

## **Rife Manifestations of Gender Segregation in Indian Society: Evidence from Textbooks**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Throughout the world, gender inequality has been recognized as a well established social notion. Over the period of time, some countries have developed relatively better social position of males and females as equal members of the society and are considered as developed but still a large number do not meet this criterion and thus are at lowest rung of social development. In this regard, South Asian region especially India has no exception. Based on strong socio-cultural norms and traditions, this country stands at lowest pool of gender equality. In this study, the existence of gender negativity and gender insensitivity was measured in the primary level textbooks of India. The focus of the study was to explore existing stereotype and gendered behaviors in textbooks through content analysis. The study concluded that textbooks represented segregated pictures for females to strengthen the patriarchal structure of Asian society.

**KEY WORDS:** Gender, textbooks, gender stereotypes.

### **Introduction**

Gender inequality is a recognized social phenomenon which is faced by all the developing and developed countries. In very few countries, women have equal socio-economic and legal status with men. Even in the most developed parts of the world *de jure* equality between women and men has not always been translated into *de facto* quality. The situation is worse in some countries of South Asia where strong social norms exist and patriarchal structure strengthens the unequal status of women (Mahbub-ul-Haq Human Development Center, 2007).

It is a well established fact that in order to institute economic growth and social justice a balance between male and female education is required. The

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illiteracy of women weakens the development and leads towards poor growth. With reference to the inequality in educational sector, the performance of South Asian countries is very much poor. Though illiteracy rate has been raised from 49% to 54% but still two major countries of the region India and Pakistan continues to stick at lowest rung in the field of literacy (UNESCO, 2004).

The perpetuation of gender segregation is strengthened by different social institutions i.e. media, school, family and religion. The nexus of social institutions fortify the behavior patterns, attitudes, values, norms, folkways and interactivity around gender stereotypes. Gender inequality is also reinforced by school. In this regard, primary school curriculum plays a pivotal part to accomplish the role of socialization and internalization of different behaviors and attitudes. Important to socialization and transformation through education is the role of textbooks. The authors of the textbooks create a social world for children to create a human world. Such edifices provide them opportunity to learn new things or endorse the existing ones. "Because the human world is inhabited by women, men, girls and boys, textbooks present a gendered picture of the world and thus encourage girls and boys to take up the stereotypical positions constructed for them by these books" (Dean, 2007, p. 188). So, these books lead towards certain image building in the mind of young one which further endorses cultural and social practices.

### **An overview of Educational Policies of India with Reference to the Gender**

Due to unsupportive educational system about half of the Indian population of girls cannot continue their education (UNESCO, 1997). The factor behind this inequality is reinforced by curriculum and the unsupportive attitude of teachers which promotes boys' vigorous participation in educational activities (Pandey, 2006).

In India, over a period of time various policies and programs have been launched to cater the issue of gender inequality in educational sector. In this regard, Program of Action was instigated in 1992 in India. The main focus of the program was to boost up the self confidence and self esteem of the women by ensuring their full and equal participation in every walk of life. For the purpose, women's role in diversified field such as economy, politics and community was recognized. The focus of the program was to promote female education to involve them in decision making of the family (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2004).

In later years, National Policy on Education was developed in 1968 which highlighted one indicator of gender inequality on the basis of social justice. This policy insisted the participation of marginalized group of people including female in education. It was stated, "The National Education System will play a positive, interventionist role in the empowerment of women. It will foster the development

of new values through redesigned curricula, textbooks, the training and orientation of teachers, decision-makers and administrators, and the active involvement of educational institutions.” Policy was made half heartedly and the motive to promote female education and improving quality of content remained at micro level. It was further reformed in 1992 but not real efforts were made to implement the policy (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 1986).

In 2004, National Alliance launched a National Common Minimum Program (NCMP). The extracts from the NCMP regarding female education were that “complete legal equality for women in all spheres will be made a practical reality especially by removing discriminatory legislation and by enacting new legislation that gives women, for instance, equal rights of ownership of assets like houses and land.” The initiated program was indirect in its nature and addresses the issue of gender inequality in arbitrary way. (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2004).

Government emphasized on the development of women in all sectors and their empowerment in all walks of life with special emphasis on gender integrated approach in all educational policies. A gender analysis of basic and primary education program was conducted from a gender perspective which aimed to identify the gender gaps in existing system. The above facts reflect that apart from various efforts made by government of India, still the issue of gender inequality persists in textbooks. Present study is an attempt to recognize the problem of gender disparities and gender stereotypes in existing textbooks in South Asia. At another level, it is a step towards identification of the underlying cause of gender stereotypes with a direction for possible strategic intervention through content analysis to address the issue of gender sensitivity in education. So, this study aims to explore the content of Indian textbooks to analyze the areas of gender negativity and inequality which is deeply rooted in the social structure of the society.

## **Review of Literature**

Research on how curriculum does affect enrollments of boys and girls is surprisingly limited. Yet curricula in South Asian Countries have been outmoded and highly limited. The curriculum including text books is not only limited but it also lacks gender sensitivity. The content of text books does not relate to the lives of girls and women. The syllabus is repetitive and has again excluded the relevant topics for girls especially those which would make a real difference in their daily lives. The textbooks presented more images of males which have often been described as leaders, fighters or soldiers, while girls are described as fragile, pretty and submissive etc.

There is lack of gender sensitive approach in curriculum and books. Books portray gender apartheid picture presenting few characters of women. Formulaic picture of women and girls is represented in books (Zafar & Malick 2006). Role of

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boys and girls is depicted in separate spheres of life promoting gender insensitivity (Dean, 2007).

Textbooks represent a stereotypical picture, not portraying women in the role of business women or police officers. On similar lines, the description of male characters is purely typical showing them in outdoor activities. Majority of women characters reinforce tradition working women role in household works (Liao, 2004).

Content represents a true description of Asian patriarchal society showing males as breadwinners and females as care takers. Pure masculine traits of males are symbolized and adjectives used in books support patriarchal structure of society. Males are represented as heroic, gutsy, gregarious, assertive, handsome and muscular whereas females role is undermined by displaying the qualities of introverted, timorous, submissive, gentle, and beautiful (Gouri, 2009; Jaireth, 2001).

Certain stereotypes about women are perpetuated by textbooks. Quality of curriculum is poor and does not relate to the life of women, represents a gender negative approach (Zafar, 2005). Stereotypes such as women are not good drivers or have weak mathematics skills and supposed to work at home are universally accepted. A big source of such unconscious transformation is textbooks and reading material which affects the thinking of individuals. Consequently, both gender internalize the traditional role and do not relate their roles with new identities and support existing inequalities (Kundsens, 2003).

The poor quality of curriculum promotes gender inequality. Very few female characters are portrayed in the textbooks. The existing characters are true representation of gendered picture of society promoting certain stereotypes about females. Gender insensitivity is found in textbooks (Zafar, 2005). Women are symbolized in cynical, unreceptive and supportive roles in the textbooks of various states of India. Mobility of women is restricted and subjected to the permission of male partners. Curriculum and books fail to provide a neutral picture of both males and females. It promotes biased picture in cultural and social context (Pandey, 2006).

The characters of women are invisible in language books especially and they are confounded to the household works. Overall women role are cooking or working within home and girls are working and helping their mothers in kitchen while males are represented as doctors, engineers and sports men (Saigol, 2004). A gendered nationalist ideology has been promoted by constructing binaries such as masculine/feminine, strong/weak, powerful/powerless and ascribing feminist, weakness and powerlessness (Dean, 2007).

Most of the language used in text of the books base on stereotypical images rather than on reality. Female identity and self images have been negatively portrayed whereas male characters are strongly portrayed and represented. This representation ultimately leads towards uplifting of strong male images and

negative and marginalized images of females in the mind of people (Hussain & Afsar, 2010).

## **Hypotheses**

In the light of above literature, the following hypotheses are formulated:

1. Males are more presented in the textbooks as compare to females.
2. Typical female characters are promoted by limiting their professional and social presence.
3. The construction of the world of males and females through existing stereotypes leads towards the construction of a patriarchal world.

## **Method**

In order to conduct a gender analysis of the textbooks, content analysis method was followed. Keeping in mind the importance of India, in South Asian region, textbooks of India were selected. In India, National Council for Education and Research has been working since 1961 on curriculum development. It is an apex body which regulates the content and quality of textbooks all over the India in different languages. For the quest of present research, national language and English textbooks from grade 1-5 were selected. The reason behind choosing grade 1-5 level textbooks was the importance of socialization of early age in later period of life. The concepts developed in this phase of life are later strengthened and perpetuated throughout the life. It has been noted during literature review that languages books were more gender negative as compare to other subjects, so analysis of language books was done.

## **The Unit of Analysis**

The unit of the analysis in the present study was stories of primary level language textbooks of India. It further included all the words, characters, paragraphs, images and phrases given about gender and prevalent gender stereotypes in the textbooks.

## **Category Construction**

In order to measure the concept of gender stereotyping in the textbooks few categories were constructed. Direction, space, frequency and intensity of the content regarding gender negativity were measured through following categories:

- A. General Idea of the story
- B. Direction of the story
- C. Male female images

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- D. Males female characters
- E. Male female personalities
- F. Personality attributes of males and females
- G. Professions of males and females
- H. Male and female authors of textbooks
- I. Male female activities presentation

### Textbooks Analysis Procedure

Both qualitative and quantitative analysis of the text was conducted. In manifest analysis those elements were analyzed which were physically present in the text. In latent analysis, the analysis was extended to the interpretive reading of the symbolism underlying the data. Textbook analysis was done by using a set of criteria that refer both, to the texts and the accompanying illustrations. Hindi books were first translated into English by an expert and rechecked twice to avoid any inconsistency.

### Results

#### Quantitative Analysis of Textbooks

**Table No. 01**  
*Category A. General Idea of the Stories*

Categories	Frequency	%
No representation of Gender	10	13.5
Male	37	50.0
Female	14	18.9
Both	13	17.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Data in table no. 01 shows the general idea of the stories of Indian textbooks for Hindi and English subjects. It is noted that 50% of the stories were male specific whereas this number dropped off 18.9% with reference to female demonstration in the text. In 17.6% stories both male and female were equally portrayed and in 13.5% stories no gender characters was presented.

**Table No. 02**  
*Category B .Direction of the Stories*

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Neutral	22	29.7
Positive	7	9.5
Negative	5	6.8
Male specific	34	45.9
Female specific	6	8.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The data in table No. 02 shows that in Hindi and English textbooks of India, about 29.7% stories were neutral in which no gender stereotyping was used or found but still the number of male specific stories (45.9%) was far more than female specific stories (8.1%).The aspect of gender sensitive text was badly neglected as only 9.5% stories were in positive direction. About 6.8% stories were in negative direction.

**Table No. 03**  
*Gender roles presentation in textbooks*

<b>Categories</b>	<b>C (Images)</b>		<b>D (Characters)</b>		<b>E(Personalities)</b>	
	<b>English</b>	<b>Hindi</b>	<b>English</b>	<b>Hindi</b>	<b>English</b>	<b>Hindi</b>
Males	642	502	55	87	0	5
Total	1144 (63%)		142 (70%)		5 (71%)	
Females	348	298	33	28	2	0
Total	646 (37%)		61 (30%)		2 (29%)	
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>1790 (100%)</b>		<b>203 (100%)</b>		<b>7 (100%)</b>	

Table no.03 shows that female images constituted 37% of the total pictures in English and Hindi textbook grade I-V. Their representation in the English textbooks was lower than the males. In Hindi and English textbooks 63% male images were presented which showed greater gender gap with reference to proper place and equal representation of both genders in the textbooks. Female characters constituted only 30% of the Hindi and English textbooks. In both the subjects, male characters were more involved in the stories as compare to females. It is surprising to note that no female personality was discussed in Hindi textbooks from grade I-V. Overall 7 male personalities were discussed in which 5 were found in Hindi books and rest two were found in English textbooks.

**Table No. 04**

*Category F. Personality Attributes Commonly Used for Males and Female*

<b>Attributes</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Attributes</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>female</b>
Leader	1	0	Small	2	1
Good	1	0	Elder	1	0
Active	2	1	Talkative	2	0
Hardworking	4	0	Cruel	1	0
Greedy	1	0	Kind	0	1
Young	1	0	Neat	2	0
Polite	0	0	Simple	0	1
Intelligent	1	1	Lazy	1	0
Courageous	1	1	King	4	
Loving	0	0	Helpful	1	1
Pretty/Handsome	0	2	Naughty	7	0
Fairy	0	2	Happy	1	1

From 74 stories, total 24 personality attributes were found. The frequency of male characters was 34 and for females it was 12. Overall female attributes were less described. For males the highest frequency of male attributes were found as hardworking, silly, naughty, king and wise. The negative attributes used for males were cruel, silly and lazy and rest of 50 was positive.

**Table No. 05**

*Category G. Professions of Males and Females*

<b>Profession</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>female</b>	<b>Total</b>
Doctor/Dentist	2	2	4
Shopkeeper	5	0	5
Teacher	0	2	2
Nurse	0	1	1
Farmer	4	0	4
Policeman	1	0	1
Pilot	1	0	1
Drama artist	2	0	2
Officer	1	0	1
Postman	3	0	3
Mountaineer	1	0	1
Astronaut	2	0	2
Other vocation (driver, cobbler, butcher)	18	0	18
Total	40	5	45
%	88	12	100

In Indian textbooks very few professions for males and females were found and those which found were discussed or elaborated with reference to the males. Females were represented only in 12% of the total professions in which only they were discussed as teachers or doctors. For males, the variety of professions was increased and they were portrayed in multiple professions which constituted 88%



of the total professions. The highest frequency of professions for males was shopkeepers, farmers, postman and other vocation such as cobbler, carpenter, tailor etc.

**Table No. 06**

*Category H. Male Female Authors of Text Books Class 1-V*

<b>Authors of Text Books Class 1-V</b>						
<b>Subjects</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Females</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>
English	10	45	12	55	22	40
Hindi	25	78	7	22	32	60
Total	35	65	19	35	54	100

The total authors involved in the writing of textbooks were 54. For Indian textbooks, individual authors were mentioned for the stories. The number of male authors for Hindi textbooks (78%) was more as compare to English textbooks where 55% women authors were involved in writing procedure. The number of females involved in Hindi text books was significantly low.

**Table No. 07**

*Category I. Male Female Activities presented in textbooks*

<b>Activities of Males</b>				
<b>Subject Name</b>	<b>No activity</b>	<b>Indoor</b>	<b>Outdoor</b>	<b>Total</b>
English	16	1	17	34
	59.3%	25.0%	39.5%	45.9%
Hindi	11	3	26	40
	40.7%	75.0%	60.5%	54.1%
<b>Activities of Females</b>				
English	24	2	8	34
	48.0%	16.7%	72.7%	45.9%
Hindi	26	10	3	40
	52.0%	83.3%	27.3%	54.1%

**N=74**

In English textbooks, in 59.3% of the stories males were not depicted in any type of activity and for Hindi books this percentage decreased to 40.7%. In English books males portrayed in indoor tasks were 25% and for Hindi this percentage was 75%. Overall in Hindi books more males (60.5%) were illustrated

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in outdoor activities as compare to English textbooks (39.5%). The classification of female's indoor and outdoor activities in the given table shows that in English textbooks an encouraging number (72.7%) of females were depicted in out door activities whereas this trend decreased in Hindi textbooks to 27.3 % where majority of the females (83.3 % ) were presented in typical characters and indoor activities including household activities.

## Qualitative Analysis of Textbooks

### Reinforcement of gender myths in stories

In Indian text books of both the subjects English and Hindi, women were also given proper space but their role was very much humble, polite and humanitarian. For example in a story, Meena took care of her younger brother who could not walk. The role of little girl Meena adopted was inspiration from her mother who took care of her siblings and her too, she gradually learned that role and then even being too young she was ready to take care of her younger brother. Similarly in some stories role of girls was presented as silly and careless. In a story, a kind girl loved her sparrow and refused to move with parents due to her love and kindness.

The story "Alice in wonderland" was typical imaginary story in which Alice lived in wonderland; her character was presented in an imaginary world beyond from the bitter realities of life. In another story, farmer's wife was presented in a helping role but she also exhibited her intelligence and saved her domestic animals from the lion but still the story was not the real and role presented by farmer's wife could not exist in reality. In Akbar's court the intelligence of his senior minister was precedent of typical approach that males are wise and good decision makers. Their roles were more defined than that of females and were culturally constructed. For example:

ताकत में मैं ज्यादा हूँ

(I am stronger than you in power)

(Story, Aqal Bari Ya Bhains, Grade III)

In a story grandmother accepted the foolishness of women by saying:

मैं ने वो म्यदल तुम्हारी बूया को दया तो उस ने उस से मामूली सी  
चुरियन बनवा लीं.

(I gave that medal to your aunt and she sells it for bangles)

(Story, Swami ki Dadi, Grade 5)

Females' low intelligence was also depicted in stories. Overall females were presented in imaginary and kind gestures but males were presented in practical fields such as working outside the home, having skilled jobs and breadwinners of families.

## **An Attempt towards Gender Equality by Equal Representation of Role Models**

Though gender stereotyping did not exist to great extent but still traditional symbols of bravery were found in stories: *Yumnan Jayadeo Singh, 11 years old, jumped into the flooded river, and saved a three year old Oom from drowning.* The act of bravery was recognized because he saved the life of an infant. Such examples were given in the text which shows the traditional roles and expectations from the young boys. In some stories females were also included in such incidents where they helped their brother to save a life such as *Harsh Srivastava, a 12 year old boy, and his 15 year old sister rescued a child from the attack of a raging bull.* In the given precedent, female was also presented in the activity but the main focal person was her brother and she helped him in saving the life. The main story revolved around the male partner.

In a story a handicap girl was presented as main character of the story who wanted to live like normal child. She tried to involve herself in day to day activities by going for shopping but faced problems, at last a boy safeguarded her and helped her to be dealt as a normal individual.

दोकानदार ने थैली उस की गुड में रख दी.

(Shopkeeper put that bag in her lap)

(Naina ki Pahya Kursi, grade IV)

The story was no doubt positive in a sense that it gave opportunity to a girl to go out and live a normal life but still she was dependent on a boy to come out of the situation and behave normally.

In Hindi textbook another good example was of a young girl Ibla who did not have both hands, with help of her mother and grandmother she got education till 10<sup>th</sup> grade and also learned the skill of embroidery by using her feet.

वोह आँखों में चमक और चाँही पे मुस्कान लए काम करती है.

(She has light in her eyes and smile on face and courage to work.)

(Naina ki Pahya Kursi, grade IV)

She was a true role model presented in the book and a symbol of courage for other girls who are normal but reluctant to spend normal life due to social taboos. In another story from English books Helen Keller, a blind girl was presented as a role model and her parents and teachers' role was presented in magnificent manner who worked outstanding in her brought up. Though number of personalities given in grade I-V textbooks was relatively low but the number of females presented in it was really encouraging. In Hindi textbooks Mahatma Gandhi was also presented as a role model, leader and guide for students who worked hard for the independence of India.

## **Exclusion of Females from Professional Roles and Low Hierarchical Status of Males**

In textbooks, only the men were leaders and have occupational roles. At the higher ranks they were presented in the role of kings and leaders. There were some men in occupations at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy. In the occupational roles and nature of the work, men were associated with positive characteristics such as honest, hardworking, truthful, strong, dutiful etc. Overall, males were also presented in lower hierarchical professions in textbooks. Roles of barber, farmer and cook, car painter were most commonly used and they had distinguished for their hard work and truth. Females were totally excluded from any specific roles and attributes in Hindi textbooks.

## **Conclusion**

This study aimed to trail the existing gender stereotypes and negativity in the textbooks of India. The main theme of this study was to explore the content of Indian textbooks to analyze the areas of gender negativity and inequality. Results of the study supports the hypothesis one that male representation is more evident in textbooks as compare to females. The world constructed by textbooks was of gender apartheid and seemed to strengthen a patriarchal society. There was lack of gender sensitivity in the text. As results indicate that about 50% stories were male specific, this was high representation as compare to females.

The world of economics and decision making was traditional and stereotypical one in which males were the wise people having knowledge of all the issues and females were supposed to work at home and having responsibility to look after the children and household cores. Gender and power relations in the society in existing content of the textbooks indicated male dominance. As supported by the qualitative content, overall females were presented in imaginary and kind gestures but males were presented in practical fields such as working outside the home, having skilled jobs and breadwinners of families. Quantitative details excerpted form the text suggest that female images only constituted 37% of the total images in the textbooks.

The text further supported the third hypothesis of the study elaborating the existing cultural life which was generally constructed to perpetuate masculinity and patriarchy. The content in textbooks was of male oriented that constructed a world in which the gender stereotypical situation existed which further consolidated their power as males. It denied the emerging new realities and further strengthened the dominant existing reality based on patriarchy.

In the same way, the textbooks construction of men by men (male authors) denied the female importance in the society. The authors who have major contribution in textbooks development had the highest percentage of males in Indian books. Overall in Indian textbooks preparation 65% males were involved in

writing the textbooks. Girls had been discriminated by restricting their education/ and keeping them in the home to look after the younger siblings. Men's work had been recognized as hard work after which they earn the right to relax, chat and gossip in the evening whilst women's work has not been acknowledged as valuable activity. Girls were prepared for understanding the marital role. Girls reaching adolescence had been denied the right to play or to go out for a walk. They were prepared to do the household chores. Overall study concluded that Indian textbooks were vulnerable to the gender sensitivity. Several factors contribute to this negativity. However, it is expected that changes in the content along with changes in pedagogy can lead towards the world based on gender equality with the realization of progressive, moderate and democratic South Asian societies.

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