

Sex Bias in Secondary School Social Studies Textbooks: A Case Study in India

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Abstract: Textbooks are filled with names of famous men and authors. So a reexamination of the composition of the textbook writing staff has been necessary for the staff's conception of male-female equality has a tremendous influence on the formation of gender role consciousness in children. It is difficult for girls to find names of women who were active in times of national crisis. So a mention of women freedom fighters is most essential. The findings of the present study point the need for reform and revision in to help shape the children's views on the development of new ideas of gender roles suitable for future society.

Key words: Sex bias, Gender roles, textbooks, new ideas

INTRODUCTION

Textbooks are the most potent instruments which help in building up the desirable attitudes in children. It can also be exploited for generating a healthy attitude towards women and raising their status in society as a whole.

Till today, the textbook still remains a central tool of instruction in social studies in most of the schools of India. Therefore, the social studies textbooks not only determine to a large extent what the textbooks contain but also how they are taught.

Studies conducted in the past in this area reflected the interest of researchers of the identification of bias in social studies textbooks.^[1] In "Women's place in the curriculum" analyzed American history texts and found that women mentioned, they are treated per functionally. Women who played leading roles in certain phases of American life, such as the labor movement, are not acknowledged. Women are treated as being supplementary to American history, rather than being integral to it.

^[2] Conducted a study to examine the coverage of race and gender in introductory economics textbooks. The results of their study were that scant attention is paid to questions of race and gender in introductory economics textbooks. Minorities and women are most frequently portrayed in stereotypical ways and their socioeconomic experiences are treated as anomalous or deviant.

A study conducted by^[3] revealed under representation of female characters in social studies textbooks. History books represented 94.2% men by name and depicted 93.8% men in human figures. Geography books presented 82.2% male figures and 17.8% female figures and addressed only men by their names. The books addressed boys and men in the explanation of geographical concepts, but any conspicuous by absence.

The review of some of the studies conducted in India and abroad instigated the investigator to analyze the secondary school social studies textbooks of Andhra Pradesh in India.

Present study: This study focuses on the content analysis of secondary school social studies textbooks of Andhra Pradesh in India with a view to identify the extent of bias. Content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication^[4]. The study involved going through the textbooks thoroughly to identify any bias. The analysis dealt with textbook make-up and design, authorship, identification of bias in the content, any error of omission, stereotyped illustrations and avoidance of human rights. The dimensions considered for the study are as follows:

1. Names
2. Captions
3. Illustrations
4. Remarks on women

Sample: The sample for the study includes three social studies textbooks, one each from VIII, IX and X classes.

Cover page: Whenever the cover pages of the texts had human forms, only men were found on them most of the time. If at all there were women on the cover pages, it was always the number of men outnumbering the women.

The reality of the portrayal of gender in the textbook composition of the textbook writing staff: The breakdown of the composition of the social studies textbooks writing staff according to gender shows that among the 12 authors, only 2 are women meaning thereby that only 17% of women have contributed in writing the texts. Only 1 (4%) woman editor out of 24 and 1 (17%) woman artist out of 6 have lent a hand in the construction of the textbooks (Table 1).

Table 1: Representation of gender in the preparation of social studies Textbooks

| Class | Authors | | | | Editors | | | | Artists | | | | | | |
|-------|---------|----|---|-----|---------|----|----|-----|---------|----|---|-----|---|-----|----|
| | Total | M | F | (%) | Total | M | F | (%) | Total | M | F | (%) | | | |
| VIII | 4 | 3 | 1 | 75 | 25 | 9 | 8 | 1 | 89 | 11 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 50 | 50 |
| IX | 4 | 4 | 0 | 100 | 0 | 8 | 8 | 0 | 100 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 100 | 0 |
| X | 4 | 3 | 1 | 75 | 25 | 7 | 7 | 1 | 100 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 100 | 0 |
| Total | 12 | 10 | 2 | 83 | 17 | 24 | 23 | 1 | 96 | 4 | 6 | 5 | 1 | 83 | 17 |

Table 2: Portrayal of gender in social studies textbooks

| Class | Subject | Names | | Captions | | Illustrations | |
|------------|-----------|-------|--------|----------|--------|---------------|--------|
| | | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| VIII | Geography | 3 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | History | 197 | 10 | 19 | 0 | 15 | 0 |
| | Civics | 27 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 11 | 0 |
| | Economics | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| IX | Geography | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | History | 166 | 11 | 2 | 0 | 6 | 0 |
| | Civics | 22 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 9 | 0 |
| | Economics | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| X | Geography | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | History | 268 | 12 | 56 | 2 | 5 | 1 |
| | Civics | 6 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 3 | 2 |
| | Economics | 5 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | | 698 | 36 | 79 | 7 | 49 | 4 |
| Percentage | | 95 | 5 | 92 | 8 | 92 | 8 |

Names: What is most striking about secondary school social studies textbooks is that the textbooks represented 698 (95%) men by name. Though these books did not denigrate or misrepresent women, effacement of women from the text perpetuated sexism, Paucity of women freedom fighters in History lessons is easy to detect. It is almost impossible to find women in any historical period.

Captions: On the whole there were 86 captions on gender out of which 79 (92%) were on men and only 7 (8%) on women.

Illustrations: The textbooks depicted 92% men in human figures and only 8% female figures. There are a few figures where women are conspicuous by absence. For eg: In illustration of the voting process, the polling staff and voters are depicted as men, Not even a single woman is shown, In another illustration depiction safety measure, women are shown walking either alone or with their children on the road. There is the complete omission of women and girls using their own vehicles like cycles, scooters and cars while men are shown using their own vehicles. Table 2 represents the portrayal of gender in the textbooks.

Remarks on women: It is however encouraging to see that out of a total 107 remarks only 10 negative remarks on women could be identified. It is noteworthy to mention here that the textbooks especially civics and geography portions highlighted the rights of women, the importance of women's education and health of a family, the bad practice of child marriages and dowry, economic independence for women.

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