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## Gender Discrimination in the Primary School English Language Textbooks in Tamil Nadu

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### ABSTRACT

*For a great majority of school-going children, as also for teachers, school textbooks are the only accessible and affordable resource for education. Thus, the textual material that is developed for the school-going children is of paramount importance in education. It is the textbook that they are exposed to in the classroom, and the teacher conveys its meaning and interpretation, while embossing his/her own ideas on the minds of children, who are yet in the formative stage. This is one of the earliest and most important influences on the young, growing minds. School textbooks and curriculum influence gender roles of students immensely. This paper explores the English language textbooks taught in Government primary schools in Tamil Nadu through a gender sensitive perspective. It is quite clear from the analysis of the textbooks that despite an explicit policy of gender sensitization of school curriculum, gender stereotypes and gender bias still exists. It points to the need of preparing gender sensitive textbook material based on feminist knowledge base.*

Key words: School textbooks, Socialization, Gender stereotypes, Gender bias, Gender roles.

In *Sexual/Textual Politics* Toril Moi states that the “principal objective of feminist criticism has always been political: it seeks to expose, not to perpetuate, patriarchal practices.” (Moi, 1985. 2001: Preface). Given the gender bias of school curricula, one of the prime aims of feminist curriculum practice has been to challenge and change the content of taken-for-granted school knowledge(s) (Coffey

and Delamont, 2000:38). Feminist educational thinking closely scrutinizes the way in which gender stereotypes pervade curricula, syllabi and teaching materials, how schools, colleges and universities perpetuate stereotypes, the link between education and gender conceptions of society, the family and the economy. While the academic establishment in India is slowly taking note of these

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developments, a lot remains to be said about the actual rhetoric and practices of educational discourse.

The National Curriculum Framework (2005) document recognized that “we must use textbooks as one of the primary instruments for equality, since for a great majority of school-going children, as also for teachers, it is the only accessible and affordable resource for education” (Panday, 2004).

The textual material that is developed for the school-going children is of paramount importance in education. It is the textbook that they are exposed to in the classroom, and the teacher conveys its meaning and interpretation, while embossing his/her own ideas on the minds of children, who are yet in the formative stage. This is one of the earliest and most important influences on the young, growing minds.

It is necessary and relevant to study and understand how gender is depicted in primary school textbooks, because by age seven, and perhaps as early as age four, children begin to understand about the basic concept of self. Gender Schema Theory suggests that youngsters develop a sense of femaleness and maleness based on gender stereotypes and organize their behaviour around them (Ben, 1981, 1983, 1984; Eagly and Wood, 1999).

American feminists like Elaine Showalter argue that women and men write and read differently since the

contexts of their lives are different. Showalter says, in many educational settings the experiences of women and the issues that concern them are often ignored or trivialized by teachers and by curricular materials (Tierney, 2008:555).

Firoz Bakht Ahmed (2006) notes that since 1982-83, the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) has been laying stress on removing gender disparities – specifically emphasizing the elimination of gender stereotypes and gender biases from textbooks. He observes a general slow reduction in gender bias is discernible in the typical “second generation” study conducted at least a decade after the “first generation” research. But Ahmed’s overall conclusion is that “Despite the NCERT having developed a set of guidelines for the elimination of gender stereotyping in textual material and the same disseminated to the authors and publishers, not much has changed” (Quoted in Blumberg, 2007).

According to Noopur (1999:161), “The government of Tamil Nadu, and the Gujarat State Board Textbooks revised their books, and the element of gender bias has become negligible, if any.” This paper seeks to explore English language textbooks taught in Government primary schools in Tamil Nadu through a gender sensitive perspective and to know if stereotypes or gender bias still exists, since it is a hidden obstacle on the road to gender equality in education.

Along with online readers (Tamil Nadu is the only state in the country to publish textbooks from 1 to 12th standards on the web-site) millions of students are exposed to these textbooks which are predominant teaching resources.

The content analysis of textbooks examined two main criteria; the personnel involved in the development process and the actual content.

### Personnel Involved in Textbook Development

Personnel involved in the process of textbook production were the authors, artists, consultants, editors and state resource group members. Personnel involved in the production of Standard I English textbook include two consultants, four authors and four artists. For Standard II it is one consultant, six authors, two artists and one layout artists. For Standard III the personnel involved include a chairperson, a reviewer and an editor,

seven teachers and three artists. For Standard IV the personnel involved include 9 authors, one artist and four state resource group members.

The percentage of women involved in the book development process was 44.44. The percentage of women involvement in Standard I textbook preparation was 40% , Standard II was 10 % , Standard III was 70% and Standard IV was 57.14%. According to a study cited by UNESCO (Blumberg, 2007:10), “There is no correlation between the sex of the author and the level of gender fairness promoted in the texts”, but it states that higher levels of patriarchy in a society seem to be associated with more intensely negative depiction of females. Subsequent analysis of textbooks provides a similar conclusion in the present study too.

### Gender Division of Labour

The essential biological sexual division of labour applies only to a

**Table 4.1: Personnel Involved in Textbook Development**

Personnel involved	STD-I			STD-II			STD-III			STD-IV			Total		
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
Consultants	1	1	2	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	1	3
Authors	2	2	4	5	1	6	1	6	7	4	5	9	12	14	26
Artists	3	1	4	3	-	3	2	-	2	-	1	1	8	2	10
Chairperson	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	0	1
Reviewer/ Editor	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	0	1	1
State Resource group members	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	4	2	2	4
Total	6	4	10	9	1	10	3	7	10	6	8	14	25	20	45
Percentage	60	40	100	90	10	100	30	70	100	42.86	57.14	100	55.56	44.44	100

small group of reproductive labour, namely pregnancy, child birth and breast feeding. Those schools of thought which regarded the gender division of labour as natural beyond these areas are essentialist and largely conservative, whereas most feminist and other progressive analyses regard the gender division of labour as socially constructed. The significant contribution that women make to the economy and to the well being of their families is all too often ignored. Studies have shown those women's reproductive roles that involve nurturing, caring and sympathizing is devalued across occupations. Women's participation in economic activities involves a substantial amount of unpaid labour; overt participation in the labour market or in what is declared to be "economic activity" does not capture the full extent of women's work. Many unpaid household-based activities of women are not simply those related to social reproduction, but very clearly economic in nature. For example among women's unpaid domestic work include free collection of fuel, wood for household consumption. Activities related to food processing, such as husking and grinding grain, other unpaid activities such as maintaining kitchen gardens and looking after livestock and poultry, etc. These are all economic activities, which in developed societies are typically recognized as such because they are increasingly delegated away by women in households and

performed through paid contracts, thereby becoming marketed services.

Girls also represent a lower earning capability than boys. This is, of course, largely due to inherited work patterns between gender roles where women are considered as the 'other' in a patriarchal society. No economic value is given to the work which girls do at home as surrogate mothers and care-givers, or what they contribute through their labour to the domestic and farm economy.

The concept and spreading of sexism takes its root from the negative representation of women in textbooks as only mothers, wives and low-status workers. The majority of girls in schools internalize these stereotypical female behaviour role models as depicted in the textbooks and as women they neither question the unequal gender division of labour at home nor the concept of the so-called gender-appropriate jobs (Tuwer, Theresa, Maria Antonitte Sossu, 2008).

A total number of 31 occupations were found in the textbooks. Professional roles comprise the first kind of stereotypes observed. The nurses and teachers in the textbooks were consistently women, while doctors, police officers, post persons, pilots, drivers, carpenters and soldiers were all men. These textbooks reinforce the stereotypical image that men dominate the public sphere and women the private sphere. Nursing and teaching are the only paid work done by women other than a woman

**Table 4.2: Gender stereotypes about occupational and domestic roles**

<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>
Vegetable seller (1)	Teacher (10)
Fruit seller (1)	Queen (1)
Teacher (2)	Gardening (house garden) (3)
Farmer (4)	Sweet seller (1)
Leader (1)	Nurse (1)
Driver (1)	Sweeping (1)
Doctor (1)	Cooking (2)
Carpenter (1)	Washing (1)
Professional Cook (1)	Packing (1)
Pilot (1)	Fetching water (2)
Policeman (2)	Making tea (1)
Postman (2)	
Soldier (1)	
Tailor (2)	
Singer (1)	
Autorickshaw driver (1)	
Hunter (1)	
Head Master (2)	
Captain (1)	
Computer Operator (1)	
Washing (1)	
Boatman (1)	
Snake Charmer (1)	
Ice Cream seller (1)	
Bangle seller (1)	
Gardener (Professional) (1)	
Cleaning plate (1)	
Fisherman (2)	

selling sweets. “Women’s potential for excelling in “non-traditional” endeavours receives scanty mention in educational materials. Materials rarely picture women as managers, pilots, lawyers, scientists, doctors or heads of states,” (UNESCO, 2004). Based on the views of primary education experts, a 1986 UNESCO report entitled *The Education of Girls in Asia and the Pacific* concludes that curricula and materials reinforce the stereotype of dependent and exclusively domestic roles for women. These limited views have been a guiding principle in the treatment of female pupils. As a result, at both the pre-school and primary school level, girls lack opportunities to develop spatial skills and perform weakly in technical areas, mathematics and the sciences.

When women are shown in unpaid jobs like sweeping, cooking, washing, packing, fetching water, making tea and looking after children, the only gender sensitive image is a boy cleaning a vessel and helping his mother along with his sister (Lesson 7, Standard I, p.60). Unpaid domestic work everywhere is regarded as women’s work, even when they are important they are often devalued and unacknowledged. Food has to be cooked, the children are to be fed, clothes have to be washed and mended, water and firewood have to be collected, the cattle have to be looked after... all these are time-consuming activities. But the long hours and hard work

that go into these are undervalued and unrecognized (Noopur, 1999:18).

The gender division of labour in paid work takes the form of horizontal and vertical occupational segregation, with women confined to particular types of work and at lower levels. It seems that the textbooks perpetuate this image, for example among the twelve teachers shown in the textbooks, all ten are women but the only head teacher (Head Master) is interestingly a man. These images give the message that ‘glass ceilings’ which are invisible barriers are preventing women’s upward mobility in professions. Studies also show that a gendered division of labour exists within the teaching profession (Acker, 1994). In principle, ‘teaching is a career in which women and men enjoy equal opportunities’ (Measor and Sikes, 1992:111). However the numbers of women securing senior teaching posts remain disproportionately low (Acker, 1989 and 1994; Bell and Chase, 1993; Boulton and Coldron, 1998; De Lyon and Mignioulo, 1989). Thus these textbooks are not only reinforcing stereotypes but also hierarchies, power relations and resultant domination between men and women.

### **Gender Difference in Games**

It is through games that children learn about their world and acquire key social, intellectual, language and motor skills. Children’s games are not like adults games. Their impact on the mind is deeper. The educator

## Identify



Driver



Doctor



Teacher



Carpenter



Farmer



Nurse



Cook



Pilot



Policeman



Postman



Soldier



Tailor

**Competency:** Gives the words relating to occupation. (5.4)

**Note to the teacher:** Show the pictures related to different occupations and their related places.

and philosopher Maria Montessori said that children learn through play. “Play is child’s work”. Children’s games refer to an extremely varied range of activities which provide to the child a means of defining the world.

Games and play activities have a significant role in shaping children’s

attitude and lifelong orientation towards objects and social processes. It is important that parents should expose their children to the full range of experiences related to playing. Both indoor and outdoor games experiences are important for children’s development. Outdoor

areas are ideal places for children to engage in merry games with sand, water, paint and other art and craft activities. The outdoor activities present more opportunities for children to engage in active games, important for the development of key motor skill such as running, balancing, chasing, throwing and catching. Outdoor games also offer children opportunity to explore their environment in relationship to themselves. Outdoor active games can be intensely stimulating and creates opportunities for children to learn about and develop self-control. Active games not only promote good health and physical development but also provide children the opportunity to develop essential skills that will help them in their social interactions with peers.

Research shows (Kane 2006, Messner, 2000) both parents and non-parents tend to purchase gender-stereotyped toys for children especially boys. Girls have more doll, doll houses, musical items and miniature domestic items (e.g., irons, microwaves, kettle etc.). Little boys get dirty, fight and play with cars, guns and trains, while little girls were given dolls and play at being housewives and mothers. There is also imbalance in the price of toys for boys and girls. Khale and Meece opines that parents can increase achievement in science by providing their daughters with science-related experiments at home, toys that are mechanical in nature and science related

excursions (Khale and Meece,1994). Researchers have focused on the influence of the social environment on children's mathematics achievement. Very early on boys are given the chance to tinker with toys or objects (for example, building blocks, racing cars and simple machines) that involve many principles inherent in mathematics and science. Girls are often denied these experiences, so they enter mathematics and science classrooms feeling insecure about their abilities. Hammrich recommend to parents that they should provide girls with puzzles, building blocks and teach them common household tools as prerequisite skills needed for science (Hammrich, 1997). In a study conducted by Ashton (1978) among 3-5 year old children who read gender biased or unbiased children's picture books, it was reported that children who read biased books later made stereotypical toy choices.

In my analysis of English textbooks from Standard I to IV, it can be seen that textbooks reinforce gender stereotypes regarding games. Boys are shown in outdoor games and activities that include more physical activity, team work and higher level of competition like football, cricket, hockey, etc. Team leadership, management, group leadership and tasks that involve physical strength are seen as men's domain, and these are reflected in these gender stereotyped plays. While girls are shown in more indoor games and which are more sedentary



**Table 4.3: Gender Difference in Games**

<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
Throwing ball	Throwing ball
Kicking ball	Playing with sand
Badminton	Blindfolding
Cricket	Hopping
Chess	Chess
Carrom	Carrom
Football	Running
Marble	Skipping
Running	Playing with fan
Jumping	Turning round
Hockey	Building sand castle
Tennis	Hop scotch
Playing with top	Drawing
Painting	Clay modelling
Making toys with clay	Pebble game
See-saw	See-saw
Kite making	Kite making.
Playing with top	
Kabadi	
Bowler	
Batsmen	
Wicket keeper	

or require less physical activities like blind folding, playing with pebbles, playing with sand and drawing. There are also gender stereotyped games and activities associated with girls like hopping, skipping, hop scotch etc., depicted in these textbooks. The books also reinforce gender-specific teams where boys and girls play differently, instead of promoting healthy inter-gender interaction. Very few games like chess, carom, kite making, clay modelling are depicted wherein both girls and boys participate together. By perpetuating

gender stereotyped games and activities textbooks are promoting gender discrimination and gender inequality giving the message that girls and boys are having different gender roles.

Simone de Beauvoir (1997) has analysed at length how women come to internalize and live out feminine attributes – including passivity. In *The Second-Sex*, she writes that the passivity which is the essential characteristic of the ‘feminine’ women is a destiny imposed upon her by her teachers and by society she writes:

The great advantage enjoyed by the boy is that his mode of existence in relation to others leads him to assert his subjective freedom. His apprenticeship for life consists in free movement towards the outside world; he contends in hardihood and independence with other boys, he scorns girls. Climbing trees, swimming, fighting with his companions, facing them in rough games, he is aware of his body as a means for dominating nature and he takes pride in his muscles as in his sex; in games, sports, fights, trials of

strength, he finds a balanced exercise of his powers... he undertakes, he invents, he dares... it is by doing that he creates his existence, both in one and the same action (Beauvoir, 1997:307).

Simone de Beauvoir states that on the contrary, a girl is not given the freedom to grasp and discover the world around her. The stories she hear, the books she read and all her experiences condition her to accept superiority of boys. She is shaped by social institutions to fit social roles 'voluntarily'. She does not dare to

## Match me



Hockey



Cricket



Football



Tennis



Carrom



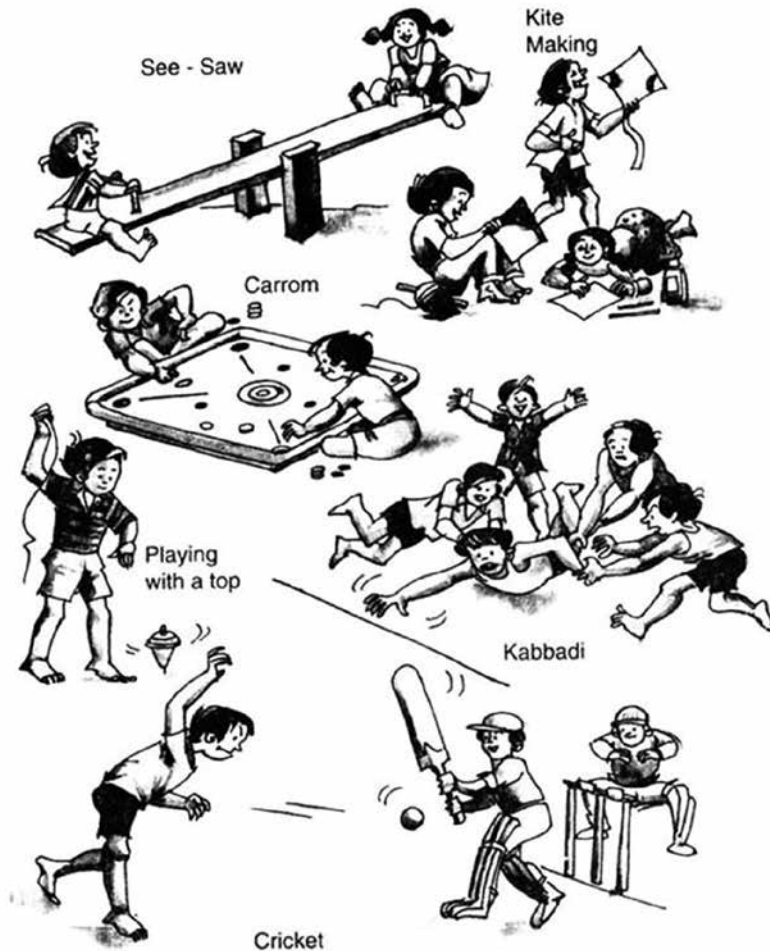
Chess

**Competency:** Gives the words relating to games. (5.4)

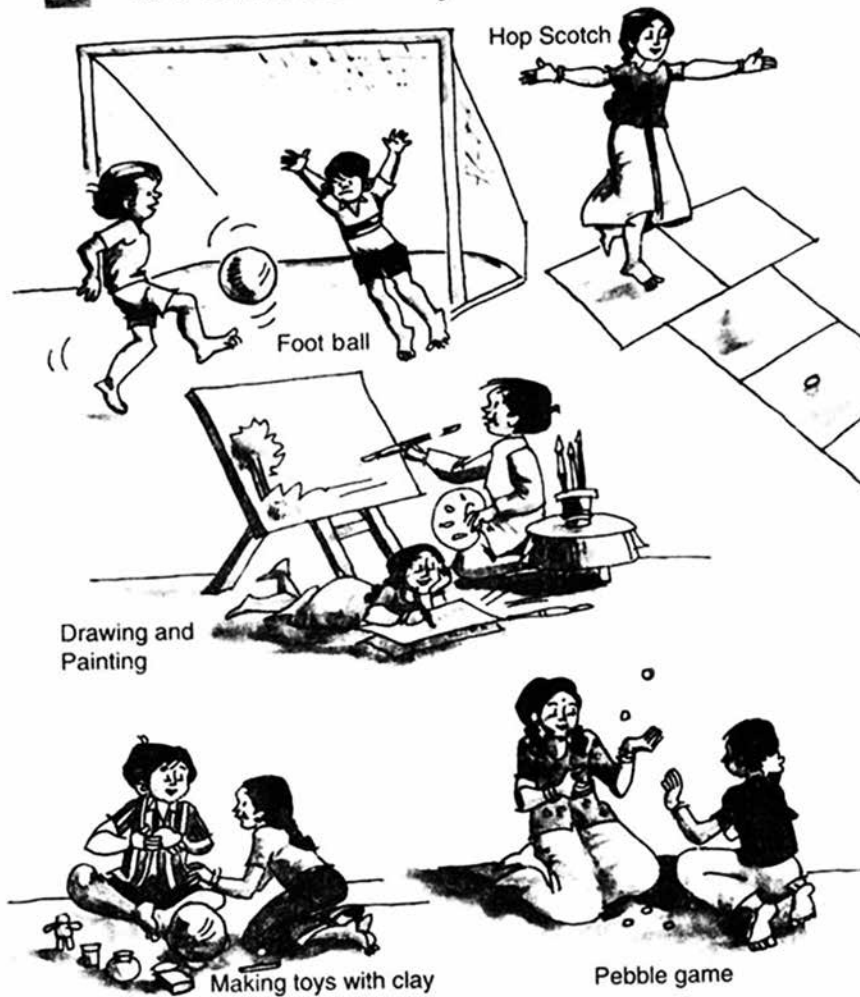
**Note to the teacher:** Say the name of the game and show the relevant pictures. Ask the children which game they are interested in.

affirm herself as subject but consider it is her womanly destiny and resigns herself to socially accepted roles. Simone de Beauvoir sums up her ideas thus “one is not born a woman, one becomes a woman” (Beauvoir, 1997:300). Gender is thus not a biological essence, something natural or innate but a social construct, a learned behaviour, a product of language culture and its constitutions. Kate Millet, an

American feminist, writer and activist observes how patriarchy maintains power largely by ideological means, winning consent through the socialization of both sexes to sexual inequalities of temperament, role and status (See Moi, 1985:29) such constructs disempower women. Male-dominated culture and patriarchal values idealise women into powerlessness (Das, 2003:171).



## 15 It's Time for Play!



### Gender Specific Dress

A person's sex is determined by biology whereas gender is constructed by socio-cultural factors. For example in the western world, trousers were considered to be male clothing before the world wars; however, when

women started working in factories because of paucity of labour, they started wearing trousers. Today, trousers are gender neutral and not masculine (RGNIYD, 2009). Socialization is inevitable but it is not a constant. For example, it is not

possible to say now that girl children are always given frilly clothes to wear while boys are given shorts and clothes that allow free play. The contemporary generation is usually dressed in gender neutral clothes. But the books under review give a totally different story. They still show stereotyped gentle mothers and teachers wearing *sari*, bangle and *bindi*, even though there are many young mothers and primary school teachers who wear dresses like churidar, jeans pants etc.

Dress is one of the most significant markers of gender identity. Dress is a powerful means of communication and making statements about the gender role of a new-born child soon after birth. Although new-born children's first dress may be gender-neutral, their sex soon prompts kin or other caretakers to provide them with dress considered gender-appropriate within their particular society.

Dress is both a repository of meanings regarding gender roles and a vehicle for perpetuating or rendering changes in gender roles. It can be seen that dress of girls and women shown in the textbooks are unfit for climbing trees or other jobs demanding more physical activity.

Even when forms of dress and their properties are largely shared or similar for both sexes, gender distinctions can be clearly communicated by a minimum manipulation of dress. For example, if the hair of males is expected to

be cut short and that of females is expected to grow long in a particular society the shape and volume of hair immediately communicate to the observers the gender of the individual under scrutiny and a ribbon but a tiny attachment tied to a wisp of a baby's hair, can announce a gender identity as feminine.

Acquiring knowledge about gender appropriate dress for various social situations extends to learning rights and responsibilities to act "as one looks", accordingly, gendered dress encourages each individual to internalize gender roles.

The books under review show men, women and children wearing gender specific dresses. As children grow older and develop increasing physical and social independence, children learn by trial and error to manipulate their own dress according to rules for age and gender. They usually acquire these rules via directions from adults or older siblings or by following role models of the same sex, such as admired friends or publicly acclaimed individuals. Textbooks are silent regarding the dress preference of transgenders altogether.

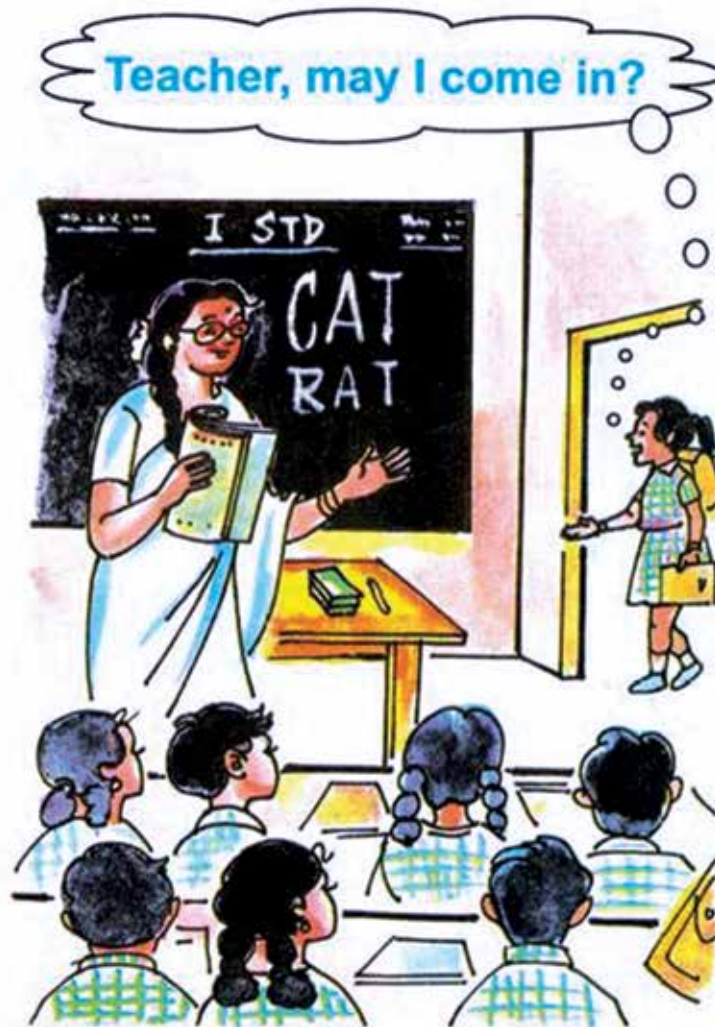
### **Gender Specific School Uniforms**

Illustrations regarding classrooms show that all children are in school uniforms. School uniforms have many positive functions. It removes distinctions of class as well as a more orderly environment. Uniforms also can remove visible economic differences between students. School

uniforms reduce peer-envy based on clothes. Moreover, it can even be later transferred to younger siblings or needy students who come from poor economic background.

But it has to be noticed that both

boys and girls have different kinds of uniforms even in primary schools which convey a clear message that boys and girls are different. Textbooks can depict gender neutral school uniforms, which would undermine



**Competency:** Asks permission using "May I?".

**Note to the teacher:** Use "May I?" in regular classroom situations and encourage children to use the same.



gender stereotypes. Many schools are now following gender neutral school uniforms from primary level to high school level. Gender neutral school uniforms will reduce exploitation

and discrimination based on gender. And it will also bring the message of non-discrimination on the basis of class, caste, religion or sex.

## Look and say



Blouse



Shirt



Sari



Skirt



Trousers



Dhoti

**Competency:** Gives the words relating to dress. (5.4)

**Note to the teacher:** Say the words aloud using pictures. Show real objects. Ask the children to repeat.

### Gender Specific Names

Names have sociological and political significance — naming is what constructs categories, and the power to name essentially constitutes power. An unnamed thing remains invisible, as if it does not exist. Today, many people recognize the significance of a name as one element of personhood, and the act of naming as a practice influenced by cultural norms having to do with identity, lineage, status, dominant ideology and social institution (Miller 1927). Names given to children tell us quite a lot about them including fixing them into a context by religion, region and ethnic group. Equally important, names are always differentiated by gender. Parents choose ‘important’ names for boys while pretty, soft and melodic names for girls. It is also observed that boys are suffixed with their caste or family name which clearly defines their place and position in the family’s ancestral records from which girls are often excluded.

The textbooks under review perpetuate these stereotypes, in page 26 of Standard II, the topic titled ‘What’s your name?’ four pictures – three boys and one girl are given with their names as ‘My name is Siva’, ‘He is Khan’, ‘He is John’, and ‘She is Vimala’. The pictures clearly reveal that to which religion and gender Siva, Khan, John and Vimala belong to. Similar things are repeated in page 60 and page 61 of the same textbook. In page 7 of Class I textbook, lesson one with subheading ‘Happy Family!’

the names given are as follows: “My name is Ravi.”, “My father’s name is Raja”, “My mother’s name is Vani.”, “My brother’s name is Hari” and “My sister’s name is Susi.” There are many such examples in the textbooks.

Teachers also propagate stereotypes based on name. According to a study conducted by Hui Song among junior middle school science teachers in China, 71% of science teachers who read a description of a student with a male name rated him as a good student, whereas, the same description was used but the student was given a female name, only 20% of teachers rated her as a good science student (Song, 2003).

Whether commemorating a relationship, confronting the problem of what last name one will adopt in a marriage, or in naming offspring, choosing a name to signify identity, and the process of that determination, represents both elements of personhood and the social and cultural norms. A name can shape one’s identity, locate a person within family, society, time and history, confer status and determine one’s power to act autonomously and influence public ideology.

Now there is greater awareness of names as “gender markers” (Lieberson, Domais and Shyon, 2000). But our textbooks do not seem to be aware about it. Gender neutral names in school textbooks may bring a new trend in naming that is free from bias and prejudices from religions, caste,



## Names of Persons



My name is Raja



My father's name  
is Balu



My mother's name  
is Kamala



My sister's name  
is Santhi



My teacher's name  
is Radha

ethnicity and gender.

### Gender Biased Language

Language has power not only to shape our view of the world, but our view of who we believe ourselves to be and our place in society. There is a growing awareness that language does not merely reflect the way we think; it also shapes our thinking. It is a powerful tool which can be used to convey a range of attitudes and values. If words and expressions that imply that women or men are inferior

are constantly used, that assumption of inferiority tends to become a part of our mindset (Shyleja and Latha, 2007). Turner Bowker (1995) noted that language is often utilized as a media tool to maintain the gender status of individuals in our society. Therefore, the language books can be used to encourage or eliminate stereotypes.

Concern about the use of language is part of our increased awareness of the changing roles of men and women in the society. The language of books

under review conveys a number of examples for non-inclusiveness of women and biased connotations of gender roles and identity.

Language can be a powerful

conveyor of bias, in both blatant and subtle forms. The exclusive use of masculine terms and pronouns, ranging from our fore-fathers, mankind, businessman to the generic

## What's your name?



My name is Siva



He is Khan



He is John



She is Vimala

**Competency:** Writes his / peers' names. (4.2)

**Note to the teacher:** Write the names of students on the blackboard.

Ask the children to tell their friends names and write them in their notebooks.

*he* denies the full participation and recognition of woman (Blumberg, 2007:5). English speakers and writers have traditionally been taught to use masculine nouns and pronouns in situations where the gender of their subject is unclear or variable, or when a group to which they are referring to contains members of both sexes (Writing Center, 2005). For example, page 14 of Standard II, *he* and *him* are used for a parrot. Similarly on page 55 of the same book a parrot says 'I can speak like a man'. On page 47 of Standard III on 'My Bicycle', even though the textbook depicts a positive image of a girl riding a bicycle, 'It runs with manpower', In page 83 of Standard III, 'A Brave Little Squirrel', the squirrel is *he*. This is an example for using masculine pronouns (*he*, *his*, *him*) for sex neutral/non-human nouns or sex is of little significance. On Page 15 of Standard III, 'The Work of God', it is said, '*He* gave us eyes to see them'. The reference of god as *He* perpetuates the androcentric idea of god as male.

Another simple illustration is provided for androcentric use of language. In Britain up until at least 1980s 'mankind' and 'men' were widely used in generic way, instead of the more gender neutral 'humankind' and 'people'. Similarly, the pronoun 'he' was routinely used in preference to 'she', or even to 'he or she'. Feminist analysis have problematised the generic use of masculine nouns and pronouns,

arguing that such linguistic practices both reflect and contribute to the marginalization of women and are symbolic of their status in general (Pilcher 2004:1). For the textbooks it is still *Postman, Milkman, Watchman, Policeman, Fisherman, Boatman and Head Master*. The textbooks also ask the students to 'find out the following *men*' (Standard III, pages 7,8,9,10,49 and 53) instead of using gender neutral nouns like police officer, postal worker/mail carrier, chairperson, etc. Feminist scholars have provided a critique of the generic 'man' used in linguistic practices and conventions. Dictionaries say that 'man' can be used to mean both the human race (the generic use) and the male of the species. Feminists have pointed out that this can result in considerable ambiguity in classroom. There is ample research (Thorne et al., 1983) to show that pupils do not understand the generic man but think it means male. Forty-four articles are cited on this point in Thorne et al., (1983), including Harrison (1975), who discovered some American adolescents studying 'the evolution of man' who believed that only males had evolved! (Coffey and Delamont, 2000:32).

Page 18 of Standard I says. 'Girls and boys come out to play'. On page 19 it is 'Be good boys,' 'Be good girls'. On Page 14 there is a line 'Yes, good boys and girls, why don't you say thank you?' On Page 41 of Standard I says 'Yes, good boys and girls always say, I am sorry. The sentences seem

inclusive and good, but actually by using 'boys' and 'girls' instead of 'Children' or 'students' (Blumberg, 2007:31) we raise in effect two different kinds of children: boys and girls, from the first standard itself. Psychologists generally agree, by age 3, children have an 'irreversible conception of what gender is'. This kind of language gives children the impression that they are different and men and women should be treated differently.

It is wrong to say that the language used in textbooks is completely gender biased, there are many instances where gender neutral language is used. For example on page 61 it is given 'Does he/she play'. On page 21 of Standard IV textbook the statement 'someone broke the baby's doll, so *it* is \_\_\_\_' is gender neutral. Here *it* is used instead of *he* or *she*. Though in many instances parrot, elephant and other animals are called *he* on page 27 of Standard IV the cat is termed as *it*.

The power of language derives from its power to reify that which is constructed — precisely at the point where this construction is most questionable — into something that appears natural and self-evident. In one word, language serves to naturalize gendered inequalities. Feminist critic Julia Kristeva says that this gender bias has nothing to do with the inherent structure of language, or some kind of male conspiracy. It is an effect of the power relation between the sexes

(Moi, 2001: 157) The gender bias in the language of the textbooks under review should also be attributed to this power imbalance between sexes in our society.

### Negative Portrayal of Women

Women were almost always portrayed as wives and mothers. And in almost every story intended to be humorous, the butt of the joke is a female (Blumberg, 2007:12). On page 3 of Standard I, a line is: "My sister likes to see the moon, but she tries to see it in the noon!" In the same book on page 35 an elder girl tries to help a little boy who lost his way, "Don't be afraid, my little child! Tell me your school's name I will guide." The boy answers "It is Government primary school. Today is Sunday. Why to school?" By portraying girls who wish to see moon during day time and girls who don't know Sunday is a holiday, school textbooks still carry negative statements like 'women are illogical' (Noopur, 1999:44).

"Father goes to work to earn money, mother washes, cooks and does the household work..." (Noopur, 1999:29). This kind of stereotype is reinforced on page 25 of Standard IV textbook in an exercise: 1. 'His father \_\_\_\_ (buy) \_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_ this evening. 2. His mother \_\_\_\_ cook \_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_ tonight.

Girls are shown watching boys doing experiment or handle sophisticated equipment (Noopur, 1999:28). Though more women are there in information and communication technology field

our textbooks still present girls as spectators. For example, a lesson on page 86 of Class III English language textbook, "The computer calls U", illustrates a boy operating computer with two other boys, but the girl is shown just 'watching' it.

### Invisibility

The invisibility of women in public sphere and invisibility of women's work are important women's issues. It can be found that the textbooks give less attention to women, those with disabilities, transgendered



persons and others. The analysis shows that the books were not only ineffective in portraying positive role for women as part of the workforce of the country but their roles were not even presented in accordance with the prevailing conditions in reality. It is desirable that school textbooks should portray more women in professional roles so that girls can take those as role models. Pictures of three leaders have been mentioned in the Standard III textbook. They are Dr S. Radhakrishnan, Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru.

Neither the name nor the picture of any women leader is mentioned. Equitable representation of heroic women in textbooks should be another way of influencing girls to perceive themselves as equally capable of doing well as their male counterparts. For example, in most textbooks men are represented as heroes, leaders and as people with prestigious jobs and it is obvious that boys are most likely going to be inspired by these male heroic representations (Tuwar, Theresa, Marie-Antoinette Sossu, 2008).

## Leader



Teacher, Teacher,  
Call my name.  
May I lead  
My friends in game?

March them up,  
And march them down  
Soon I'll win  
A leader's crown.

**Competency:** Listens to and repeats jingles. (1.5)

**Note to the teacher:** Say the jingles aloud and ask the children to repeat.



## Cosmetic Bias

Cosmetic bias offers an 'illusion of equity' to teachers and students who may casually flip the pages of a textbook. Beyond the attractive covers, photos or posters that prominently feature all members of diverse groups, bias persists. For example, the cover page of the Standard II textbook of English language gives a very positive image of a boy and girl reading the book and the cover page of Standard IV textbook shows a boy and girl going to school. But from the analysis of textbooks, it can be seen that bias exists despite shiny covers. Though there are number of illustrations of women and girls in the textbooks most of them are mothers and teachers. Most often women characters are shown passive and menial. Most of the times in

the illustrations women are shown watching rather than doing.

It is quite clear from the analysis of the textbooks, that despite an explicit policy of gender sensitization of school curriculum, the situation on the ground did not improve a great deal. Traditional meanings of the masculine and feminine continued to persist along with the oppositional, dichotomous categories of active-passive, emotional-rational, nature-culture and dependent-autonomous. Gender-sensitive material in the textbooks should be prepared based on a feminist knowledge base. Without this knowledge-base, those who were given charge of rewriting textbooks will restrict themselves to superficial tinkering: either by increasing the number of times women are visually or verbally represented in the books or by facile role reversals.

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