

Representation of gender in textbooks in India:

In textbooks, studies were conducted which still found gender stereotypes and under representation of women in textbooks.

- DiptaBhog (2002) looked at NCERT's language textbooks for classes III, V and VIII as language textbooks are supposed to expand the horizons of the children, to increase their ability to think and to inculcate values within them. She analysed that boys in all the three textbooks were shown **to have greater mobility as they travelled to various places on their own** and possessed the ability to comment on and describe new experiences while women were shown as naïve, lacking knowledge and not to be taken seriously. Out of 75 lessons that she reviewed, 34 i.e. nearly **50% had only male actors in text with no female characters in the narratives. Only eight (8) lessons represented women as achievers** which included a chapter which highlighted the achievements **of women swimmers, another one described girls as active participants in sports day celebration and two chapters had biographical accounts of Rani Laxmibai and Madam Curie.**
- However, these also portrayed these women achievers in stereotypical ways. For instance, **Rani Jhansi who was a great fighter was vulnerable to depression at the death of her husband and son.** Before fighting with the British, **she had to pray every morning as she is shown to be surrounded by doubt and uncertainty while no such doubts surrounded men in any of the narratives.**
- In another biography, author mentions **Madam Curie even on being busy** with her lab experiments did all the household work herself. She would wash the clothes, cook food and wash dishes. Their biographical accounts were found to be different from biographies of male achievers where the men were depicted as clear about what they were doing and what they wanted to achieve.
- **I think it is really a sorry state for women that their success in their professions is measured by how successfully they are able to manage their household chores with the work that they do outside. It is being projected in the textbooks** that women can be called successful or achievers only when they are able to create a work and home balance while there is no such pressure being put on men by the society.
- Any deviation from the ideal image of females represented in the textbooks could lead to building up of emotional distress and guilt among young girls which they would carry throughout their lives as they grow up and face similar situations at work and home.
- **After the 1986 National Policy on Education which called for a removal of gender bias.** Other studies on analysis of NCERT school textbooks also indicate that women lack visibility in **the official school curriculum and the lessons are largely male centric.**
- Karlekar (2002), drawing on a 1986 study of the Hindi textbooks published by the NCERT, Delhi, showed that the ratio of boy-centric stories to girl-centric stories was.
- English language textbooks published by the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages, Hyderabad, boy-centric stories outnumbered girl centric stories.
- **This huge difference in representation of men and women in textbooks can reinforce the beliefs of young girls and boys in the male dominated nature of society that we live in. Young girls will see no or very few female role models whom they could look up to for building their careers in economically productive professions.**
- There have been significant changes in terms of how women and men have been presented in these textbooks over the years. However, there is still a long way to go. According to a recent report published by NCERT in 2014 on gender analysis of 18 primary NCERT textbooks,

while all the textbooks attempted to highlight gender concerns, there were elements of stereotypes in some textbooks. Men were shown mainly in a variety of professions whereas the gender biases and stereotypes already existing in our society.

- They offer poor role models for girls and boys since they do not bring into focus the diversity of roles that women and men play in their real lives. This is instrumental in shaping girls' and boys' visions of who they are and what they can become and such distorted images and portrayals can have a detrimental effect on the construction of gender identity among young children.
- Linked to this, in many countries, gender stereotyped choice in courses of study is evident through the enrolment numbers. Girls are led away from mathematics and science. Meanwhile boys remain disadvantaged and relatively unaided in reading and language skills in countries where they are behind in these areas (Blumberg, 2007).

Hence, there is an urgent need to represent women and men appropriately and more realistically in the textbooks in order to break the already existing stereotypical images of gender roles prevailing in society. In order to not reinforce the already existing gender stereotypical images and inappropriate **socialisation that young girls and boys may have undergone within their families, textbooks must be gender sensitive.**

Representation of gender in textbooks around the world:

A study conducted on Punjab board English language textbooks of classes VII to X in Pakistan also concluded that gender biases in school textbooks need to be addressed.

- Representation of women needs change. In these textbooks, many examples, pictures and exercises showed that women were meant to stay within traditionally allocated roles including cooking, cleaning and looking after children.
- The only knowledge and skills they required were their roles as mothers and good, obedient wives. For instance, the lesson on, 'Family Relations' focused its entire attention on showing that a woman's identity is with her husband after marriage and she is no longer known by her own name but as 'Mrs' So and So.
- 'Mrs' being a gender biased term passes on a message about the subordinate status of a woman within the family unit and larger society as a whole.

Apart from this, the language used in the text of class VII textbook is gender biased itself. 'He' has been used in the examples to explain a point reinforcing in the minds of young children that women do not have an identity of their own. Another chapter on 'Going on a Holiday' reinforces traditional gender roles based on the binary division of male as the active/rational and female as passive/irrational.

The father in the story took the decision to go on a family holiday while the mother made tea. Women who have played important parts in history had been totally ignored in the textbooks. Instead, a gender based division of roles woven into almost all the exercises and stories in these books is evident in use of statements such as **'Pakistani soldiers are among the bravest in the world'**, My brothers work in a **factory ..' '... their sisters wash clothes,' 'Imrana made some tea' and 'She was combing her hair'**. **The fact that there are countless examples of brave women in history and large**

numbers of women work in factories and men also comb their hair and have been known to

make tea and wash clothes is ignored. Also ignored is the fact that most professional cooks and laundrymen in Pakistan are men (Mattu and Hussain, 2003).

- Moving to a study conducted in another neighbouring country, Afghanistan which aimed to investigate gender roles in the new Pashto Language textbooks (grades 1-6) based on Afghanistan's National Curriculum Framework, 2003. **It was found that the textbooks were male biased in texts, illustrations and language. Female roles depicted in illustrations and texts included most passive and stereotypical ones such as mostly looking after children and** house chores while males were depicted in more active roles both inside home and outside home.
- Women figured significantly less prominently than men as leading actors in texts.

Women appeared primarily in the role of housewife and mother, and when they were depicted as working outside the home, they were shown to occupy traditional female jobs such as teacher, vaccinator etc. Women/girls tend to be portrayed as passive and dependent while men/boys are shown as more intellectually inclined, active, adventurous, and forward-looking.

Male-centered language was used in the analyzed texts. Male words and common nouns were used to refer to all human beings. Women were excluded from the very first page of the textbooks in the message from Minister of Education. In Pashto language, when boys and girls are addressed, the common nouns referring to boys and girls are spelled differently. In the official message from textbooks issued by the Ministry, common nouns referring to only boys were used (Fahim, 2010).

- In a study conducted in Central and South Eastern Europe on textbook biases, it was found that there were very few examples of men involved in domestic activities resulting in domestic work being presented as women's work and inappropriate for men. Primary school textbooks in Romania depicted women as school teachers, villagers, fruit or flower sellers, while men had been represented as astronauts, police, physicians and actors, (Magno et al., 2002). **This depiction of men in more technical and profitable career and women in low paid occupations can in turn affect the career choices of the young girls and boys when they grow up.**

Now talking about gender representation in textbooks in a developed nation like United States, girls were shown as subordinate to their brothers and receiving no recognition for their accomplishments in the earlier studies but there has been progress in reducing the worst examples of sexism in textbooks and curriculum but the battle has not been completely won yet (Blumberg, 2007). A research study evaluated American history text books for gender balance. Elementary, middle school, and high school texts were assessed for the number of male and female historical figures in text content and illustrations. Three K-12 2005 editions of American history textbooks from different publishing companies were evaluated for gender balance namely, Growth of a Nation for grade two. Creating America: A History of the United States for middle school, grades 7-9, and America: Pathways to the Present for grades 9-12. Content analysis was done for each of the three textbooks and the number of males and females were calculated. While there were more than three times as many males than females in elementary textbook, in high school textbook, that ratio increased to more than six times more males represented than females. In both text

content and illustrations, all three American history textbooks evaluated in this study contained significantly more males than females (Chick, 2006)