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From Curriculum to Textbooks — Post 2005 Revised Textbooks and Social Exclusion

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This paper examines how a curricular policy is translated into practice. To do so it reviews some selected school textbooks that have been revised based on *National Curriculum Framework–2005* (NCF–2005). It focusses on mapping how social exclusion has been addressed in these textbooks. These findings are supported with fieldwork in a government primary school, and discussions with school teachers and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan functionaries.

1. CONTEXT AND QUESTIONS

The relation between school curriculum and exclusion has been a prominent concern in research, policy and practice in education. In the past two decades this has further come to the centre stage in education policy and research in India, particularly with the paradigm shift towards the question of ‘quality’ in school education particularly at elementary level (Kumar, 2004). While whether or not there is a ‘shift’ may be a matter

of analysis, it can be said that one of the prominent markers of a focus on quality is the *National Curriculum Framework–2005* (NCERT, 2005) NCF–2005 may be understood as an envisioning document that sketches a national policy level response to some concerns that have been framed in curricular (or educational) discourse in India. Many of these concerns and questions share an organic link with the context of social exclusion in the country.

One of the most debated among these is the divisive character of the school system which plays a role in amplifying inequity and exclusion – by providing qualitatively different educational experiences to children from different socio-economic cultural ‘backgrounds’. The poor quality of school education, in particular, varieties of government schools is at the heart of this debate or concern (Kumar, 1996; Sadgopal, 2006; Pratham, 2013). Though not contradictory, this appears

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paradoxical when seen with the State's claim of the near achievement of UEE whereby increased enrolment rates among the marginalised social groups are emphasised or highlighted. [These claims also need to be read closely with the much 'talked about' withdrawal of the low income-groups from the State schools (Tooley, 2009)]. Furthermore, researches around the categories of caste, class, gender and religion, have presented various descriptions of children's experiences of exclusion in school and classroom contexts – asserting that Indian school contexts are far from being inclusive (Nambissan, 2009; Ramachandran, 2012; Majumdar, 2004; Krishna, 2012). How curriculum, pedagogy and texts are involved in reproducing and/or shaping students' identities based on their location in the social structure/hierarchy, is a prominent dimension in these researches (Bala, 2001; Bhadu, 2007; Krishna, 2012; Guru, 2012). One such example is seen in the recent controversy around the Ambedkar-Nehru cartoon in the Class XI NCERT political science textbook.

Although NCF-2005 does not claim to resolve these concerns, its formulation clearly revolves around them. Based on this national framework a nation-wide curriculum renewal project has been initiated.

In most of the states and union territories, the curriculum, syllabi and textbooks renewal/adaptation/ adoption processes have been completed recently, and in some these are as yet underway. In this context, this paper focuses on assessing the textbook revisions that have taken place post-NCF-2005, with a focus on social exclusion. Through a broad review it attempts to address the questions –How well do the guideposts emerging from NCF-2005 reflect in the textbooks of the selected states? What can be inferred about the translation of national curriculum framework to state level curricular material and textbooks?

For this purpose, the paper reviews some selected textbooks from three Indian states, to understand how (if at all)the concerns emanating from NCF-2005 as regards to social exclusion have been incorporated. Environmental Studies (EVS) and language (English and Hindi) textbooks from three classes at primary school level (Classes 3, 4 and 5) from the states of Bihar, Uttarakhand and Andhra Pradesh have been selected as case points for a broad based review and comparison¹. NCERT textbooks that have been selectively adopted in several states including Delhi, have also been referred to – though not included in the review.

1. The selection of these states, though somewhat arbitrary, has been made on the basis of variations in the processes and approach to curriculum renewal that they represent [an aspect that will be discussed in the chapter at a later point]. Focus on EVS and language textbooks is an outcome of the potency of these subjects to address social exclusion and of the specific recommendations made by the NCF in relation to these school subjects.

The review has been supplemented with data collected from interviews with three SSA personnel – who have been anonymised to maintain confidentiality. To develop a linkage with curricular practice, some vignettes from school visits and interactions with school teachers, which were a part of a yearlong qualitative research, have been presented (Sharma, 2013).

The paper has been organised in four sections. It begins with a discussion on NCF–2005 and exclusion. It then moves on to draw a broad framework for review, highlights the inter-state variations in curriculum renewal approaches and finally presents a review of the selected textbooks.

2. NCF–2005 AND EXCLUSION

NCF–2005 is the latest of the three national curriculum frameworks for school education (1988, 2000 and 2005) developed by NCERT after National Policy on Education 1986, aimed at guiding development of state level curriculum frameworks, syllabi and textbooks across states and union territories in the country. In the process of understanding curriculum and exclusion, it is relevant to note that all the three curricular documents claim to be based on the core values enshrined in the Indian Constitution, which-directly or indirectly relate to social exclusion. These values include justice, liberty, equality and fraternity situated in a socialist secular democratic polity. However, despite having been quoted, these values have not always mirrored in the curriculum

frameworks or in how they have been implemented in practice. This has been the case with NCF–2000 which has been critiqued for its ‘saffron’ hues (Dhankar, 2012, p. 3).

The textbooks developed on the basis of NCF–2000, particularly the History textbooks, were debated for saffronising school knowledge (Delhi Historians’ Group, 2001), which entailed an exclusion of a variety of cultural beliefs as well as biased presentation of cultural identities and the nation. NCF–2005 emerged out of the need for ‘reviewing’ its predecessor. However, the review, at least in an explicit way, did not claim to focus on the saffronisation debate [for which it has been critiqued (Sadgopal, 2005; Ganesh, 2005)]. It stated that its focus was on reducing the curricular load on children and making learning more ‘joyful’ [based on the Learning without Burden report (MHRD, 1993)].

Furthermore, NCF–2005 is distinguished from its predecessors based on three aspects. The first among these is a focus on the individual, not as a means to achieve some national goals but as an individual in her/himself – which in a way throws light on how the framework proposes to address ‘exclusion’ [to be discussed in the following section]. The other two include “an awareness of the need for epistemological considerations” (Dhankar, 2012, p.5), and the detail in which the exercise of the development of the framework was undertaken. NCF-2005 is based on the development

of 21 position papers on various curricular aspects. Among these three were titled 'Problems of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Children', 'Gender Issues in the Curriculum', and 'Education of Children with Special Needs'. In these respects the framework appears to bring in the concern for exclusion of some social groups within the vision of school curriculum and education.²

NCF-2005 draws its educational aims as – "a. independence of thought and action, b. sensitivity to others' well-being and feelings, c. learning to respond to new situations in a flexible and creative manner, d. pre-disposition towards participation in democratic processes, and e. the ability to work towards and contribute to economic processes and social change" (p. viii). In these aims, b, d and e may be seen as having a direct bearing on the context of inequity and exclusion, though all are interlinked in addressing these concerns.

In fact NCF-2005 mainly focuses on the problem of 'exclusion' of children from the process of learning or from engaged learning at schools. In imagining an engaged and meaningful curricular environment for the child, references to social context,

marginalisation, diversity and critical pedagogy have been made. Thus, the relation between the individual and the social, forms a centrepiece of the design of the framework (Dhankar, 2012). It can be inferred that it is through this focus on the individual child, that the overlaps between exclusion and education have been addressed. This gets clarified further when the task of the framework is located in the 'social context of education' in India marked by hierarchies of caste, gender relations, economic status, cultural diversity, lopsided development and the challenges of a globalising society as the main aspects constituting the social context of education (NCERT, 2005, p. 9).

While these overtones in the document are explicit, there is also an acceptance that the practice in reality is far from such approach. However, the framework does not address this gap. The picture becomes more complicated when one observes the 'implementation' of the ideas outlined in NCF-2005 (and in other national legislations/documents) in school practice. For instance, in a workshop with 40 school teachers (in the year 2012) from government and private schools in Delhi, in the context of CCE,

2. The paper does not critically review NCF-2005. However, this does not imply that the framework has no problems. There are conceptual confusions or ambiguities of various kinds (Dhankar, 2012, p. 10). For example, while reading the text with a focus on social justice and exclusion, one finds references to terms like critical pedagogy, plurality in perspectives, relating school knowledge to social context and community knowledge. It is difficult to make-sense of how these have been conceptualised and knitted together or differentiated from each other. In fact, at several places they have been used to explain one another. Since these terms have particular connotations in educational thought and theory, it becomes difficult to trace how social exclusion has been conceived. However, the general spirit of the document is relatively clear.

it emerged that all the participants were in strong disagreement with the ideas of no detention and no corporal punishment (as mandated in RTE Act, 2009). The teachers argued for the need to beat children and explained how difficult it was to teach without these practices. The core arguments were that ‘the *guru-shishya* tradition is over and now children and parents do not respect teachers’, and thus ‘they don’t listen to teachers’. Teachers were of the view that CCE is ineffective in the government schools, given the adverse class-size and the ‘backgrounds’ of children. In another focus group discussion, the teachers of an MCD school discussed about the ‘backgrounds’ of children saying:

“For me all are one; I do not distinguish. That is a separate thing that most in this locality are SCs [Scheduled Castes]... But some of the SC children at our school are good, they are better off economically and don’t avail schemes; so just by looking you can’t make a difference between them and the general category children, which is otherwise so easy.” (sic.)

“You cannot say things for sure here; you do not know ‘who is who’ – one who claims to be an SC may not actually be one. You would generally see that better-off people send their children to the Gaur school [a neighbourhood low fee charging school]. So you are left with the rejected lot. If I do

not beat them, you tell me what do I do? Who comes here to study afterall!”

Further, these practitioners felt that the framework represents an imagination that is far from the educational and cultural reality of India, and expressed how they experience the gap between the chaotic practice and the utopian imagination. Many of the school teachers and the SSA personnel (from among those who were interviewed) stated that the problems they face in implementing the NCF are not recognised by the ‘authorities’ – which in itself creates a gap between the ideas in and practice based on the framework. From these narratives, it also comes across that the manner in which the NCF (and RTE) are being implemented is creating a sense of resistance among the practitioners.

The question of social distances between the teacher and the children in the context of the state school systems accessed by marginalised communities has been underlined by many researches (Ramchandran, 2012; Ramachandran, Pal and Jain, 2005; Majumdar, 2005; Subrahmanian, 2005; Sharma, 2011). State’s response to this question is seen in the form of teacher preparation -which some educationists believe is a key component in bringing about the expected shifts (Batra, 2005). However, to even make sense of (let alone reform) how ‘social distances’ implicate the curricular contexts requires a deeper qualitative engagement with all aspects of the school system – and not just

implementing curriculum frameworks and training functionaries to deliver these.

3. FRAMEWORK FOR ADDRESSING EXCLUSION

Based on the perspective emerging from the NCF–2005, the various states and union territories in India have taken up the process of curriculum (particularly syllabus and textbook) renewal. There have been some analyses of the revised textbooks from various states from the perspective of exclusion. Notable among these are the analysis by Nirantar (2011) from the standpoint of gender, and the debates stemming from Ambedkar-Nehru controversy whereby school textbooks became a subject matter of inquiry. However, the review done in this paper does not examine the textbooks from the perspective of any one particular marginalised social group. In this review, three particular criteria, emanating from the NCF in the context of exclusion, have been conceived to assess the textbooks from the selected states and classes. These three criteria are presented below.

3.1 Situating the Subject-matter in the Social Context of Children

One of the clear guideposts for curriculum development emanating from NCF–2005 concerns establishing a relation or bridging the gaps between the subject matter and everyday context of children. While overcoming the alienating character of education is one purpose, enabling

an understanding of the social context is the other. Linking school knowledge and community knowledge comes under the purview of this criterion and so does representing diversity or variation in the social context. However, this also calls for a critical engagement with the social context or reality such that the social hierarchies and oppressive inequalities can be problematised. NCF–2005 says:

Experiences of the socio-cultural world also need to become a part of the curriculum. Children need to find examples of the plurality of peoples and ways of life represented in the textbooks. These portrayals need to ensure that no community is oversimplified, labelled or judged. It may even be better for children to study and generate portrayals of the local social groups as a part of their social science studies (p. 32).

3.2 Multiple Frames and the Frames of Marginalisation

NCF–2005 asserts representation of plural identities of children as constituted in the socio-culturally diverse Indian society. However, representation of plurality has been ascribed a special meaning in the case of social sciences. This special meaning entails not only representing plural perspectives, but involves shaping the content and pedagogy of social sciences from the perspective of marginalised social groups. “A paradigm shift is recommended, proposing the study of the social sciences from the perspective of

marginalised groups. Gender justice and a sensitivity towards issues related to SC and ST communities and minority sensibilities must inform all sectors of the social sciences” (p. ix). The underlying educational aim is to develop sensitivity towards others’ well-being and feelings, and to nurture the abilities to understand democratic processes. This is a move towards ‘rescuing’ school knowledge from a unitary or ‘mainstream’ frame – and thus moving towards a more critical envisioning. To meet this objective, the framework recommends the use of plural textbooks and curricular material.

3.3 Instituting a Critical Pedagogy

The concept of critical pedagogy directly relates to the educational aim of pre-disposition towards participation in democratic processes, and the ability to work towards and contribute to social change. In NCF–2005, representing plural perspectives, paradigm shift towards perspectives of the marginalised and critical pedagogy have been seen as being interlinked:

Critical pedagogy provides an opportunity to reflect critically on issues in terms of their political, social, economic and moral aspects. It entails the acceptance of multiple views on social issues and a commitment to democratic forms of interaction... Critical pedagogy facilitates collective decision making... (p. 23).

Although they are interlinked and interdependent, here in etching out this criterion they have been presented

separately. This has been done to stress that merely presenting plurality in perspectives or a shift towards the perspectives of the marginalised, does not necessarily entail a critical approach to school knowledge. A critical perspective is reflected much more in how children are enabled to examine and participate in the world around them. The purpose of this criterion is to assess how well do the textbooks prepare children to critically understand and act upon circumstances by asking basic questions on the taken-for-granted realities, examining their own assumptions and engaging with situations.

4. CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT: INTERSTATE VARIATIONS

Following NCF–2005, NCERT also issued guidelines for the states for the revision of their respective syllabi and textbooks. Although the states and union territories followed these guidelines (as shared by an SSA personnel in an interview), there is a variation in the approaches to curriculum renewal or outcomes of the same processes. In the three states chosen in the paper the strategies followed for curriculum were different.

Bihar and Andhra Pradesh developed their own curriculum frameworks based on NCF-2005 (Bihar Curriculum Framework, 2008; Andhra Pradesh State Curriculum Framework, 2011), whereas Uttarakhand did not. Bihar SCERT revised and/or developed the state textbooks for Classes I to

VIII for all subjects in three phases – Phase I: Class I, III and VI (August, 2009); Phase II: Class II, IV and VII (December, 2009); Phase III: Class V and VIII (April, 2010). In the case of Andhra Pradesh, I to VII textbooks have been revised or developed by the SCERT for all school subjects except Hindi (for which NCERT textbook was adopted). For VIII to X, NCERT's Mathematics and Science textbooks were similarly adopted. In the case of Uttarakhand, the syllabi and textbooks for I to VII were revised based on NCF-2005. Thus, the state in a way adopted NCF-2005 as it is.

With such differences in approaches, variations in the interpretation and realisation of the vision of the NCF appear to be guaranteed. In this respect, an interview with an SSA personnel working at the national level, was found to be particularly insightful. He said,

There are certain uncanny practices that continue even after the training [given by NCERT] on the curriculum renewal guidelines. For example, Uttarakhand's syllabi, despite the claims of being based on NCF-2005, give an impression of being highly competency based... In the case of Kashmir, there was an agreement that the NCERT textbooks will be adopted.

However, 'somehow' instead of the revised ones, the old textbooks, some developed between 2000 and 2005 and others developed before 2000, got printed and distributed.

To highlight another peculiarity the SSA personnel referred to his discussions with a principal of a school that caters to a tribal community in Hazaribagh, Jharkhand. He said,

The Principal who has been working with tribal children since 1971, made a passionate case against the revised NCERT textbooks, saying that these books [particularly English ones] are not appropriate for the children of his school in terms of the contents, difficulty level and overall perspective. It makes the school community wonder about the utility and meaningfulness of these textbooks for the children in that context. Despite having a space and finances to develop its own textbooks, the state of Jharkhand has adopted NCERT textbooks and pays a heavy royalty for this every year.

Thus, one finds that there are differences in the 'approaches' of how the states have interpreted the guidelines for curriculum renewal. How textbook and curricular decisions may shape exclusionary processes in the everyday classroom contexts also reflect in these variations.³

3. How these processes have a bearing on school children also has a link to the manner in which teachers' training is planned. Most of the pre-service teacher education programmes (including the ones offered by the premier institutions) in the country are yet to be revised based on NCF for Teacher Education 2009 (NCTE, 2009) (developed in consonance with NCF 2005). The SSA personnel told in an interview that although, in-service programmes have been revised, the revisions are limited to gender sensitisation trainings and orientations on the education for children with special needs.

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In these contexts a review of the outcomes of curriculum renewal processes and their reflection in the classrooms becomes pertinent not only from the standpoint of exclusion – but to understand how the ideals envisioned in national policies and documents like NCFs are translated into practice. This includes not only review of textbooks but all aspects of education in relation to each other.

5. ANALYSIS OF THE TEXTBOOKS

While textbooks alone cannot be sufficient to assess how they are pedagogically made use of in classroom contexts by teachers and how they may be interpreted by children, yet the contents of the textbooks indicate the nature of teaching-learning they may facilitate. The review of the textbooks from the selected states indicates that there are inter-state and intra-state variations and commonalities not only in how exclusion has been addressed, but also in how NCF–2005 guideposts have been interpreted.

5.1 Subject Matter and the Social Context

A survey of Classes III, IV and V textbooks from Bihar, Uttarakhand and Andhra Pradesh brings to the fore that across these texts there is an attempt to make the content more approachable for school children. In general, the choice of topics is such

that the contents do not appear to be alienated from the everyday life. The themes around which the units/chapters revolve are common in the life worlds of children from all kinds of social contexts. Themes like family, games and play, houses, water and rain, food, animals' and plants' worlds and the like, cross-cut EVS and language textbooks from all the three states (and the NCERT textbooks as well). These have been presented by relating them to the day-to-day observations that the children may make. The chapters are supported by simple questions involving thinking, observing and talking to people around. For example, in the chapters on the theme 'houses' in EVS textbooks of Classes III and IV, children have been asked to visit their locality and observe the various kinds of houses and to inquire from the local people about the materials used in their construction.

Commonly used words from the local language, contents related to local geography and real life stories from the region have also been incorporated. In Uttarakhand's Class V English book four chapters (out of 15) relate to the state's local geography and well known places. These chapters include 'where does Bhagirathi come from', 'The Mahavriksha' and 'A Day at the Saat Taal'. Similarly, local names and words like 'Dada-Dad', 'Nana-

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Revisions with a focus on building on a wholesome perspective on socio-cultural identities of children and marginalisation have not yet been done. Also, the number of days for in-service teacher training have been reduced from 21 to 7 due to budget cuts at national level.

Nani, *'Aloo gobhi'* and *'sattu'* find references in the Uttarakhand's and Bihar's textbooks. In fact, in Bihar's Class III English textbook, there are Hindi glossaries for difficult words in the chapters. By and large, each topic has pictorial depictions and some real-life photographs that depict people, particularly, children engaged in everyday activities, plants, animals and objects that one sees around – though not in the 'form' in which one may see them.

While in general, these features were demonstrated across the selected textbooks, some textbooks were better than others with respect to bridging the gap between the school knowledge and social context. All the selected textbooks from Uttarakhand and Bihar, and Class III EVS and English textbooks from Andhra Pradesh, were found to be fulfilling the criteria of making the content more child-friendly. In fact, many of the selected states' textbooks were found to be better than the NCERT textbooks in representing children's local contexts – an aspect that will be referred to later in the chapter.

However, one textbook in obvious ways deviated from this trend. Class IV EVS textbook from Andhra Pradesh, despite having been revised, does not give an impression of having gone through the process of review. The selection and organisation of content is such that it reminds of the 'traditions' that the NCF critiques. There are 13 units, each with around 3 to 4 sub-units, organised in a linear

fashion. There are units on Indian history (that talks about pre-historic age, medieval history and the like), Indian government (that concerns the structure of governance), Earth (that includes contents like longitudes and latitudes) and so on. These themes have been built upon in a descriptive fashion.

The case of Andhra Pradesh's English textbook for Class V (with integrated workbook and supplementary textbook), is peculiar. There is an overemphasis on biographical accounts or description of lives of famous national and historical personalities (like A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, Bismillah Khan, M.S. Subbalakshmi, Doctor Joseph Lister, Maharana Pratap and Rani Padmini). The contents could have focused on anecdotal accounts from the lives of these personalities. However, they include accounts of various achievements with dates and famous people who had a bearing on the lives of these personalities in a descriptive style. The rationale for inclusion of several of biographical notes in a language textbook does not come across clearly. Even the presentation of the content is not such that a child would relate to it spontaneously – the design and language seem fairly balanced but how would children relate to these, is a question that persists as one reads the texts.

Furthermore, along with such aberrations there are variations among the textbooks from these states in terms of the difficulty level of the contents.

Uttarakhand's English textbooks seem to be least difficult as compared to the rest. Andhra Pradesh's English textbooks are pitched at a higher level. Since English more often than not is the second (or even the third) language for a child, this variation needs a more careful examination. Bihar's and Uttarakhand's EVS textbooks for Classes IV and V look simpler than those of Andhra Pradesh's. What is interesting is that in some cases there is disconnect (in terms of the level of difficulty) between the textbooks of different classes from the same state. Also, while the developmental continuity between some textbooks is clear, there are somewhere this progression is broken. For example, in Uttarakhand's English textbooks for Classes III and IV seem to be pitched at nearly the same level (the progression is visible in the chapter end exercises though). Andhra Pradesh's Class IV EVS textbook seems to be difficult (in terms of how the content has been organised) than that of Class V. It is also logically not in continuity with Class III EVS book. However, this pattern is not visible in Andhra's English textbooks.

Moreover, a broad examination of these textbooks indicates that while the 'social context' finds a representation in the texts, the 'social reality' does not. 'Social context' seems to have been interpreted a-critically in most cases. The everyday problems of local economy, polity, infrastructure, health services and education have not found a place in these texts. Another common

observation across the textbooks relates to the imagined audience of the text. It seems as if the contents have been selected/designed around the life world of, or addresses, a child from a rural/semi-urban middle class nuclear (Hindu in most cases). The institutions (family, marriage, market, school, etc.), occupational profiles of the main characters, values and standard of living, clearly represent this slant. Poverty, conflict affected contexts, children without families or in different kinds of families and social relations hardly find a reference.

Even in the case of NCERT [which steered the development of NCF-2005] primary school textbooks, similar problems are seen. For instance, the Class V English textbook (NCERT 2008) opens with three kinds of stories on food. The first unit is a poem called 'Ice-cream man' by Field (2008) that begins with a quote that reads, "What is cold, sweet and creamy, and wonderful to eat? Everyone's favourite treat especially on a hot summer day is an ice cream! And everyone's favourite person might just be the Ice-cream Man!" (p. 3). The second chapter in the text was titled "Wonderful Waste!" – a folktale where a king asks his cooks not to waste the vegetable remains and use them to make a dish – in this process his Brahmin cook invents *Avial* and serves to Brahmin guests (as depicted in a picture) (p. 11). This is followed by a "folktale" of a Santhal [an Indian tribal community prominent in the states of Jharkhand and West Bengal] bridegroom, who

misinterprets a communication and brings home a bamboo door from his in-law's house and asks his wife to make 'bamboo curry'. The chapter concludes with a comment on the 'foolishness' of the Santhal groom (p. 17). This is followed by the chapter end exercises (two sets of fill-in-the-blanks) which are descriptive in nature. In fact, in the text, there is no description or question about the Santhal community – with which the primary school children (and even school teachers) in many Indian classrooms may not be familiar with (as was the case with the MCD school to which the researcher went). While inclusion of folktales in language textbooks is clearly the purpose of the text, the rationale for selecting this particular folktale is unclear. This is particularly so because of the sequence in which these texts emerge and as the textbook does not prompt the children and teachers to critically think or discuss about the context. This is the only chapter that does not figure in the content list of the textbook. While it could be a simple omission, how children may make meaning from such 'ignorances' needs to be reflected upon.

Chapter Seven, Topsy-turvy land, begins with a pictorial depiction of a child's personal room which is in a mess as he has unkemptly thrown his things here and there. It asks questions like "does your room sometimes look like this" (p. 111). While this represents one style and standard of living, the other kinds

of lives (for example those of the children of the MCD school to which the researcher went – whereby most children came from a slum with small one room houses). Further, there are stories and poems from foreign contexts, which may make candidates for inclusion in a language text – but this needs to be seen in relation to the struggle that the children of many government schools make in learning the language. Many school teachers from government schools expressed these concerns in various discussions. One from an MCD school said, "There is a poem 'Teamwork' [by Jan Nigro] about the game of basketball... our girls have neither played this game and nor had heard about it." The contrast between the experience of the children and these textbook chapters was explicit. It also threw light on how textbooks based on a framework that stresses 'child's experience', 'child-centered and 'critical pedagogy' and 'social construction of knowledge', would work in different contexts.

These observations indicate a trend of commonalities and variations in how NCF translated into practice in various states. They also reflect a lack of synergy within the state teams designing different textbooks – which brings forth a need for an inquiry in the processes through which curricular materials get developed. While there seems to be a general trend towards connecting school knowledge and social context in the textbooks, the scenario with respect to representation of plural frames is

different. This also makes it possible to critically examine the interpretation of the meaning of 'social context' by the textbook teams.

5.2 Multiple Frames and the Frame of Marginalisation

In the textbooks there are several case materials which a child may find in her/his context. However, the manner in which the case material have been presented, organised or handled in most of the cases does not involves an engagement of/with multiple perspectives. Although, assessing textbooks for inclusion of content relating to different social groups would amount to oversimplification of the meaning of 'plurality', it is worth-mentioning that there are several textbooks among the ones selected that did not qualify this test. This is the case with almost all textbooks from Uttarakhand, and some textbooks from the other two states. In general, in terms of parity in representing boys and girls (in illustrations and contents) and depicting mixing of both the sexes all the textbooks are fairly balanced. However, the girls and the boys (exempting a few cases) are shown in their traditional roles. This is particularly the case with Bihar's textbooks. Furthermore, references to minority religions, tribal communities, oppressed caste groups and poor, find place in very few textbooks. Caste hierarchy or inequity did not come across as a subject matter in any textbook.

In fact, there seems to be an inherent ambiguity regarding the meaning of representing multiple perspectives. Does it mean removing all markers of or references to socio-political identities of people? Does it constitute including stories of 'brave' and 'unique' women, differently-abled people, tribes and minorities? Does it mean inclusion of some stories representing these social groups? Does it involve including stories and poems on national unity? Does it comprise showing pictures that represent unity? Or is it simply including characters in some stories with [stereotypical] names representing affiliation to different religions to give an impression of unity? Would it imply representing socio-cultural contexts with "real" political over/undertones to the children? These ambiguities and patterns become visible in the selected textbooks particularly from Uttarakhand and Bihar. For example, in Uttarakhand's Class IV textbook, *Hansi-Khushi*, in all the chapters the characters have been given common Hindu names and they represent the Hindu ways of life or culture (through common festivals, family structures, mythological stories etc.). However, inclusion of Eidgaah seems to be an attempt to break this trend (or is just the one case where a different kind of culture finds a reference). It is also worthnoting that this story finds a place in Class V (and not IV) Hindi NCERT textbook. Thus the arbitrariness in assessing the level of

texts also comes to the fore. Similarly, in Bihar's Class III Hindi textbook, *Kopalein Part I*, the contents revolve around characters with Hindu names. Amidst these there is a poem making references to religious unity in India, that says – "Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Isaai chaaron milkar gaen" (p. 80). In several textbooks there are 'references to' (and sometime meaningful incorporation of) Muslim minority, but references to Sikh, Christian, Buddhist and other religions are hardly found. It is only in Andhra Pradesh's Class III textbooks that one sees Sikh children in illustrations.

The contents that bring social conflict, debates, contesting perspectives and viewpoints have not found a place in these textbooks. There seems to be a deliberate attempt to de-politicise the textbooks (and thereby the social world), which in itself raises questions about how well do the textbooks represent the social context of the children. [This could be an outcome of a very literal interpretation of the term 'joyful' learning proposed by the NCF.] What Kumar (1996) says in the context of presenting children with the category of 'conflict' becomes relevant in this context: "institutional education [in India] avoids imparting the knowledge of issues that involve conflict" (p. 6). As an outcome of these ambiguities, not only the objective of representing multiple perspectives in a meaningful fashion remains unfulfilled, the possibility of presenting contents from the perspective of the marginalised becomes remote.

However, there are certain notable exceptions where instead of an omnipresent ambiguity; there is a sense of clarity and direction in this context – where it is possible to infer the principle of content selection and organisation. Two cases that were found to be better than the others on the parameter of presentation of multiple perspectives are Andhra Pradesh's Class III EVS and English textbooks. The EVS textbook is also one case where one sees an attempt to examine the social norms and institutions from the frames of the marginalised. This also presents a meaningful example of how 'critical pedagogy' may be supported by textbooks. Both of these have been reviewed in the next section.

5.3 Critical Pedagogy

Although based on textbooks it is not possible to understand pedagogic environments of classrooms, here an attempt is made to review whether or not and how the selected textbooks facilitate (or provide contents and cues for) thinking critically about the social world. The kind of picture that emerges from this brief review of textbooks indicates that on this criterion the situation is abysmal. The textbooks from Bihar and Uttarakhand, were particularly found to be lagging on this dimension. With exception to countable instances, the textbook contents and chapter end exercises did not appear to promote or support critical questioning.

These texts present the social context as it exists, without creating spaces for the children and the teachers to critically examine social norms, institutions and stereotypes. In fact, themes like poverty, hunger, inequity, disability, exclusion and the like do not find a space in the textbooks at all. For example, if one examines the contents in the Bihar's EVS textbooks of Classes III and IV, it emerges that they primarily revolve around plain descriptions of the social and natural world that children observe around them. In Class III EVS book, there are chapters like 'chacha's wedding', 'our family', 'various kinds of foods', 'world of living beings', 'preparing for Diwali', 'know about houses', and the like. The poem 'Chacha's wedding' (p. 1) which is the opening chapter, basically lists the various close relatives who usually come to attend family weddings. The text is supported with a picture of a traditional Hindu wedding and the chapter end exercises include: listing the relatives who usually come to weddings, matching the category names for relations with their descriptions and classifying relatives according to their gender. There is no reference made to the variety of ways in which weddings take place, and to the traditions and practices in marriages that are problematic from the standpoint of gender equity. Class IV textbook also has a chapter on relationships (pp. 41-46), 'When *mamaji* [maternal uncle] came home'. It describes how an uncle comes home on the festival of *Raksha Bandhan* and

brings a variety of gifts for his sister's family and how the two children are elated. The chapter is followed by questions that revolve around change in women's residence after marriage. For example, the text asks, 'where did your mother live before marriage'—without facilitating a critical inquiry about this practice or aberrations to this norm or how gender roles are shaped in the social institutions.

The case of Class III chapter 'Know about houses' (p. 48-52) is similar. The chapter is about the various kinds of homes one sees in villages and cities, the material with which they are made and the availability of the material in villages. There are illustrations of four kinds of houses. One is a dilapidated hut structure made of mud, wood and straws. The second is a relatively permanent and better off hut structure. The third illustration is of a permanent structure and the fourth of a multi-storeyed building. Although there could be a variety of concepts about the social world that a child may be able to question or engage with through such contents, the text limits the exercises to listing the materials with which the houses are made, drawing pictures of the houses around, describing the materials with which the children's own house is made and the like. Aspects such as who lives in what kinds of houses, why are houses different from each other, who constructs various kinds of houses, what may be a better way (ecologically) to make houses and the like, remain untouched. The

Class IV EVS textbook, in continuity to this chapter, there is another chapter on houses (p. 58), which again asks children to do similar tasks. In fact, in Bihar's textbooks there are several exercises that limit the work to preparing lists of various kinds. Uttarakhand's textbooks are also very similar.

However, as said in the preceding section, Andhra Pradesh's Class III English and EVS textbooks, *My English World* and *We-Our Environment*, (particularly the latter) emerged as being the better ones in the sample. That is, they have the potential to support children in a critical examination of the taken-for-granted 'reality'. The very same themes, as presented in the textbooks from the other two states, have been treated very differently. The textbooks satisfy all the three criterion of focusing on the social context, representing plurality and presenting contents in fashion that encourages children to think about situations from a logical standpoint (if not from the standpoint of the marginalised). The English textbook (from among all the textbooks chosen for review in this chapter) came across as being the most balanced in the representation of the major religious beliefs practiced in the local context of the state. While there are some critical cues given in the main body of the chapters, the criticality is primarily promoted by asking questions that involve imagining, thinking and developing narratives around questions of who, how and why.

The EVS textbook is better than the one for English with respect to the parameter of promoting critical thinking by presenting intellectually stimulating and critical content. For example, in the chapter on different types of houses (pp. 86-93) (which has been dealt very descriptively in Bihar's and Uttarakhand's books), the children have been asked to think about the structure of the village – in terms of who stays in which part of the village and in what kinds of houses, and why this may be so. There are pictures of tents and big unused drainage pipes that show families using them as houses. The children have been prompted to think about who lives in such accommodations and why. The cues lead them to discuss about migrant labour, homeless and poor – and even the lives of people who work in circus. Similarly, the differences between city and village houses are made problematic. Across this textbook, gender, poverty and disability run as undercurrent in the contents and have been stated explicitly in the syllabus (p. iii).

However, there are problems in representations that come across in a few sections in the book. For example, the first unit has a section, "Let's play" (pp.7-8), that shows 'abled' and 'differently-abled' children playing together. While this picture is unique or one of its kind (vis-a-vis the various kinds of pictures in all other textbooks), the questions that follow bear an awkward or rather a condescending tone. The text asks,

“Who are there in the picture? What difficulties do they face in doing their day-to-day work? How should they be helped and supported?” and the like (p. 8). This seems to be an outcome of difficulty in finding a solution to the question how to incorporate the agenda of sensitising children towards ‘others’. However, the complication involved in defining and addressing the category of ‘other’ or ‘us’ and ‘they’ seems to not have been adequately engaged with. While the concern for doing so is clear, the form that it has taken seems to do the opposite.

Thus, the instances from the various textbooks bring out that (though there is one exception to the norm) the textbooks have not been adequately scrutinised with respect to criticality in perspective. Furthermore, despite NCF’s (2005) recommendation of practicing critical pedagogy, it is pertinent to think about whether or not critical pedagogy can be ‘implemented’ in classrooms based on ‘recommendations’ or ‘mandates’. Can teachers be ‘trained’ to ‘incorporate’ critical pedagogy and what kind of work and how long it would take to do so, are also questions that may or may not have been reflected upon in the large scale curriculum renewal processes at the state level. As it is apparent the textbook development teams would need support to make sense of critical practice.

6. SUMMING-UP

Broadly it can be said, that despite efforts towards inclusion, the perspectives

of Dalits, tribals, differently-abled and religious minorities find fewer references in the textbooks. The textbooks demonstrate a trend of a more balanced representation of the two sexes. However, the representations follow a descriptive or a-critical trajectory (with some exceptions) that reasserts the traditional gender roles. Also, the complexity of the constitution of gender and diversity in sexuality do not find a place in the textbooks. Themes like poverty, unemployment, hunger, conflict and multiplicity in ideologies and the like which are omnipresent in the social context of the country and the world, also do not emerge from the textbooks. At the same time, certain kinds of stereotypes continue to be embedded in the textbooks in subtle ways. Thus, although it would take a closer and a more holistic analysis to understand whether or not the textbooks’ contents are exclusionary, it is evident that they are far from addressing the category of exclusion in a holistic and critical fashion.

NCF-2005 lays emphasis on the context of social exclusion in the country and presents a broad vision for contextualising school curriculum in this social reality. However, being a broad guiding document, it skips detailing on how this may be achieved. While this may not be the task of a curriculum framework for obvious reasons, it creates varied kinds of ambiguities in interpretations at the state level. The genesis of these ambiguities, in some ways at least,

can be traced to the NCF itself – which presents ideas like ‘social context’, ‘plurality’, ‘paradigm shift to the perspective of the marginalised’ and ‘critical pedagogy’ in a somewhat ambiguous form. Although the spirit of the document is clear, this clarity does not seem to find a reflection in the renewed textbooks developed at the state level and by the NCERT as well (in some cases at least). Would representing social context imply reflecting “real” political over/undertones embedded therein? How to make textbooks “joyful” and “critical” at the same time? How may a textbook’s contents incorporate concerns of varied social groups, varied views of reality, marginality, criticality and train children to be socially sensitive? The textbooks seem to be products of various ways in which the state level teams have grappled with these issues. There are exceptions where there is some kind of a resolution in these respects. Like the one EVS Class III textbook from Andhra Pradesh (which is not free of anomalies) in the small pool of selected books, there could be more in a larger sample. However, the trend indicates that several rigorous

review exercises would be required to make the textbooks suited to address ‘exclusion’ critically.

In these respects, the questions that have framed the discourse on ‘school knowledge’ (Young, 1971; Apple, 2000) continue to hold ground. How do the principles of selecting and sorting constitute school reality? Whose knowledge or experience becomes socially legitimate in schools? Whose interests do the schools serve and how? In what ways can schools and pedagogic practice assume a critical transformatory social function? How to bridge the social gaps and strive for the ideals of social justice, equality, fraternity, liberty and democracy, through school curriculum? These questions, among many other things, highlight that the functions that schools perform and the roles they assume are not just ‘pedagogic’. Schools are social institutions (Beteille, 2005), and their pedagogic and academic agenda revolve around their social functions – which are much more contested even when the debates appear to concern only the pedagogic aspect.

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