distinct styles, imagery, themes, points of view, humor, dialogue, expression and characterization. Stories invariably have a clear plot, with action and conflicts, development and resolution. They often reflect the thinking, imagination, points of view or experiences of children.

With Savio and Rajasthan textbooks, the point of view reflected is usually didactic, adult-authoritarian, and prescriptive. Most stories and poems are written with a particular didactic intent (Rajasthan textbooks often state the moral of the story, such as 'developing time management skill' or 'developing love for the nation'), with little attention to literary quality. Elements of a good story or a good poem, such as distinct style, imagery, expression, clear plot and development of conflict, are conspicuous by their absence.

The **language** used in Rajasthan textbooks is staid, stiff, formal, closer to Sanskrit, while NCERT books use fluid spoken language, with a sprinkling of Urdu terms. Savio has a mix of these two language styles: it has tried to use easier Hindi, but the effort sounds artificial and unconvincing. The Rajasthan and Savio textbooks are unlikely to inspire an interest in language among children, while the NCERT textbooks stand a good chance of motivating children to take an interest in language, and its creative use.

Savio textbooks make ample use of English language within the Hindi language textbook. In the end-of-lesson exercises, for every lesson, Hindi word-meanings are given in English. These meanings are often wrongly explained, for instance 'moh' as 'deep affection' in the *Hei Dayamay* poem (where *moh* is used in the sense of attachment, not affection). The over-use of English requires some explanation. It is not as if most children coming into public schools are already conversant with English: rather there is a strong parental aspiration that they must learn English. The use of English here is really designed more to teach English, through teaching of Hindi, though it is couched the other way round! In any case, the end result is bound to be children confused about both languages, Hindi as well as English.

NCERT textbooks progress from simpler to more difficult lessons, while no such progression is attempted in the other textbooks. This makes the NCERT textbooks more student-friendly, encouraging an interest in independent reading. The Rajasthan and Savio textbooks do not encourage children to enjoy reading, and will actually serve to put them off from developing any reading habits.

VISUAL AESTHETICS

In the realm of general layout and aesthetics, the Rajasthan textbooks easily score lowest. Production quality, paper and binding are shoddy. Text sometimes gets superimposed by illustrations, becoming difficult to decipher. Black, white and shocking pink are the colours used in the textbook: not a very pleasant combination. The lack of visual aesthetics is partly explained by their low-price factor. However, a democratic regime which promises free schooling and equality of opportunity to all children needs to consider whether low-price has to necessarily translate into *low-cost*, and *low-aesthetic quality*. Otherwise, children who most need their textbooks to be attractive, sturdy and interesting will be the ones who get the most shoddy fare. Many of these children have no other children's literature available to them, apart from what the textbooks provide.

Savio and NCERT textbooks have better layout, use of color, production and paper quality, and binding. They are bigger in size and have bigger fonts, making for ease in reading. However, Savio has glossy paper, which is not the most suitable for young schoolchildren. The colors are striking, often gaudy, with bright contrasts, giving a somewhat artificial feel.

NCERT textbooks give a realistic, authentic feel, with a range of shades used, and diverse styles of artwork, resulting in an attractive and child-friendly aesthetics. There is generally balanced composition, perspective and sense of proportion, which are sadly lacking in Rajasthan textbooks. NCERT textbooks can be faulted on one count: too much of a good thing: too much colour and illustration, with no empty space left on any page.

In terms of artwork variety, NCERT has maximum: distinct illustration styles, as well as cartoon, photographs and folk art. Rajasthan textbooks also make use of photographs, but the quality is extremely poor, smudged and unattractive. Savio books only have illustrations, of a uniform, generally uninspired, style and quality.



An example of poor quality of photograph. This photograph shows 'Sonar Quila' in Jaisalmer. *Swarna Nagari ki Sair*, Rajasthan State Board Class 3

While NCERT and Rajasthan artwork seem to be original, made by artists commissioned for the purpose, the Savio artwork is partly original, but the artist has also made generous



use of clip art. NCERT artists sometimes use stretched-and-pulled pictures, to fit into given spaces, such as page margins: this practice is fairly obnoxious on aesthetic grounds.

NCERT artists are listed at the beginning, and all seem to have distinct artistic styles, but we do not get to know which illustrations have been executed by which artist. Savio has named its one artist, while Rajasthan textbooks do not even name their artist. In any case, neither of these artists has a distinct artistic style: the illustrations are standardized, stereotypical examples of *bad art*.

NCERT artwork is clear, accurate, imaginative and creative, which will also encourage children's interest in art. It often adds to the meaning or interpretation of texts, by providing further nuances to characterization and interesting details of setting and event. Savio artwork is attractive and clear, but often inaccurate and misleading, being out of tune with the events or characters it is supposed to represent. Rajasthan artwork is neither clear nor accurate, neither realistic nor imaginative.

NCERT textbook illustrations have a lot of vitality and freshness, with expressive faces and active bodies. However Rajasthan and Savio textbooks lack either vitality or freshness, the faces are homogenized and expressionless. There is a flattening out of humanity, particularly in the Rajasthan textbooks. The Savio textbooks often have pink-cheeked fair children—not only a gross misrepresentation of context, but also indicative of their ideological attempt at 'Anglicisation' (fitting with their tendency to teach English through Hindi, as discussed above).

PEDAGOGIC APPROACH

NCERT textbooks have a self-avowedly different, progressive **pedagogic approach**, focusing on constructivism, wherein each child is encouraged to draw upon her or his own experiences, and express as well as build new knowledge. Textbook producers have attempted to live up to this radical approach. However, the old habit of textbooks being the fount of knowledge will not die out so easily. The present NCERT textbooks also are basically centered on complete texts, which are closed rather than open-ended, with little space for children to bring in their experiences or perspectives. Children cannot participate in actually evolving or creating within these texts. However, the texts are child-friendly, enjoyable, and often reflect children's perceptions. Also, the exercises often draw upon children's experiences, encouraging them to think beyond the texts. Notes for teachers (and parents) are provided to encourage them to change their set approach, and synchronise with the new pedagogic intent.

Rajasthan and Savio textbooks seem to have no intention of participating in any such progressive pedagogic approach. They are anchored in the didactic, top-down school of pedagogy, wherein textbooks provide adult perspectives to discipline, control and train the growing child. Textbooks are seen as part of disciplinary mechanisms, rather than educational in the sense of helping open up children's minds, imagination and creativity. Savio textbooks do not address teachers at all. Rajasthan textbooks provide occasional directives to teachers, but these are really extensions and reinforcement of the didactic approach.

The NCERT lessons are by and large age-appropriate, and provide means for children's cognitive and psychological growth. Rajasthan and Savio lessons are not interesting, or even comprehensible, for children of the relevant age-group. These lessons are crammed with expectations of ideal behavior, couched in abstractions, which are not suited to positive psychological growth or cognitive development.

The **quantum** of lessons in Rajasthan textbooks will overload the child. Considering that these textbooks are frequently prescribed to children who are first-generation learners, from deprived socio-economic backgrounds, the sheer quantity is completely unjustified. Children who do not have time or help to study at home will inevitably lag behind when textbooks prescribed are so top-heavy. Unable to cope, they will end up performing poorly and dropping out of the system.

Savio textbooks may have *too little* material. This is indicative of the relatively low importance accorded to Hindi language in public schools, as compared to English and the other subjects. Savio textbooks do not provide sufficient exposure to Hindi language and literature.

The quantum of material in NCERT textbooks seems just right, balancing between too much and too little. With appropriate inputs by adults (teachers, parents), children will feel interested and engaged, learning without feeling burdened.

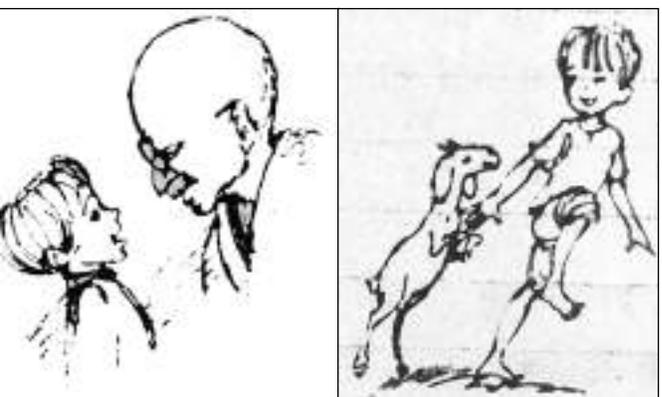
While the NCERT textbooks speak from children's **perspectives**, and to children, Savio and Rajasthan textbooks seem to address only the adult-defined 'good child', typically a middle-class 'ideal boy', giving them lessons in behavior and ethics. The lessons are so overwhelmingly didactic that children's own *experiences, emotions and moral dilemmas* hardly find any reflection at all. NCERT lessons typically present children's dilemmas, a wide range of emotions, and ways in which these play out, including expression, coping and resolution.



Patthar par Bane Nishaan, Rajasthan, Class 3



Naya Utsah, Rajasthan, Class 3



Swatantra ki Ore, NCERT, Class 4

While NCERT textbooks address *children as active learners*, Rajasthan and Savio textbooks do not. NCERT textbooks portray diverse images and forms of activity by children, but the other two textbooks portray relatively passive children: docile, obedient and controlled. These two textbooks seem to be envisioned as tools for moulding children, into some pre-decided formats.

Savio and Rajasthan textbooks present authoritarian families and **adult-child relationships**; NCERT textbooks display more diverse and democratic relationships: for instance stories such as *Ek Din ki Badshahat* and *Swatantra ki Ore* exemplify open, mutually respectful and affectionate relationships between children and adults.

The wider world of nature is hardly shown in any of the textbooks. In Savio and Rajasthan textbooks, nature is there in order to be used, as a neutral backdrop, or resources to be glorified in the interests of the nation-state. NCERT textbooks show nature as having some vitality and life: through poems or stories with interesting animal characters, for instance the poem *Kaun?*, the vulture story *Hudhud*, and animal sketches in the Warli painting *Kahani Khojo*.

The psychological impact of these textbooks will vary: from the possibility of being enabling, encouraging and empowering in the case of NCERT textbooks, to being discouraging and disempowering in the case of Rajasthan and Savio textbooks. The NCERT textbooks would help nurture children's creativity, imagination and critical thinking. But the Rajasthan and Savio textbooks would tend to crush children's creativity, originality and self-confidence.

As pedagogic tools, the Rajasthan and Savio textbooks are ill designed to serve the interests of helping nurture active, independent and thinking children—the adult citizens of tomorrow. NCERT textbooks do provide resources, to some extent, for nurturing children in this sort of direction.

Exercises:

Of the 20 lessons in the NCERT textbook, 14 have exercises at the end. Most exercises are easily understandable and interesting, directly addressed to children in everyday language. Apart from questions, there are fill in the blanks, identify true and false statements, exercises requiring children to conduct interviews, observe their surroundings and gather information. Several questions require children to express their thoughts, experiences and feelings through writing, enactment and discussion, and create solutions to various problems. Grammar is taught by giving instances and then opportunities to think and apply. Exercises encourage development of varied linguistic abilities including listening, speaking and writing. Questions are based on recall, comprehension, application, analysis, evaluation as well as creativity.

All 31 Rajasthan textbook lessons have exercises at the end, which may be easy to understand, but rather stiff and boring. The instructions are like commands, with no attempt to elicit children's interest. No opportunities are provided for self expression. Skills of copy-writing are developed rather than writing: taking down passages from the text, rather than encouraging expression of thoughts, ideas or feelings. Grammar teaching is based on mechanical application of rules, rote and repetition. The questions are all based on recall, and to some extent comprehension. None of the exercises require children to use critical thinking skills, make observations, exercise creativity or construct knowledge.

All 20 lessons of the Savio textbooks have exercises at the end. Word-meanings are explained through English, often erroneously. Questions are uniformly recall-based or comprehension-based. Grammar exercises require mechanical application of rules. None of the questions encourage creativity, observation, critical thinking or construction of knowledge based on children's own experiences, thoughts or imagination.

NCERT notes are helpful in guiding teachers to an innovative and child-friendly pedagogic approach. Rajasthan notes, on the other hand, are meant to instruct teachers on following a top-down didactic mode of textbook transaction. These textbooks not only talk down to children, but also to teachers!

SOCIO-POLITICAL CONCERNS AND PERSPECTIVES

Gender: To begin with, simple counting of male and female figures in the lessons, both in text and in illustrations, provides revealing findings. If we look at gender ratios in Class 3, 4 and 5 textbooks taken together, we find NCERT textbooks have a gender ratio of 72% males and 28% females. The Rajasthan textbooks have a gender ratio of 75% males and 25% females. Thus there is a highly skewed picture of male-female presence in both NCERT and Rajasthan textbooks.

When we examine illustrations in these textbooks (Classes 3, 4 and 5 combined), we find an identical figure for NCERT and Rajasthan textbooks: both visually depict 76% males and 24% females.

Looking at only Class 4 textbooks, we find the NCERT textbook has 79% characters male, and 21% female—a very striking imbalance. The Rajasthan textbook has 67% male and 33% female characters; the Savio textbook has the same statistic, that is 67% male and 33% female characters. When we look at illustrations in Class 4 textbooks, the NCERT depicts 77% males and 23% females; the Rajasthan textbook depicts 76% males and 24% females, while Savio has a better ratio with 67% males to 33% females in the illustrations.

These figures indicate a distorted presentation of reality. They show predominantly men's worlds, rather than women's worlds, and boys rather than girls. This is particularly shocking in the case of NCERT textbooks, which generally have a progressive and gender-sensitive stance.



In *Thapp Roti Thapp Dal*, NCERT, Class 4 boys playact cooking a meal.

When we examine **roles, attitudes and dress** of males and females, NCERT textbooks score much better than Rajasthan or Savio. Rajasthan textbooks are the worst on these counts. They tend to reinforce *gender prejudices, stereotypes and discrimination*. They show girls and women predominantly as wives and mothers, devoted to welfare of sons, husbands, families and (very rarely) communities; wearing traditional clothes, with heads covered.

NCERT textbooks have stories and illustrations of girls and women engaged in a wide array of activities. However, here too there are many wife, mother and housewife images; women's dress is by and large stereotypical, though at least their heads are not covered. In Savio textbooks too, women are predominantly placed within the household.

In all three sets of textbooks, traditional roles particularly responsibility for housework and childcare, are barely challenged. In NCERT, there is at places a glimmering of an attempt to formulate such a challenge, but it is not well developed. For instance, in the story *Thapp Roti Thapp Daal*, boys play-act a scene in which they try to cook a meal, but by the end of it they are disheartened and declare they cannot cook. In all the textbooks, women typically inhabit the home space, where they perform essential but subordinate roles; while the public sphere is dominated by men. Rajasthan and Savio textbooks make hardly any attempt to stimulate thinking on girls' and women's status in society; the NCERT textbook does make scattered attempts to do so. However, issues such as gender discrimination in schooling, female feticide, dowry, domestic violence and bigamy, find no mention in any of the textbooks.



Sunita's mother in *Sunita Ki Pahiya Kursi*, NCERT, Class 4

There are representations of 'different' girls or women, such as Sunita in the NCERT textbook, Imarti Bai and Kalibai in Rajasthan textbook, though there are none in the Savio textbook. (The only lead female character in the Savio textbook is a cruel queen, Karuna, in the story *Nyaya*.) In the absence of any clear positive role models of women, these few representations remain mere tokenism. The NCERT textbook tries, to some extent, to explore the inner world of girls with disabilities, like Sunita (*Sunita ki Pahiya Kursi*) and Ila Sachani (*Jahaan Chaah vahaan Raah*). The Rajasthan textbooks show Imarti Bai (who prevents deforestation by sacrificing her own life, and Kalibai (*Guru Bhakt Kalibai*) who sacrifices her life to save her teacher: however these characters are presented as symbols, with no attempt to build an understanding of their inner struggles, or indeed the social structures that they challenge. Sohni, in the story *Buddhimatta*, comes across as a hard-working, sweet, 'good' girl, who catches two terrorists in a totally unrealistic sequence of events. Nowhere in the three sets of textbooks is there any indication of women's collective action for social transformation.

Sexuality-related issues are conspicuous by their absence in all three textbooks, but it may be argued that the age-group is too young for these. Girls' body image vis-à-vis boys' could however have been usefully included. The age-group to which these textbooks catering often

has girls beginning to grow taller than boys—a reality nowhere reflected in the illustrations, which uniformly show girls smaller than boys. In Savio, girls are shown as sweet, pink-cheeked, wearing cute frocks. In NCERT the images are a little more tuned to Indian realities. Rajasthan illustrations have girls with homogenous faces and figures, all expressionless, wearing uniform clothes, and generally clustering together. Society, whether the home, the classroom or a public function, is shown as segregated on the basis of gender.

Class: NCERT, Savio and Rajasthan Board textbooks all deal largely with middle class characters. NCERT has many illustrations where the children could belong to lower middle to middle class backgrounds. A count of Class 4 textbooks indicates NCERT texts have 6% upper class, 38% middle class and 32% economically deprived characters; Rajasthan texts have 33% upper class, 22% middle class and 9% economically deprived characters; Savio texts have 38% upper class, 10% middle class and 33% economically deprived characters. (The figures in each case do not add up to 100% because the class affiliation of several characters is indeterminate).

Examining illustrations in NCERT textbooks, we find 8% characters are upper class, 39% middle class and 15% economically deprived characters. Rajasthan illustrations depict 34% upper class, 24% middle class and 17% economically deprived characters. Savio illustrations show 27% upper class, 9% middle class and 26% economically deprived characters.

The socio-cultural milieu represented in Savio textbooks is bipolar: a simplistic picture of basically two social classes: the rich and the poor. There is very little in-between: whereas in fact most children in public schools belong to middle class families. It seems that middle class children in these schools are being encouraged to identify themselves with the wealthy, aspiring for ever greater economic success, income and wealth. Rajasthan textbooks represent middle and upper classes, with much less portrayal of working classes. Most children studying these textbooks may belong, however to the deprived or working classes! Obviously they will feel alienated from books that barely represent their realities. NCERT textbooks have a more balanced representation of classes: a minority of upper class characters, predominance of the middle class, and a fair sprinkling of working class characters.

Though the NCERT textbook tries to address children from different economic backgrounds, the kinds of consumer goods shown, for instance cake, apple and umbrella with the poem *Koi Laake Mujhe De*, or a comfortable middle-class home like Sunita's, will seem alien and distant to children from economically deprived families. To some extent, this will be balanced out by the friendly and realistic portrayal of a working class child like Keshav, in the story *Nanha Fankaar*.



Seekho, Savio Publishers, Class 4

Savio textbooks typically address children from upwardly mobile families, that is, ambitious urban middle-class families, who pressurize children to perform, achieve and rise on the rungs of 'success'. Thus there is an emphasis on English, downplaying of Hindi, rosy-cheeked fair-haired children, and emphasis on wealth as a supreme value. The worlds of poor, working-class, dalit or adivasi children are systematically excluded.

Rajasthan textbooks seem basically keen to affirm and reaffirm social classes and orthodox social values, social hierarchies and an upper-caste Hindu code of values. A rare depiction like Sohni (*Buddhimatta*) does provide, however, at least a glimpse into the consciousness of a working class child.

NCERT textbooks present some inkling of the realities of poverty, in stories like *Daan ka Hisaab*, where the citizenry is shown suffering from drought, and struggling to get the king to take steps to help them. However, they are not able to move the king: only the cunning stratagem of a 'sanyasi' forces the king to part with funds.

Savio textbooks make no effort to build understanding of the causes of poverty, or even urge the belief that all deserve equal economic opportunities. Stories like *Santa Claus* completely misrepresent the causes for poverty and wealth. Such a story insists that the rich have a right to remain rich, no questions asked.

Rajasthan textbooks portray the overwhelming importance of wealth, again usually linking it to family background and status. The story *Bholu and Lobhu* (Rajasthan 5) insists that



Daan ka Hisaab, NCERT, Class 4

‘Seth Dhanraj’ is a very generous man, although his behavior towards two poor men, Bholu and Lobhu, defies this. He sets them a task, at which Bholu succeeds and therefore grows rich, but Lobhu fails to manage his time well, and therefore he remains as poor as before. To a weeping Lobhu, the Seth merely remarks, “Those who cannot manage their time have to cry and regret, like you.” Such stories depict the poor as undeserving of any improvement in their circumstances, being lazy or incompetent.

Apart from the citizenry of *Daan ka Hisaab*, in the NCERT 4 textbook, there is no whiff of working class struggles, or citizens’ struggles for basic economic rights, in any of the textbooks.

Caste: Caste does not emerge much in the textbooks, either as a social reality, or through movements for dalit equality and rights. Whereas there is no indication at all of caste in NCERT and Savio textbooks, the Rajasthan textbooks have markers of caste in the case of Brahman boys. Though the text does not mention caste, the boys studying in Gurukuls in stories like *Gurubhakt Aaruni* and *Pathhar par Baney Nishan* are shown with shaved heads, a lock of hair (*bodi*) left on the scalp—clear signs of Brahman caste! To depict this well-known fact pictorially is a powerful method of sending across subliminal messages: education as such is for Brahmans, although lower castes may be allowed to study as a concession!

Whether or not caste realities should be included in textbooks is a moot point. Simply ignoring reality will not change it. It is noteworthy that various Parliamentarians had objected to caste nomenclature such as the word ‘Chamar’ in a story by Premchand, the classic social realist writer, due to which the story was removed from an NCERT Hindi textbook. Perhaps we need a great deal of serious social debate if we are to move beyond this impasse, find ways of representing reality, instead of simply rendering them invisible.

Tribal: Tribal or adivasi issues do not find much space in the entire three sets of textbooks. There is no representation at all of tribal life in Savio textbooks: is it a reality the urbanized upper classes can afford to simply ignore?



NCERT textbooks have one lesson, in which a Warli painting is shown over two pages, with typical geometrical line sketches of human and animal figures engaged in a variety of activities, within the world of nature. Similarly Rajasthan textbooks have one depiction of tribals: the story *Guru Bhakt Kalibai* mentions that Kalibai was a tribal girl; however, she is shown wearing a skirt-and-blouse, her school uniform, although according to the text she was returning from work in the fields, and she has a scythe in hand.

The Warli painting, in NCERT textbooks, is a creative lesson, which will at least help introduce the subject of tribals as part of Indian composite society. However, NCERT textbooks have another image, in the poem *Khilonewala* (by well-known writer Subhadra Kumari Chauhan) which purveys a negative portrayal of forest-dwellers, identified as 'Tadka' and 'asuras': negative figures that the righteous conqueror, Ram, is justified in killing. Set within the contemporary context where tribals and their land are being threatened by corporate timber and mining interest, this portrayal is extremely problematic. It reaffirms an elite, urban, upper-caste perspective, in which tribals are marked as a regressive force, backward forest inhabitants practicing many evil customs.

All three textbooks fail to portray anything close to the complex realities of tribal customs, lifestyles and worldviews—in central or south India, the north-east or Andamans. The real wealth of tribal life and culture is ignored, a very serious omission.

Disability: Disability issues are taken up by NCERT and Rajasthan textbooks, though not at all by Savio. NCERT takes up the issue through a positive portrayal of Sunita, a young girl who is wheelchair-bound. The story has an enabling perspective, indicating that children with disabilities have many abilities too, and the need for sensitivity on the part of society, including their family and friends. Rajasthan textbooks bring out disability in two stories. In one, *Naya Utsah*, a young girl, Mohini, loses her leg and stops coming to school, until her teacher visits and exhorts her to continue with her studies; she agrees to return to school. The story gives no indication of her feelings, or the extent of her disability and the kind of support she would require to actually go to school. She comes across as a passive character, whose only positive



'Asura' in *Khilonewala*, NCERT, Class 5. At left is the poem's hero as Ram.



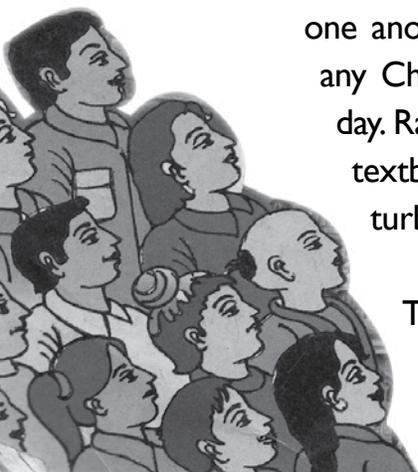
Naya Utsah, Rajasthan Class 3

quality is that she is the class topper, while the active agent in the story is her male teacher. The other story is *Rannkshetra*, in which the hero, a Captain, is injured and loses his leg during the Kargil War. Again there is no depiction of his pain, only a caricature-like regret that he sacrificed only one leg, rather than his entire life, for the sake of the country!

None of the textbooks give a deeper picture of disability as it affects the person concerned: none indicate pain, anger, frustration or the struggle it takes to function 'normally' in society. The material factors of the disability are glossed over, even in the Sunita story, with no attention paid to the fact that mental encouragement is not sufficient, rather concrete forms of physical help are required, and are a right. There is some sense of agency in Sunita's character, but none at all in Mohini's.

Religions and religious communities: The Class 4 NCERT textbook has approximately 10% Muslim characters, out of those characters whose religion is identifiable. All 10% are male. Another NCERT textbook (Class 5) has a very positive story set in a Muslim family, called *Ek Din ki Badshahat*. NCERT textbooks have no Christian characters, nor Jews, Parsis or those with any other religious affiliation apart from Hindus.

The Rajasthan textbook has only one Muslim character, that is, the king Akbar. It also has an illustration of a mosque on Id day, in which a number of Muslim boys and men are greeting one another, in the lesson *Id aur Christmas-Day*. This is the only lesson which has any Christians in it--four children receiving gifts from Santa Claus on Christmas day. Rajasthan textbooks are the only ones to depict a Sikh character: the Class 5 textbook cover has a Sikh boy: clearly it is an afterthought, for his 'patka' (cloth turban) is superimposed on an ordinary haircut!



The Savio publication has no Muslim characters at all. It has substantial Christian characters, though--James Watt and his aunt in *Bhaap Ka Engine*, and Nicholas in *Santa Claus*. Since these textbooks hope to cater to convent schools in urban centres, it is no doubt strategic to give some space to Christian characters.

Cover Page, Rajasthan Class 5

The overwhelmingly Hindu ethos is time and again reinforced, particularly in the Rajasthan textbooks. In the Class 4 textbook, 41% characters are clearly Hindu, with markers such as dress, *tilak* on forehead, *rudraksha* bead necklaces and shaved heads for men; sari, bangles and *ghunghat* for women. Descriptions like ‘Seth’ and ‘Guru’ are unmistakably used for Hindus. Hinduism, Hindu history and present is valorized, with ‘Ishvar’ (Hindu male godhead) actually materializing, as in the story *Atal Dhruva*. Hinduism is mixed up, in many instances, with nationalism and national identity. Most heroes, heroines or national leaders portrayed or mentioned are Hindu, in all three sets of textbooks.

Nationalism, war and peace: is a potent presence in the Rajasthan and Savio textbooks. In both, nationalism is mixed up with a glorification of Indian nationhood. India is portrayed as a place with no divisions or discriminations, a veritable abode of bliss. In Rajasthan textbooks this is reinforced throughout, with exhortations to boys to become soldiers, even martyrs, for the sake of their motherland, as in *Rannkshetra and Maran Path ra Panthi*. Jingoistic ideology runs through the length and breadth of the Rajasthan textbooks. These textbooks promote communal feelings, with a subtle and gross identification of ‘love for the country’ with ‘hatred for the enemy’, identified more than once as Muslims or Pakistanis.

NCERT textbooks, which otherwise present a peace-loving and secular ideology, have one extremely war-like Hindu image, that of Ram, killing ‘Tadka’ and ‘asuras’, using sword, bow and arrows, in the poem *Khilonewala*. This image is extremely brutal, communal and war-like, in no way harmonious with a secular vision of India.

Enmity is encouraged and conflicts shown as inevitable because there are ‘evil’ people, in the Rajasthan textbooks. Instead of promoting peace and reconciliation, these textbooks inculcate hatred, aggression and war-like tendency. The Rajasthan Class 5 textbook notes, approvingly, in the lesson *Dussehra*, “As we see Ravana’s effigy burning, we realize an evildoer will have a bad end, and future generations too will never forgive him”. The NCERT textbook does make an effort to show reasonable ways to resolve conflicts, as in the story *Kirmich ki Gend*, the cartoon-story *Teen Sukh Ek Saath* and *Daan ka Hisaab*. However, *Khilonewala* presents a hackneyed, dangerous and communal way to resolve conflicts—the powerful conqueror (or state) simply kills off people who do not fall within his frame, for instance simple forest-dwellers.



Dussehra, Rajasthan, Class 5, p 31

Democratic movements: The issues of marginalized groups and discrimination on the basis of gender, class, caste, religious affiliation or disability have either been ignored, or received negative reinforcement in the Rajasthan textbooks as well as Savio. NCERT textbooks have relatively more positive portrayals and images for social reform or evidence of progressive thinking. However, here too the effort often reduces to tokenism rather than inclusion or integration. The agency of oppressed sections is hardly in evidence, in any of the textbooks.

Socio-political movements are hardly represented, although it could have been done in stories like *Imarti Bai* and *Guru Bhakt Kalibai*. There are a few faint glimmerings in NCERT textbooks, as in *Daan ka Hisaab*.

NCERT, Savio and Rajasthan textbooks have several stories about kings and their regime. In NCERT textbooks, the monarchical state is represented through figures like wise Akbar, but also the miserly king in *Daan ka Hisaab*, who is challenged by his subjects, and ultimately loses: the people register a victory. In Rajasthan textbooks, kings are invariably presented as the epitome of human virtue, valour and wisdom: for instance Maharana Pratap, Raja Chandragupta and King Utaanpaad. Nowhere is there a historical framing of the texts, indicating that monarchies in India are a thing of the past. Feudal values are represented time and again, especially in Rajasthan textbooks, without questioning. Savio approves of feudal hierarchies, mixed up with an unabashed espousal of capitalist-consumerist lifestyles.

While Rajasthan textbooks espouse regressive jingoistic Hindutva ideology, Savio has a relatively neutral stance, and NCERT textbooks by and large reflect progressive, liberal, socio-political thinking. Only the NCERT textbooks can be said to be at least trying to consciously promote values of justice, equality and democracy, in any systematic way. Children and teachers get some encouragement to develop into active citizens, within a democratic consciousness, through these textbooks.

Exercises in Rajasthan and Savio textbooks add no further dimensions in terms of additional information or ideas regarding socio-political setting, poverty, gender, caste or other forms of deprivation, nor do they encourage students to observe society. The exercises add nothing by way of explaining geographical, historical or cultural factors and frames, nor do they provide any inkling of people's struggles or movements. There is no explanation of past realities, or contemporary social processes. Considering that both these textbooks have a number of historic-mythological lessons, this is a serious lacuna. Students have no option but to misread and misinterpret history, so they will grow up confused about basic

facts and events in society. Since several texts glorify monarchy, authoritarian teachers, patriarchal families and an omniscient Hindu godhead, children are indoctrinated into an anachronistic and undemocratic belief system.

While the exercises in NCERT textbooks also do not provide sufficient additional information or historical frames, they do encourage children to question, observe and gather information, as well as engage in discussion. Children are required to analyse, think, imagine, and express their own ideas. If this is actually done, with the encouragement of teachers, it would help children to develop a nuanced understanding of socio-political issues and realities. Children have a chance to share experiences and observations, enrich and develop knowledge, and learn lessons in practical democracy. Since most lessons in the NCERT textbook are contemporary, and even its historical fiction promotes progressive rather than obscurantist values, there is less possibility of dangerous misreading of the texts. However, there are slip-ups, for instance in the poem *Khilonewala*, where the exercises make a bad situation worse by further valourising Ram, Ramayana and Ramlila, without providing any secular or historical frames. Such a lesson, and its exercises, is completely out of place in NCERT textbooks, with its avowedly secular ideology.

Conclusions

The three sets of textbooks reflect a range of different literary, artistic, pedagogic and socio-political perspectives. Their respective perspectives are influenced by the contexts and concerns of the textbook producers. NCERT is a nation-wide educational body, with progressive thinking and intent, aiming at stemming systemic decay and bringing about educational renewal ; the Rajasthan Rajya Paattyapustak Mandal is situated in one of the most educationally backward states of India, and seems invested in maintaining a distinctive, elite-Hindu view of the state's culture and populace; while Savio is a commercial publisher intent on reaching out and selling textbooks to relatively affluent sections of urban school-goers.

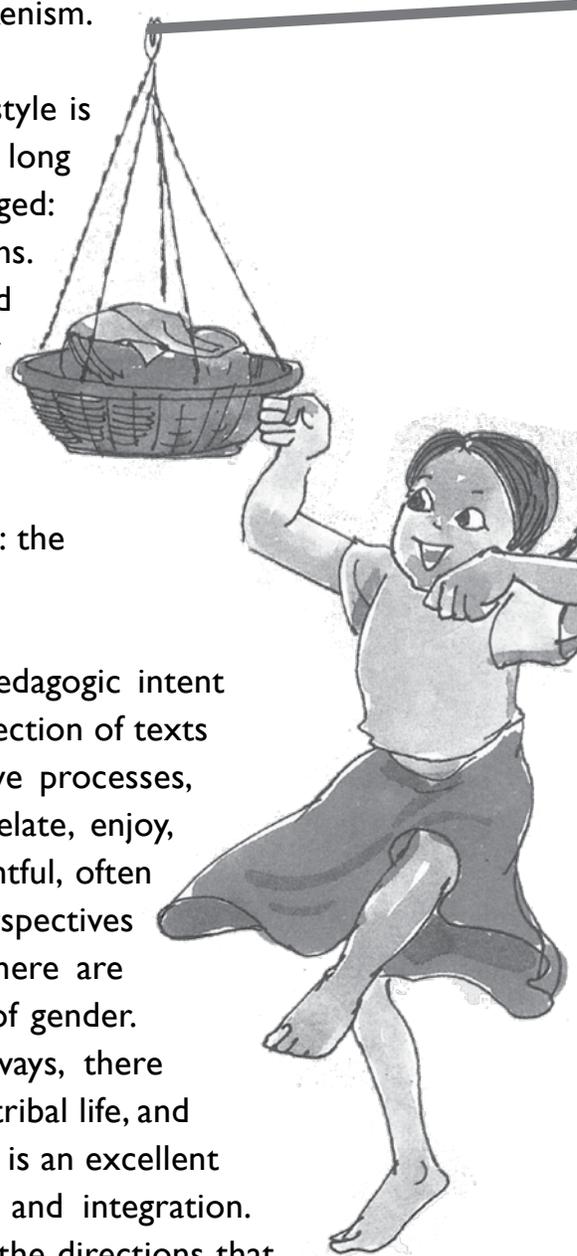
Rajasthan textbooks have a deliberate marked ideological slant towards a glorified upper-caste masculinist notion of the Indian nation-state. The textbooks cater to a wide section of government school students, many from marginalized social groups, yet they negate the lived realities of this section of children. They ignore the medley of vibrant literary, oral and artistic traditions in Rajasthan. In a state where storytellers still recite night-long stories with pictorial 'phads' (scrolls) and grandmothers tell 'quissas' stretching for weeks on end—tales with adventure, fun, fantasy, romance, poetry, local color, valor and pathos, these textbooks are a sheer reduction and shrinkage of possibilities. They work

to deliberately destroy an array of languages, dialects, storytelling genres, art styles and oral literatures.

Savio and Rajasthan textbooks are alike in being pedagogically regressive. They have no understanding or respect for children's active agency, aspirations, perceptions and cognitive processes. They have scant respect for constitutional values of equality, freedom and democratic social structure. At best, they indulge in tokenism.

Savio textbooks cater to a middle-class urban milieu. Their style is artificial and stilted, with attempts at Anglicisation. No deeper long term relationship with Hindi language or literature is envisaged: the textbooks will merely help the children pass Hindi exams. Probably this accords well with the aspirations for upward mobility that most middle-class urban parents have for their offspring. Culturally these textbooks are hollow, the writing slovenly, artwork inaccurate and misleading. Showing a world of charitable rich and voiceless poor, these textbooks inculcate motivation in children to remain on the right side: the side of wealth.

NCERT textbooks indicate a paradigm shift in terms of pedagogic intent and literary quality as well as visual aesthetics. Conscious selection of texts reflects respect for children's abilities, perceptions, cognitive processes, aspirations and diversity. There is scope for children to relate, enjoy, question, grow and actually love to learn. Artwork is delightful, often extending the text in imaginative ways. Socio-political perspectives too have widened, with emphasis on diversity. However, there are limitations, the most striking being the imbalance in terms of gender. While freedom and equality are celebrated in various ways, there remains a shortfall in terms of female presence, presence of tribal life, and concerns of the really poor. One lesson with a Warli painting is an excellent beginning, but ends up as tokenism rather than inclusion and integration. NCERT textbooks need to go deeper, higher and further in the directions that they have, to their credit, begun to open up.



Analysis of Selected Literary Texts

Poems and Stories

In this chapter we present detailed analyses of selected text items. We have chosen predominantly *literary texts*, that is, stories and poems.

From each set of textbooks, we have selected 2 lessons for analysis – one poem and one story. The selected lessons are by and large representative of the particular textbook approach – in terms of literary quality, visual aesthetics, pedagogic approach and socio-political perspectives. However, as in the poem *Kakku*, our selection is based on the fact that while this poem reflects the general NCERT approach on most counts, and is of high literary quality, it also has a critical shortcoming, which is not apparent at first glance.

Of course, this is the point of analysis: to be able to go deeper, uncovering some layers of meaning that may otherwise lie undetected. In this sense, the analyses here are incomplete, being work in progress, rather than rigid, finalised evaluations. We hope to stimulate further thinking and questions, through these analyses.

The text items analysed are:

Rajasthan State Board Textbooks:

- *Sukhdham*, Class 4, poem
- *Gurubhakt Aaruni*, Class 4, story

NCERT Textbooks: *Rimjhim*

- *Kakku*, Class 3 textbook, poem
- *Sunita ki Pahiya Kursi*, Class 4, story

Private Publisher, Savio Textbooks: *Satranji*

- *Hei Dayamay*, Class 4, poem
- *Santa Claus*, Class 4, story

A. Analysis of Poems

SUKHDHAM

Rajasthan State Board, Class 4

Literary Quality and Visual Aesthetics

The poem 'Sukhdham' is a paean to India, praising it as a glorious land full of beauty, love, religious tolerance, humanity, wisdom, mutual respect and friendship. The rhythm is forced, though steady. The poem is dull and heavy, lacking creativity, vision or freshness.

The language is extremely difficult to understand, the words far from spoken language. The language is dry and uninteresting, imagery stereotypical. This poem is not likely to motivate children to take an interest in language or in reading.

Authorship is not assigned. We assume it is written by textbook writers, especially to fit into a curricular requirement.

The poem is surrounded by illustrations: stereotypical sketches of a sun rising behind mountains, river, fort, church, mosque and temple, with trees sprinkled throughout, and flowers clustered at the bottom. It is extremely cluttered, with words at the margins superimposed on illustrations, becoming difficult to read. Composition, space, colour, perspective and proportion are poor. The illustrations are imitative. Rather than observe nature and draw from it, the illustrator is obviously trained to copy stilted sketches, in which (for instance) the sun has to rise from behind mountains.

The illustration has no human beings in it. The poem is about human relationships, natural beauty and historical monuments as constitutive of a glorious India. However, no effort has been made to show people, in the illustrations. Illustrations lack imagination, and are unlikely to help nurture aesthetic sense or artistic creativity in children. Quite the opposite!

Pedagogic Approach

Children will find it difficult to relate to the poem, which is very distant from their experiential worlds. Its abstract conception of the nation will be incomprehensible to most children aged 9-11 years, for whom the textbook is meant. At this age, children have just begun to form abstract concepts of family, home, village or city. Concepts like humanity,

piety and lack of discrimination on the basis of religion, are even more abstract, and difficult to grasp.

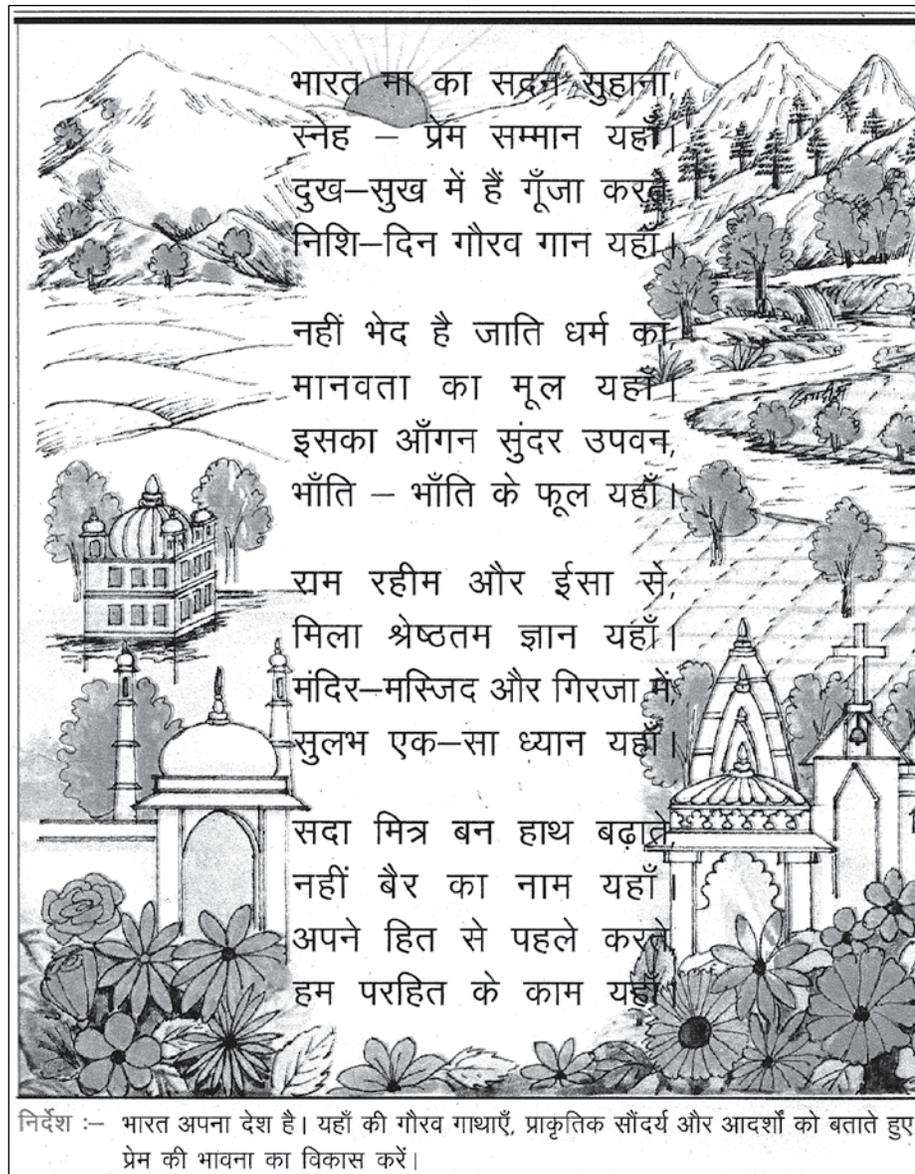
The theme of 'nation' could have been presented differently, relating it to children's experiences, motivating them to observe and reflect on what they see. This may have helped nurture creativity. The poem is likely to generate a dilemma in children's minds--whether to believe what it claims, or not. Its claims will be contradictory to the children's life worlds. The poem peddles a conception of India that is false, but which students are expected to accept without question. Children and children's perspectives are completely absent, human beings being mentioned only in the abstract.

There is a directive for teachers at the bottom of the page: "India is our country. Describing its tales of heroism, natural beauty and ideals, develop a feeling of *desh prem*, love-for-the-country, in children." It is left to teachers to gather material that would actually interest children and awaken a feeling of love for the country. It is unlikely that most teachers would attempt this. Considering that this is the first lesson in Class 4, it sets the tone for the year—boring, top-down lessons, with unreal images and ideals in the garb of reality. Sensitive children may feel anxious, guilty and confused by this poem: with no space or permission to articulate their discomfort.

Socio-Political Concerns and Perspectives

The poem communicates ideas that are patently untrue, such as:

*Nahi bhed jaati dharm ka,
Maanavta ka mool yahan,*



conveying that India has no differences or discrimination based on caste or religion. The fact is that children in many parts of Rajasthan face such discrimination as part of their daily lives. The poem completely negates such realities and experiences. Another set of lines–

*Sada mitra ban haath badhaate,
Nahi bair ka naam yahan.
Apne hit se pehle karte,
Hum parhit ke kaam yahaan–*

creates further misconceptions. It claims all Indians are selfless, and always reach out in friendship, nurturing no enmity.

The poem is written with the intention of presenting India as ideal. It emphatically negates realities of social discrimination, religious intolerance, corruption, ecological destruction as well as political conflicts and violence. It completely whitewashes reality. The poem motivates jingoistic feeling, rather than true love for the country, or any nuanced notion of patriotism.

The poem gives the idea of an ideal humanity dwelling in India, in blissful friendliness and joy. These human beings are cardboard figures, with no social context, class, caste or gender. India is imaged as 'Mother India', *Bharat Ma*, but the only figures named in the poem are stereotypical male godheads: Ram, Rahim and Isa (Jesus).

The negation of caste based differences in the poem is in itself a reinforcement of caste prejudice. Similarly, negating religious differences and ignoring gender discrimination serves to reinforce prejudices based on religion and gender. The poem in this sense is written from an upper caste, majoritarian, male and middle-class point of view, which can claim all is perfect, while in fact people face acute problems. Such a poem makes people's problems and suffering invisible and, literally, unmentionable. Children too are silenced, as are all voices of experience and dissent.

KAKKU

NCERT, Class 3

Literary Quality and Visual Aesthetics

Kakku has an inherent rhythm, and creative play with words. The central theme revolves around young children, their emotions, experiences and behaviour. The imagery is vivid and attractive, with freshness and intensity. The poem uses simple spoken language, easy to understand, and will be interesting for children as it has a lot of playful use of words. There is a contemporary feel to the poem, which is written by Rameshchandra Shah.

Illustrations are large and imaginative and would excite children's aesthetic sense and inspire creativity. Illustrations show a small child, Kakku, who looks annoyed. His annoyance is clearly evident in his body language and facial expressions--knitted eyebrows, wide eyes, downturned mouth. The illustrations extend the interpretation of the poem by giving an indication of Kakku's own nuanced feelings, and a sense of his isolation.

Illustrators' names have been given in the beginning of the textbook, although we do not know who made which illustrations. The *Kakku* illustrations seem to be original, with a distinctive individual style. They are drawn from life, the depiction is realistic. The colors used are vivid, and composition and perspective are pleasing.

Pedagogic Approach

The poem relates with children's experiential worlds: it is about a child and his peer group. It is a lively and interesting way of presenting a conflict situation common among children.

The poem has been written from the perspective of children who tease, without giving any voice to the teased child. The poet could have explored moral dilemmas involved in 'teasing'—which can be synonymous with bullying and harassment. But this opportunity was not utilized. A realistic situation has been depicted, but in a one-sided way.

Kakku is a boy who cries 'all day', is irritable and doesn't sing, fights easily, and gets upset when teased. The other children, in whose voice the poem is written, continually coin names for him, criticizing and ridiculing. Although the dilemma is presented, there is no exploration of the psychological complexities involved. The poem makes no attempt to go beneath the surface, suggest different points of views, and different ways of understanding and coping with emotions. The poem expresses the views of the perpetrators, in a

1. कक्कू

नाम है उसका कक्कू।
कक्कू माने कोयल होता
लेकिन यह तो दिनभर रोता
इसीलिए हम इसे चिढ़ाते
कहते इसको सक्कू
नाम है उसका कक्कू।



humorous vein. It fails to notice that teasing may cause further damage to the already troubled child. There is no agency accorded the 'victim': he simply lives through the situation.

The poem will be interesting to many children, especially those who indulge in teasing. But children similar to Kakku may find it embarrassing, even humiliating. Vulnerability is treated as shameful in this poem, encouraging children to conceal their hurt and other softer emotions. There are no notes for teachers indicating the sensitive nature of the poem, or suggesting appropriate pedagogic strategies.

Relationships between children are shown as devoid of empathy or even sympathy. The child Kakku may be touchy and over-sensitive; he may be disturbed, depressed and unhappy. The way the poem is written reflects adult lack of empathy, understanding and sensitivity to the predicament of such a child. He probably needs help—certainly not teasing and bullying.

The poem is likely to have an adverse effect on children, since it trivializes the effect of teasing, justifies and reinforces aggressive behavior, especially

within a male peer group. The poem gives no voice to Kakku's suffering, in terms of his lived experiences. The poem seems as insensitive as the teasing itself.

Illustrations try to give the reader a peep into the world of Kakku, and his feelings. They help bring a bit of an alternative perspective, by showing Kakku's emotions through his expressions. Sensitivity towards others' emotions may be developed to some extent through these illustrations. But they can be misleading—the second illustration shows Kakku looking somewhat relaxed, which is odd, considering that the teasing has reached a peak and no resolution suggested in the text.

Socio-Political Concerns and Perspectives

This poem reinforces stereotypes of the 'normal child' and in particular the 'normal boy'. The normal child is supposed to be smiling, singing, resilient, calm, never giving way

to irritation, anger or tears. Through the skilful use of fun and humor, the poem tries to enforce an adult-devised norm onto children. By highlighting in the very first stanza that Kakku is a boy who weeps, the poem reinforces the common stereotype that boys shouldn't cry, or express any softer emotions.

The poem does not portray physical violence, but it does condone a kind of emotional violence, by normalizing teasing behaviour. Considering the pervasive social ethos of violence and aggression, this is very problematic. Dominant concepts of masculinity indicate to boys that they should be in control of emotions and situations, betraying no vulnerability. This poem tends to reinforce these expectations.

The poem promotes dominance of the majority and more powerful, over those who are numerically weak and less powerful. It fails to give a voice to the victimised minority figure. He is seen from the lens of those who tease him, as a caricature rather than the real person. We get no inkling of Kakku's life circumstances, or for that matter the influences upon the other children, that have generated specific attitudes and characteristics.

Rather than question aggressive behaviour, the poet condones it, and presents the victim as helpless, lacking voice or agency. No possibility of change, within him or his tormentors, is indicated. He is not shown as building up the courage to reply or challenge those who tease him. In fact, the poet should have provided Kakku with a voice: to respond, answer his opponents, indicate growing confidence, or else protest. As it is, the poem ends up legitimizing the actions of those who tease and bully, with no sympathy towards the teased or vulnerable child, or sense of progression in terms of the central existential dilemma.

HEI DAYAMAY

Savio Publishers, Class 4

Literary Quality and Visual Aesthetics

This is a prayer-poem: schoolchildren address *Dayamay*, 'Merciful One', asking for an end to ignorance, misdeeds and darkness, through the light of knowledge, purity and hard work. The poem has a steady rhythm, although its words are stodgy and heavy, and imagery poor.

The language used is scholarly Hindi, with words like *shuddhatai*, *tatpar* and *vyasan* which are not part of spoken language. Even Hindi-speaking children will not be familiar with such language. It is dry, uninteresting, and difficult. The poem does not at all encourage creativity or playfulness in use of language. English is used frequently: for instance, alongside 'Paath I' it says 'Lesson I'; word-meanings are explained in English. Most children even in private schools are more conversant with their mother-tongues than with English. Subtly, a message is conveyed, that English should become one's primary language.

The poem has been penned by the textbook writer, specially commissioned to meet the demands of the curriculum. It fits into one page, with a lot of illustrations. The main illustration shows two children praying, with a sun rising from behind mountains. There are several 'cute' flowers, a lamp (diya), a tiny turtle encircling each page number, and two clouds around the lesson number. The page is extremely cluttered. It is difficult to read the first two lines because they are superimposed on the main illustration.

The illustrations are not very imaginative. However, they are more attractive than the poem itself, and may provide some relief to children from the tedious poem. The main illustration is original, though it lacks a distinctive style. The other illustrations may be clip art. The artist is named at the beginning of the book. His illustrations are stereotypical. Nature is represented through cut flowers on the page margins, or the clichéd sun rising behind hills. Expressions on the faces of children are smug, with little difference between the facial features of the two children. Drawing quality is poor, with no vitality or freshness.

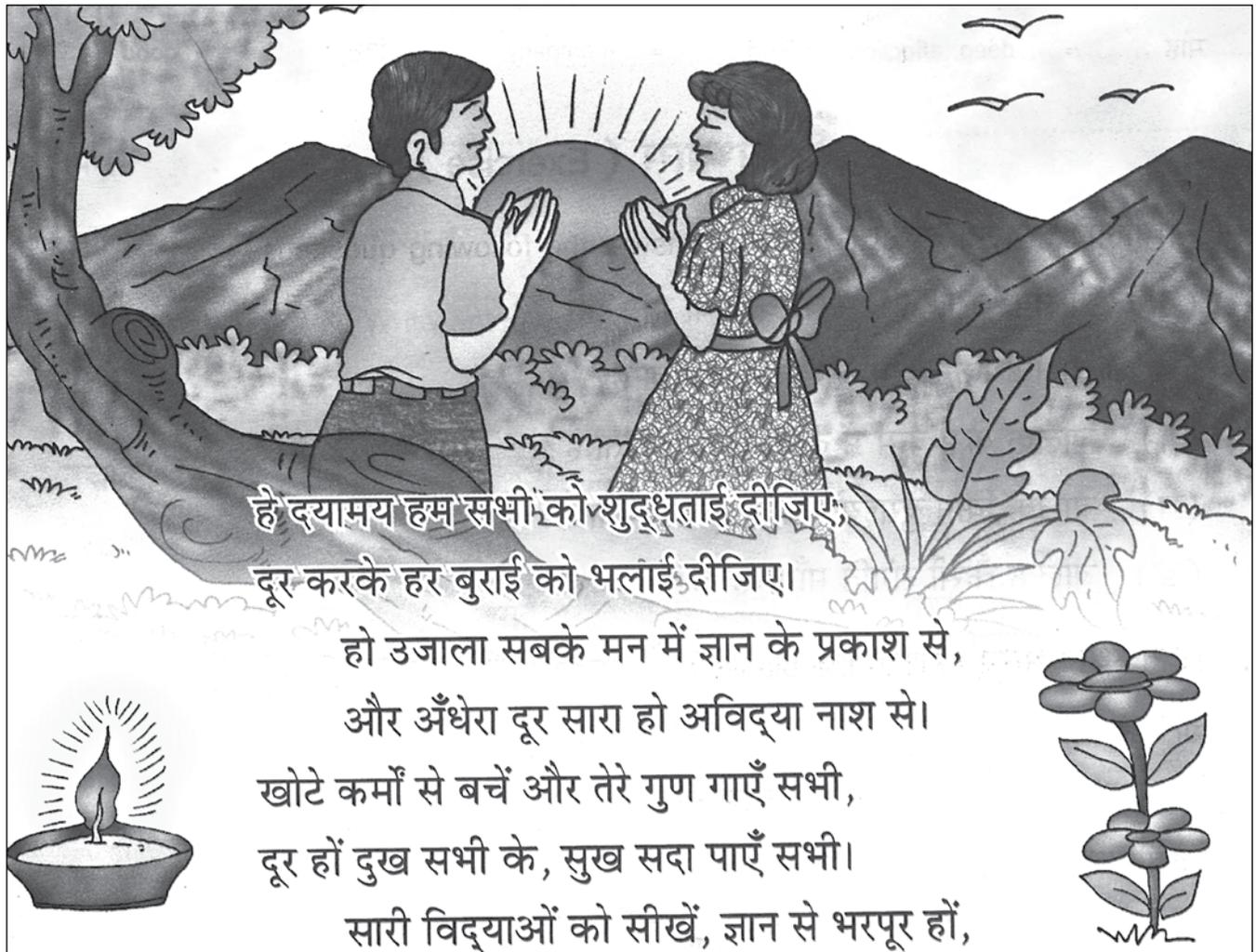
The representation of children is misleading and inaccurate. They are supposed to be praying to the sun, while in fact they are shown facing each other. They seem to be praying to one another, so a child may think they are addressing each other (as 'Dayamay'!). In an otherwise boring lesson, this error might lend a touch of liveliness. When the phrase *prem aapas mein karein* (let us love one another) comes up a child may well imagine a romance between the two characters!

The illustrations being more appealing than the poem itself, may encourage some children to appreciate art, draw, colour and so on.

Pedagogic Approach

The poem is by and large incomprehensible to children. It has little relation to children's experiential worlds. While they feel emotions like greed, anger, reifying these takes them away from the realm of lived experience. Words like *lobhi*, *kaami* and *krodhi* are difficult, particularly *kaami*, lustful. No child desires to shed anger/ greed/ ignorance and become 'virtuous' in the way portrayed. Words and phrases such as *shuddhtai*—purity, *shubh karm* – auspicious deeds, *chhod deinve moh ko* – let us renounce attachment – are very far from children's experiences or aspirations. Emotions and actions are spoken of in vast abstractions, very distant from concrete situations.

Rather than nurture creativity or imagination, the poem intends to inculcate blind obedience and imitation of high-sounding ideals. It depicts children praying for some incomprehensible



ideal of perfection. This 'perfection' or 'purification' requires shedding ignorance, attachment, emotions, vices and misdeeds, all spoken of in abstract terms. This is very likely to have a *negative psychological effect*, inculcating guilt, anxiety and confusion in sensitive children.

For children struggling 'how to' behave in acceptable ways, it is no help if the ideal presented is incomprehensible and unattainable. Rather than examine real life situations and ethical dilemmas, the poem presents a glorified ethical super-ideal, with no guidance about how to reach it. The poem is *overwhelmingly didactic* – its purpose is to show children what they should desire to be. While adult child relationships are not directly depicted, the device of putting adult words into children's mouths indicates a hierarchical relationship, with children being trained to fit into pre-set moulds.

The poem encourages no teaching-learning of ways to understand, deal with or express individual feelings and thoughts. It overlooks children's emotional lives, desires and aspirations. Genuine self-development requires observation and awareness of one's actual self, which is missing from the poet's horizon. Human beings experience various emotions, including 'negative' ones like anger and greed, and act from various motivations, not always noble or 'pure'. This fact requires to be accepted, before any realistic process of self-development can begin.

Such poems teach children to feel and behave in a mechanical way. Children are seen as passive, supposed to blindly accept and parrot certain aspirations and goals. Creative thinking, or construction of knowledge by the child, is nowhere part of the scenario.

The poem is not likely to be interesting or enjoyable to children. It is the sort of poem that children mug up because they have to, with no interest or comprehension. Such poems prompt children to dislike (Hindi) language, and literature.

Socio-Political Concerns and Perspectives

The poem is about a romanticized, unreal world. No social context is provided. No social or personal conflicts are mentioned. It pretends that every human being can attain a superhuman ideal, simply by praying. The content of this ideal is left vague.

The poem subtly inculcates middle class Brahmanical values. The language is close to Sanskrit, with many terms associated with Hindu scriptures. The illustration however shows children dressed in Western style--girl in frock and boy in shirt and pants. They seem to be urban children, transposed onto natural scenery for their morning prayers. Their posture, supposedly facing the rising sun with folded hands, is a gesture essentially associated with Hindu religious tradition. The illustration shows a girl and boy, but the exercises refer only to boys. No socio-political awareness is reflected in this poem: quite the opposite!

B. Analysis of Stories

GURUBHAKT AARUNI

Rajasthan State Board, Class 4

Literary Quality and Visual Aesthetics

The story is based on the theme of extreme obedience to adults, particularly Gurus: male teachers. It is set in some hazy past when Brahman (and Kshatriya) boys studied with their Guru in an Ashram or Gurukul. The story is not contextualized, no time period is given, nor is there any mention of wider society. The story has no reference to the children's daily lives.

The pace of the story seems haphazard as the main conflict, that of Aaruni's predicament, and his solving of the problem, is dealt with very quickly as if it is a small event, while the Guru finding the child and appreciating his obedience is described in detail.

The language used in the story is heavy, formal Hindi close to Sanskrit. Most children may be unable to understand the language, as it is far from spoken language. It is dry and uninteresting, unlikely to develop children's linguistic abilities or creativity.

No author is mentioned. It is a well-known story, which the team of writers have picked from somewhere, and perhaps adapted.

The illustrations tend to flatten out humanity by showing homogenized expressions. The five children shown in one illustration are with absolutely no differences in physique, face, dress or expression.

Pedagogic Approach

The story setting and time period are far from children's experiential worlds. However, many children may be facing similar expectations of obedience, from significant adults in their lives. This story provides them no option but to obey.

As with many other lessons in the Rajasthan board textbooks, this story's moral is explicitly spelt out. In fact, the moral seems far more important than the story. The story is written with the intention of conveying the dictum that children should obey adults to the maximum, even if it means extreme risk and discomfort.

Aaruni, the ideal child, is shown as completely obedient to his Guru. The Guru's ruthlessness

in sending a young child for a difficult task in inclement weather is not discussed. In fact, there are other versions of the story in which Aaruni resolves the conflict in a similar way, but for the benefit of the common people.

The author mentions that the Guru made children work hard. Adult child relationships are portrayed as hierarchical and authoritarianism. The lesson clearly shows adult ordering and children meekly following. The message conveyed is that because Aaruni followed the Guru's orders, he was blessed by the Guru and became a famous person. The natural world is shown as a problem, to be dominated by human beings.

Aaruni's intelligence and creative problem-solving ability are used entirely to serve and obey the Guru. Aaruni's obedience is highlighted and glorified, while his creative intelligence is ignored as a positive quality. Aaruni does not question broader goals, which are set by elders: he applies himself only to execute those goals. The emotions, struggle and inner turmoil Aaruni may have felt doesn't emerge. Even when the teacher praises his devotion and obedience, Aaruni's positive emotions are not explored.

The story has action and drama, which may interest children. However the overall hierarchical attitude and overwhelming emphasis on obeying adults may turn children off. Children aged 9-11 are usually trying to understand their relationships with adults and ways of coping with authority. A text such as this is unlikely to be appealing or find resonance in their consciousness.

On the whole the action taken by Aaruni is far-fetched, a glorified sacrifice, an over-expectation. For children who are forever expected to 'perform' – in various aspects of life

including exams – the story will inspire anxiety, guilt and fear. No child can actually live up to the exalted image shown in this story. Rather than make children obedient, such stories will encourage children to feel they are failures.

The story has two accompanying notes. One asks the teacher to discuss the ancient *guru-shishya* tradition and Ashram organization, while the other instructs them to make children read the lesson aloud, with intonation, and silently. The exercises do not encourage any active questioning or critical thinking.



The illustrations do not help build any deeper understanding of the subject matter, nor do they add any additional information. They are very unclear, hazy and misleading. One depicts Aaruni lying on the ground with clean clothes and an extremely pleasant expression on his face. The other shows the Guru as kind and affectionate, whereas in fact he is very thoughtless. He forgot about having sent young Aaruni away at dawn to brave the elements, remembering only as the day sets! This, for an adult, that too a teacher responsible for his wards' welfare, is highly irresponsible behavior.



Socio-Political Concerns and Perspectives

The story doesn't have even a single female character. Only boys dwell in the Ashram. There are no villagers shown, male or female. The Ashram is depicted as an entirely male world, which has no female counterpart.

Illustrations show boys with shaved heads, a representation commonly associated with Brahmins. The boys and Guru are wearing similar white cotton clothes, dhoti and short kurta. The setting is region neutral, but biased towards the culture of Hinduism. The setting is rural, although there is no depiction of rural life or people. Aaruni's quick thinking shows a relationship and understanding of nature, which are laudable, and may inspire some of the children who read the story.

SUNITA KI PAHIYA KURSI

NCERT, Class 4

Literary Style and Visual Aesthetics

The story has a clear plot, storyline and development of characters. The setting is a contemporary middle class urban home. The theme of the story is the feelings and capabilities of a differently able girl, and the sensitivity others have, or don't have and need to develop.

The language of the story is spoken Hindi and hence easy for Hindi-speaking children to follow. It is written in a lively style, and has likeable child characters; children are likely to find it interesting.

Although the writing shows individual style and clear points of view, no authorship has been assigned.

The illustrations are imaginative, with freshness and vitality, and likely to inspire children's creativity. Sketches help bring out nuances of characters and events, facial expressions, actions and body language. They depict a range of emotions and expressions, for instance Sunita's excitement at the beginning of the day, with outstretched arms and a happy expression; Amit is shown as upset when teased. The illustrations have been accorded sufficient space, proportionate to the text.

Pedagogic Approach

The story relates to children's experiential worlds. Sunita, Amit and Farida are the same age-group as Class 4 students, which will help students identify with the characters. Diverse possibilities within children's experiential worlds are well brought out: so different children may be able to relate to different aspects of the characters. For a child with disability, such a lesson may provide a rare opportunity to be heroine of a drama, in a positive and affirmative way. Amit is shown as a child teased for being short, who handles the situation with confidence. Farida is rebuked by her mother for asking questions, but keeps her curiosity alive, and finds a way to engage with Sunita. This story provides a window through which children can fulfill some of the curiosity they may feel when they see children who are different from themselves. It would help develop some understanding about the way other children lead their lives.

The story presents certain moral dilemmas, and helps arrive at strategies to deal with these, in a way that the whole situation shifts in a positive direction. Sunita does need

help, but she does not want people to extend more help than she needs. It is important that others develop this basic sensitivity, which requires observing and responding to the real needs of a differently able person. Too much help can feel demeaning, and leave the person dependent, rather than support her move towards greater autonomy.

Sunita's mother is shown as supportive of her independence. She promotes it actively, in a friendly and democratic manner. The shopkeeper seems sympathetic to Sunita, but exhibits a savior or rescuer kind of attitude, which is offensive to her.

The psychological effect of this story on children would largely be positive, since it presents an unusual peep into the lives of differently able children. The story has drama and action, with no place for pathos or false sentimentality. The children are portrayed as resilient, full of energy and life, playful and genuinely concerned about one another.

The text addresses only one type of emotion that differently able people might feel. There are many children who may feel frustrated, sad and negative about not being able to do something that others can do. Sunita's example may be inspiring for many children. However, the opportunity could have been used to convey to readers that there are many kinds and degrees of disability. Sunita's is a relatively mild form, but a quadriplegic, also wheelchair-bound, will be much less mobile than her, and less able to handle activities of daily living. An attendant is a basic necessity for many wheelchair-users, and going out on the road alone impossible, given also that most roads and markets have traffic. The roads and market here are shown with only pedestrians—an unreal depiction.

Socio-Political Concerns and Perspectives

Gender representations in the story are to some extent stereotypical. Women are shown as mothers, housewives and caregivers, with little individuality or concerns apart from family and home. Both the women, Sunita's and Farida's mothers, are depicted in stereotypical fashion, dressed in saris and blouse, bangles on their wrists.

The portrayal of Sunita, a girl with disability, as capable and independent, with a range of normal emotions, is extremely positive and enabling. Sunita is shown to be capable of managing things independently, and at the same time Amit is shown as helping her in appropriate ways, such as helping take her across the shop stairs. The illustrations showing



Sunita on a wheel chair during various events of the story are apt. The story may well help children who have not interacted with differently able children, to build empathy and a modicum of understanding about their feelings and situations.

At the same time, Sunita's independence at points is overdone, stemming perhaps from the writer's effort to be politically correct, without paying enough attention to the fact that a child on a wheelchair does have a real physical disability, and a right to certain clear forms of help from others. The writer may be imposing a new image of 'normality' which is actually a fresh expectation and pressure on the child with disability.

Sunita and Amit are Hindu and Farida a Muslim, going by their names. Thus there is representation of religious communities. In an effort to break stereotypical markers of religious affiliation, Farida is shown wearing a frock, just like Sunita; Farida's mother is wearing a sari, just like Sunita's mother. While this is a way positive attempt, there is a less positive angle to it: typically more Muslim women in India wear salwar kameez, while married Hindu women typically wear saris. If the artist had shown both women wearing salwar kameez, it would have highlighted a view of the 'norm' as what is typical to Muslims: whereas, as it is, with the sari depicted as norm, it is a norm with a Hindu tinge to it. This is a subtle point, yet significant, giving the wider ethos of Hindutva majoritarianism sweeping the country.

Some social conflicts are highlighted in the story – like the fact that people sometimes show unnecessary pity to differently abled individuals. The issue of teasing within the peer group has been well brought out. The teased child has been shown as able to overcome his feeling of hurt, and move on.

The story projects a world where most people are sympathetic to differently able people, which is not an entirely honest representation of reality. The concluding scene is overdone, with Amit climbing onto Sunita's wheelchair, and both racing fast on the road, Farida running alongside. While independence and fun are certainly positives, this depiction may be downright dangerous. Most children, particularly in urban India where the story is situated, will find it difficult, in any case, to relate to a road scene where there are no vehicles and children can run fearlessly!

SANTA CLAUS

Savio Publishers, Class 4

Literary Quality and Visual Aesthetics

Santa Claus intends to be a fictionalized portrayal of St Nicholas, whose character inspired the figure of Santa Claus. According to the textbook, Nicholas was a wealthy man, who right from boyhood gave charity gifts to the poor and needy. One day Nicholas overheard a starving girl, in a feudal family that used to be rich; he quietly gifts gold sticks to the family. He spends his life thus giving away what he has. The main theme is expended by the middle of the story. After this, the writer describes Christmas and Santa Claus, and notes that there is a God taking care of us. The plot of the story is disjointed and characterization unconvincing. Initially the feudal lord seems to have only one daughter, but later other daughters are vaguely mentioned. The young girl's emotions and thoughts are not depicted at all, apart from initial despair due to hunger. The time and setting of the story are blank.

Language used in the story is spoken Hindi, though somewhat stylized. The tone is flat and monotonous. Illustrations are colorful, but unimaginative. They depict modern urban households and dress, which are inappropriate. Several details are misleading and inaccurate, for instance Nicholas is described as a boy, but presented from the start as a full-grown man. Facial expressions are deadpan. The tearful starving girl child has full pink cheeks, and looks slightly uncomfortable rather than unhappy. The feudal lord seems unperturbed. Illustrations are cramped, and perspective false. Nicholas has the same expression, or rather absence of expression, in all three illustrations. The fourth illustration, of Santa Claus handing out gifts to three children, is stereotypical and has probably used clip art.

Pedagogic Approach

Many children celebrate Christmas, or see it celebrated, and are fascinated by the jolly, plump figure of Santa Claus, giving away gifts. However, the story gives no explanation for connecting St Nicholas with Santa Claus or with Christmas. St Nicholas, as shown in the illustration, is completely different from Santa Claus.

The main story is boring, alien and uninteresting for children. It fails to enter their experiential worlds and imaginative realms. It is patronizing and didactic, 'exposing' and differentiating the real from the unreal, according to adult definitions. For many children, Santa Claus is part of a make-believe world, a symbol of abundance who fulfils their wishes, a figure they outgrow as they become older. But the author reveals that a man dresses up as Santa Claus, thus breaking children's fond, harmless fantasy.

The story is written in an authoritative style, as if it is describing a historical event and personality. However, there are many versions to the Nicholas story. It would have been more interesting for children if they were apprised of this fact, and asked to gather, or even imagine, alternative versions.

The story presents the young girl's moral dilemma: her family may have to beg for food, since they have not had a morsel to eat for the past two days. The dilemma is resolved when Nicholas gives them some gold. The father feels no compunction about accepting this charity. The child is depicted as passive and helpless. The father preaches to her to be patient—which is very difficult for a hungry child, especially when there is no indication that her father is working to get some food. He is only praying. But according to his interpretation, God hears his prayers and sends Nicholas with gold for them! Children are shown at the mercy of adult expectations and interpretations, which they have to accept, whether logical or illogical.

The illustrations serve no educational purpose. They show the father daughter duo dressed in clean clothes, with curtains on the windows and solid furniture in the house—at a time when they are supposedly poor and starving. The father is shown as youthful, fit and healthy, so it is inexplicable that he is unable to earn a living and feed his daughters. The story discourages the idea of hard work and earning one's livelihood, rather than depending on charity.

Socio-Political Concerns and Perspectives

The story has female characters but they remain in the background. Most of the action is around Nicholas, and the second important character is the father. The girl child plays a role



in the beginning, but soon fades into the background. Other daughters remain invisible. All the female characters are passive and perform no major action. Illustrations too represent females as passive. Even in the fourth illustration which depicts contemporary Christmas, a boy stretches out his hand to receive a gift from Santa Claus, while a girl lurks behind him.

Class connotations are very clear in the story. Nicholas is shown as wealthy, with a personal treasury from which he can freely donate to needy people. He is nowhere shown earning a livelihood. The feudal lord is impoverished, but even when his children are starving he doesn't consider the option of working to earn. This attitude of his is shown as entirely reasonable, since his 'izzat' (respectability, status) lies in maintaining a façade of well-being. His class position resides in his refusal to take on paid work, as much as in the plush curtains, colored spectacles and expensive clothes he continues to maintain. Nicholas is sympathetic, probably a fellow-feeling born of class solidarity.

Poverty is completely misrepresented in this story: the real roots of poverty, hunger and starvation are nowhere explored or explained. The existence of social and economic inequalities and injustice, and the reasons thereof, are never mentioned.

The story promotes perpetuation of class hierarchies, and feudal values. It fails to bring out facts about links between affluence and poverty. Many persons labour all day and yet not have enough food to eat. A large number of Indian children belong to such laboring families and experience harsh poverty and malnutrition. They do not have miraculous saviours. It will be difficult for them to relate to the circumstances presented in the story. To children who face hunger as a part of their lives, the story is a utopian fantasy where some generous rich person donates gold. But still, nobody donates to the genuinely poor. Rather, the kind of charity shown here keeps the rich rich, and the poor are nowhere in the picture.

Praying is projected as a strategy to solve problems of temporary poverty, faced by a traditionally wealthy family. It is implied that through prayer a wealthy man's problems will be solved, with no effort or hard work. The family is supposed to be Christian, but there is nothing to indicate a distinctive Christian culture or belief system.

Neither the text nor exercises explore issues related to class, gender, religious affiliation, nor do they help promote respect for deprived people, and their independent agency. Nowhere are children encouraged to contextualize the story. Although the incidents are in the past, there is no indication how many centuries or millennia ago the events may have occurred. No help is provided to children for understanding either the historical past, or contemporary realities.

Homely Females and War-like Males

Gender Analysis of Rajasthan State Textbooks

This paper is a revised version of the paper we circulated at a seminar on 'Rajasthan ki Nai Paathyacharya aur Paathypustak Nirman Prkriya' (New Curriculum and Textbook Production Process in Rajasthan), held at Rajasthan University, Jaipur, on 18 Dec, 2009.

The Broad Picture: About the Rajasthan State Textbooks

For this paper, we have examined Hindi Language textbooks for Classes 3, 4 and 5. These have a large number of texts—29 lessons in Class 3 textbook, and 31 lessons each in textbooks of Classes 4 and 5--making a total of 91 lessons. The lessons include 33 stories, 28 poems, 5 biographies, 6 plays, 1 on riddles and 18 information-based texts. These textbooks go out to very large numbers of schoolchildren—the print orders are 4 lakh, 2.3 lakh and 3.5 lakh (for Classes 3, 4 and 5 respectively).

Random reading of the textbooks indicates dominance of upper-caste, middle-class Hindu perspectives, articulated in a patronizing way, with adult rather than children's perspectives. Most lessons portray an unreal, glorified India, past and present, marked by an absence of social conflicts or movements for social change.

Examining Gender

To study gender implications of these textbooks, we have adopted a qualitative approach, combined with quantitative content-analysis techniques.¹ Within an overall analysis of situations, characters, plots and themes, we will examine the presence and visibility of female and male characters, gender stereotyping, gender equality, women's agency, and

notions of ideal family and social structures. Our analytical tools are drawn from critical social science and feminist theory, educational theory related to pedagogy and child development, as well as content analysis methods.

PRESENCE AND VISIBILITY OF GIRLS AND WOMEN

Counts of female and male characters in the texts, and illustrations, indicate a clear imbalance in ratio of females to males. The Class 3 textbook has 27% female characters in all lessons combined, Class 4 33% and Class 5 a mere 18%. If we combine the figures for the three textbooks, we get a percentage of 25% of total characters as female.

Table 1: Number of Female and Male Characters in Textbooks:

Textbook	Total characters	Male characters	Female characters
Class 3	67	49 (73%)	18 (27%)
Class 4	46	31 (67%)	15 (33%)
Class 5	74	61 (82%)	13 (18%)
Total	187	141 (75%)	46 (25%)

The percentage of females in illustrations in all three textbooks combined is a mere 24%. Thus, there is acute imbalance in the visual representation of females vis-à-vis males.

Table 2: Number of Female and Male Characters Illustrated in Textbooks:

Textbook	Total number of characters in the illustrations	Number of male characters in illustrations	Number of female characters in illustrations
Class 3	299	227 (76%)	72 (24%)
Class 4	139	105 (75%)	34 (25%)
Class 5	151	118 (78%)	33 (22%)
Total	589	450 (76%)	139 (24%)

If we count illustrations which have a) only male characters, b) only female characters, and c) male and female characters, another interesting finding emerges. We find there are only 3 illustrations in which only females appear, out of a total of 156 illustrations! Most illustrations, that is, 65%, have only male characters, while 33% illustrations have both male and female characters.

Table 3: Number of Illustrations with Males/ Females and Males/ Females

Textbook	Total number of illustrations	Illustrations with only male characters	Illustrations with both female & male characters	Illustrations with only female characters
Class 3	67	45 (67%)	22 (33%)	0
Class 4	53	31 (58%)	20 (38%)	2 (4%)
Class 5	36	25 (69%)	10 (28%)	1 (3%)
Total	156	101 (65%)	52 (33%)	3 (2%)

GENDER STEREOTYPES: ROLES, IDENTITIES AND ATTRIBUTES

To identify extent of gender stereotyping, we have examined representation of characters in literary items—largely stories, and a few poems and biographical sketches.

Work Roles: Women and Men

Women are essentially shown as wives, mothers and household drudges, and some grandmothers. Women are responsible for household chores, particularly cooking and serving. Even the story of an activist woman, Imarti Bai, begins with the sentence, “Imarti Bai was working in her house.”² Housework is attributed to women, as a given, no questions asked.

A number of women are queens, yet they are projected primarily as wives and mothers, never as rulers. As with most other women in the text, their lives are circumscribed within the household, and their major preoccupation is the welfare of sons and husbands.



Sukh Ka Dwar, Rajasthan State Board Class 5

Not one text or illustration depicts males engaged in household work. Men are traders, businessmen, kings and princes, soldiers, teachers and religious heads. There is a fleeting reference to a woman scientist, Kalpana Chawla, but an entire lesson about a male scientist, DS Kothari, presented as a ‘Vigyanik Sant’, Saint-Scientist. Lessons on crafts of Rajasthan give no idea of the extent of women’s involvement and skills as craftswomen, although illustrations show women and men. Farmers are all-male: in text and visuals. Only at one place is a woman shown in the agricultural fields--she has brought food for the men to eat.

The texts have an overwhelming presence of soldiers, and several illustrations of men in uniform, marching or in the battle-field, and similar groups of boys marching, in uniform—miniature soldiers or soldiers-in-the-making.

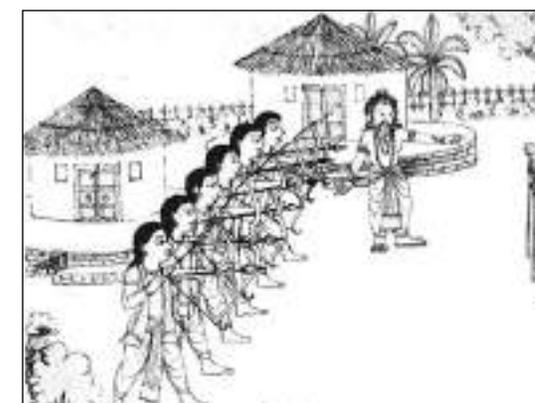
A number of statesmen are depicted including Gandhi, Chandrashekhar Azad and Rajendra Prasad, but there is no corresponding depiction of a female political figure. In biographies, women are mentioned only as mother or wife; in the lesson on Gandhi, Kasturba is not even named, she is just referred to as 'Ba'.

There is only one female teacher throughout the three textbooks, compared to ten male teachers. Many 'Gurus' are depicted—a term used interchangeably with 'teacher', but implying only male teacher. These gurus are invariably projected as wise and worthy of praise and adulation. Moreover Ram, Rahim and Isa are exhorted as pinnacles of wisdom, givers of knowledge. There are no female characters to match the stature of any of these. Visual depictions emphasize these distinctions.

Girls and Boys: Skewed from Childhood

There are several visual depictions of girls in households, lighting diyas at Diwali, swinging on the rope-swing, receiving gifts at Christmas, or playing. A group of schoolgirls is depicted in a classroom, and there are a couple of images of individual schoolgirls wearing school uniforms. A number of girls are shown being taught by adult males—either father or male teacher—in class, or in a home setting.

Boys are depicted frequently in traditional teacher-student relationship within a Gurukul setting. Luv and Kush are presented as child prodigies. Aaruni is the quintessential obedient child; Shraavan Kumar the quintessential son who worshipped his parents. Dhruv is fearless and virtuous: he goes into the forest and undertakes penance, due to which Ishwar, God, grants him a boon. The brave boys are framed in ancient or medieval historical and mythological narratives, a context in which no brave girls are depicted. The stray instances of brave girls dwell on one exemplary action, rather than the girls' qualities as such. Thus Kalibai, a tribal schoolgirl, sacrifices her life to release her school teacher, tied to a police vehicle (in *Gurubhakt Kalibai*). Roshni, in the story *Roshni*, runs out of the house to rescue her baby goat, and is injured by bomb-



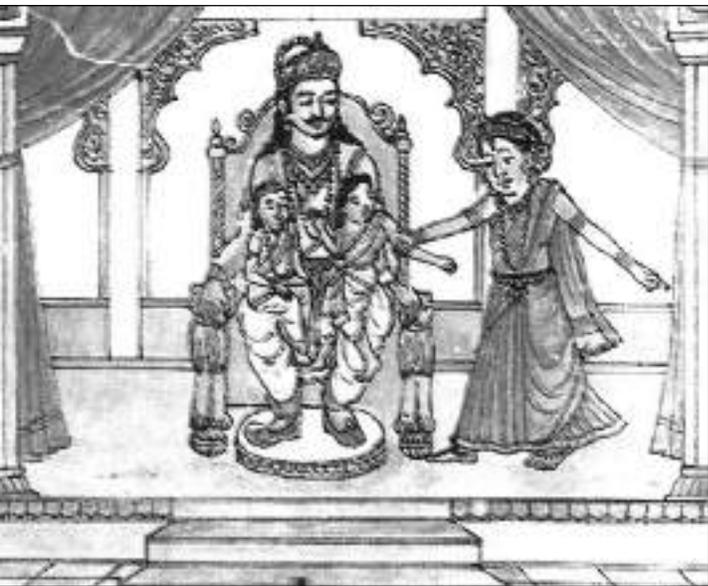
Stereotypical male and female images in *Hamein Jalashay Lagte Pyaare*, Rajasthan Class 3 and *Safalta ki Kunji*, Rajasthan Class 5

shelling from across the Kashmir border. *Buddhimatta* is a fairly convincing portrayal of a working-class girl, Sohni, a rag-picker who aspires to study, but her role in getting two terrorists arrested is highly unrealistic.

The lack of adult women in different occupations and diverse personalities means that there is a paucity of role models for girls in these textbooks. There is a contradiction in depiction of girls as hard-working and studious, while women are shown almost exclusively within the household. One wonders whether girls reading these books will get puzzled. Although they are being exhorted to study, there are no longer term goals in sight. As they grow up, are they supposed to adopt the pre-ordained roles of womanhood: wives, mothers and household drudges.

PATRIARCHAL SOCIAL STRUCTURE: NO QUESTIONS ASKED!

The stories are set within patriarchal family structures. Patriarchy is projected as a natural way of life. There is no questioning of the notion of the archetypal family, or depiction of alternatives. A single woman is nowhere depicted: a woman has to be married, and that may even be in a bigamous situation!



The 'bad' queen drags the other queen's son away from the father (King's) lap in *Atal Dhruva*, Rajasthan Class 3

In *Atal Dhruv*, the king's two wives are key characters. There is no framing of bigamy as a historical situation, no information that it is illegal in modern times. Reading this story, we step back into another world, feudal, monarchical, patriarchal, and completely mythologized: a world in which God comes and stands before a boy-child, resolving all his family problems, simply because the boy is so virtuous. The story plays out the tension between 'good' woman-and-son, and 'bad' woman-and-son. The 'good' woman is shown as submissive, silent, innocent and homely, while the 'bad' woman is cruel, wicked, manipulative and worldly-wise. Children are all highly obedient, striving to live up to values set by elders.

Women and children are framed within the patriarchal family, community or nation—to which they are totally loyal and committed, for which they continually perform various services. In times of urgent need, they step out to perform daring acts. These acts are

legitimized since they are essentially in the service of a larger patriarchal institution. There is no question of transgressing set social boundaries, for any other purpose: individual desire, aspiration or ideas. Thus Ganga ('*Ganga ki Chaturai*', Class 4) is intelligent and quick-witted, but uses these solely in the service of her husband and sons.

Men are generally lead protagonists. Even in the few stories with lead female characters, they are framed within a patriarchal ethos. *Naya Utsah* has a little girl, Mohini, who is physically disabled. The story focuses on the male teacher who 'rescues' her by exhorting her to continue her studies. It doesn't dwell upon the child's feelings, or provide any realistic understanding of what the disability means to her, and forms of support she may require. The representation of disability is tokenistic. In '*Gurubhakt Kalibai*', Kalibai's character is hardly developed, while her teacher Sengabhai is at the centre of action. Kalibai is active only at one point, when she cuts the rope dragging Sengabhai behind a vehicle.

Several illustrations show women as passive, helpless and dependent on men or boys, who are active and helpful, for instance a boy helping an elderly lady into a bus, or firemen rescuing a screaming girl from a burning house. In *Buddhimatta* Sohni receives an award for bravery, but the visual depiction portrays a male-dominated scenario, with males on stage and an overwhelmingly male audience. Audience seating arrangement is sex-segregated, men prominently placed, and women tucked away in a corner.



Buddhimatta, Rajasthan Class 5

Illustrations throughout the textbooks show women shown wearing saris or ghaghra choli with dupattas, and often jewelry, while girls wear frocks or school uniforms. Only in one illustration is there a woman without her head covered. This one is a concession to 'modernity', although within limits--she is shown wearing a sari, accompanied by a man, the reformer Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, and she is shown throughout as dependent on others. Men are shown wearing a range of clothes--dhoti kurta and turbans, to more contemporary clothes like shirt, pants, suit with ties etc. Their appearance shows them to be assertive and self-assured.

WOMEN AS AGENTS OF CHANGE

Female protest is interpreted in ways that suit the interests of maintaining gender hierarchies and stereotypes. Women never raise a voice against patriarchy within family

or society. Issues in contemporary Rajasthan, such as boy preference, female feticide, domestic violence, sexual harassment and so on are completely missing.

The depiction of girls' or women's activism is essentially in the context of respect for elders such as parents and teachers, or husbands. Marginally, an individual girl or woman is shown protesting for 'other' issues. Collective



Imarti Bai, Rajasthan Class 3

struggle is never depicted, only a heroine-type figure who engages in spontaneous action, for which she is instantaneously punished, usually by death. After Imarti Bai's head is cut off because she protests cutting of trees, the story glorifies the king who bans tree-felling after Imarti Bai's martyrdom. She and a number of other villagers inspired by her become fodder for the monarchical state, whose legitimacy is never questioned.

In the case of *Roshni*, where the girl child attempts to save her own mother and a baby goat, the attempt is trivialised as love for the animal, a soft feminine image, rather than earning the stature of bravery. In this story, war is depicted as a way of life, which civilians have to simply live with. Stories like *Rannkshetra* (Class 4) depict a world where women cease to exist, that of a militarized war situation. The enemies as well as patriotic



Rannkshetra, Rajasthan Class 4

Indian soldiers--the attackers and the defenders--are men. It is a world suffused by male violence, which frames the lives of all, especially girls and women, who have no constructive role to play, except when they help their men.

Roshni is the virtually only girl in the entire three textbooks who is a Muslim, and Kalibai is the only one who is a tribal. They are depicted as exceptional characters, not representatives of either Muslim girls generally, or tribal girls in general. Mohini, who has an accident which disables her, seems to deserve help only because she is the best student in her class. It is as if a Muslim, a tribal, or a disabled girl is so negative, that in order to salvage her image, it must be balanced by a highly positive and unusual attribute. Then, she may deserve the company of the exalted: the boys, the men, the brave, the good...!

Women are not shown in groups at all – as if women’s groups do not exist. Apart from the three women or girls who take any action in the public sphere--Imarti Bai, Kalibai and Sohni--there is no female political agency. There is no hint of women’s participation in politics, whether in Panchayats or higher echelons of governance. Women’s movements are blanked out.

Male groups are shown several times in stories and poems, at home, in the fields or market, gurukul or army, and so on. But there is no sense of any women’s collectivity, whether in everyday or public life. Women are not part of the workforce. They step out of the home, only the service of families, elders or, perhaps, communities. There is no notion of movement or aspiration towards equality, justice or freedom. The actual conditions of inequality, injustice and lack of freedom are never mentioned, named or articulated or made visible. Several poems, like *Sukhdham*, depict India as an idealized world with no divisions, or social conflict. Going by these textbooks, the women’s movement may never have occurred in India. There is no move to deepen democracy, or overcome patriarchy. India is depicted as one seamless whole, in which patriarchy co-exists with a jumble of monarchy, feudalism and capitalism, ruled uncontested by wealthy men, male politicians and teachers; women and girls exist, with the sole purpose of perpetuating the status quo.

Conclusions and Ways Forward

We hope this monograph raises many questions. If so, there is need for further discussion, interaction, dialogue and workshops. We need to think—many of us—about the salient issues, raised here. There are more questions in these pages, than definitive answers.

This work was initiated as one step towards the creation of a Centre for Children's Literature (CCL), at present a nebulous entity, but envisaged as having, over time, an independent institutional setup. CCL is developing under the aegis of the Sir Ratan Tata Trust and Eklavya, Bhopal.

Sampurna has helped house the present study. It has been a challenging task for us, and exciting as well. We have stepped often into uncharted territory and come up with new findings—expected and unexpected, surprising and even shocking. Our critique is meant to be constructive: to help pave the way towards increasingly appropriate, progressive children's literature to be included in our school textbooks.

We would love to have responses, agreement and disagreement. We would love to engage with you—fellow-educationists, teachers, writers, illustrators, children, students, parents, teacher-trainees—in dialogue and discussion.

The Framework of Analysis may be used to analyse any other language textbooks, or particular text items. The analysis of Hindi textbooks can be extended and expanded to cover detailed assessments of many different text items, or to go into particular issues in greater detail... or to look at textbooks being used in different school grades.

Your inputs will help extend this work. We look forward to having our own understandings enriched, through your involvement and interventions. Most of all, we look forward to ever-widening circles where such issues are taken seriously, and collective efforts made to improve the educational literature created for schoolchildren.

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