

Building National Consciousness in Primary School Students through English Language Teaching

Padma Thinless*

Devendra Rankawat**

Abstract

Being 'conscious of' something means being aware of one's environs. National consciousness is not a tangible thing; yet, it plays an important role in nation-building. It plays a crucial role in promoting national unity, peace, diversity, patriotism, and gives a sense of belonging within the diverse national community. The concept of 'nation' is an artificial one; therefore it requires a conscious effort to inculcate the right values and attitudes in children so that they may grow into proud citizens tomorrow. National consciousness refers to a state of awareness of one's surrounding as well as the necessary sense of shared identity, unity, and bonding among the people of a particular nation. Since the nation rests on the idea of a continuous history, bringing up children on the diet of national history would likely result in a better future for children. This paper is an attempt to find out whether the primary school English language curriculum addresses the issue of national consciousness. In this direction the study seeks to analyse whether the content and style of representation in the Marigold English textbooks instils national consciousness and if yes, to what extent. Also, whether there can be further reinforcement of this idea in verbal and visual content of the books.

Key words: Unity, Patriotism, Language, Belonging, National consciousness, Identity

INTRODUCTION

National consciousness is not a tangible thing; yet, it plays an important role in nation-building. It is crucial

for the promotion of national unity and peace, diversity, tolerance and acceptance of diversity and inculcation of a shared sense of belonging to the

*Research Scholar, Central University of Rajasthan

**Assistant Professor, Central University of Rajasthan

diverse national community. Certainly, nations are man-made. They don't occur naturally like plants, rivers and mountains. To build a nation, it takes people who envision their collective existence in a certain way and to develop this sense of collective existence, a certain kind of education is needed. This paper is an attempt in the direction of finding out whether the primary school English language curriculum of NCERT addresses the issue of national consciousness. To do so, the study seeks to analyse whether the content and style of representation of the Marigold English textbooks (Class I to Class V) instils national consciousness in children and how its structuring and selection of content contribute to its reinforcement. The attempt is also to suggest literature which can help inculcate national consciousness.

Generally, consciousness is defined as the physical and mental state of being awake and fully conscious of one's surroundings, thoughts, and feelings. Also, consciousness is frequently used as an interchangeable term for 'awareness'. National consciousness thus refers to a state of awareness in which one conceptualises who one is, where one belongs to, how one wishes to be seen by others. Benedict Anderson's idea of "imagined community" is that a nation is made up of people who see themselves as part of a certain group. He conceived of 'nation' as a community living in a territory with well-defined

borders, and as a group with specific configuration of citizenship. In order to better understand nation as a concept it is necessary to analyse how an individual is able to attach himself with territory and its symbols.

The sentiment of attachment among its citizens and the will to differentiate themselves from others are the two pre-requisites of a nation. It is noted that there are various other factors in the creation of national identities. National identity is created within a specific community that has common beliefs, rituals and memories, which are thought about and spoken in a specific language. A shared language strengthens the contact channels between people and helps build a real sense of belonging. For instance, languages like English, French and German and their school education system played a decisive role in generating strong national consciousness among the people of these nations.

Similarly, identifying and establishing what it means to be a member of a nation socially and psychologically is of key importance. Continuity over time and differentiation are the other key criteria of identity. Continuity is embedded in historical roots. Last but not the least, having a set of shared symbols and rituals plays an equally decisive role in fostering national identity. Symbols such as national flag and rituals like attending a national day give strength to the community and a feeling of unity

because such events and symbols are meant for hallowing a common past. Individuals can experience an emotion of unusual strength that stems from their affiliation with the nation through rituals.

The most important resource of a nation is its citizens. In the absence of aware, loyal and proud citizens, all other resources may simply go waste. In developing this one resource, education is extremely vital. Just as bringing children up to a national iconography molds them in a desired way, so their language curriculum can be designed to reinforce their sense of a collective identity. The National Policy on Education 1986 envisions an education system rooted in the Indian ethos—one that contributes directly to transforming India into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society. By providing high-quality education to all, India can be transformed into a global knowledge superpower. The Policy envisages that the curriculum and pedagogy of our institutions must develop in the students a deep sense of respect towards the Fundamental Duties and Constitutional values, bonding with one's country, and a conscious awareness of one's roles and responsibilities in a changing world.

The approach of primary language curriculum of letting students make visual observations and then have conversations around these, plays a vital role in primary education. Observation of iconography and diversity of our country, and the

reading of literature pertaining to national historical events, could be very helpful in imparting a basic understanding about the nation to our children. Understanding the relation of the present conditions to our history is a major, if not the most important, factor determining the way in which the nation perceives itself. For instance, a 'Read Out Exercise' in Unit 2 of Class II textbook in the Marigold series, enabling understanding of inclusivity says, "So what if they are dark or fair, so what if they are tall or small, so what if they are 'this' and 'that', they are your children, And you love them for what they are" (Page no. 37, Marigold Class II). Likewise, a poem in Unit 8 of the Class I textbook speaks of pride in being Indian and teaches children how to be a good Indian. A read-and-act story titled The Tiger and the Mosquito says, "A tiger was dozing under a tree. A mosquito came buzzing by. The tiger said, "Hey! Mosquito!"... The tiger struck out with his paw. The mosquito flew off. This time, too, he hit himself... The mosquito called out after him, "Don't be so proud, my friend. Everyone is great in his own way." (Page no. 91, Marigold Class I). A reading exercise in it says, "I must not hit anyone. I am proud to be an Indian." (Page no. 92, Marigold Class I). The need to comprehend and empathise with the theological, philosophical, ethical, cultural, economic, and political perspectives of others, should be the key attributes of an Indian.

A clear sense of one's own identity is definitely a key factor in determining how one relates to others and responds to them. In the last chapter, titled *Who will be Ningthou*, in the Class V Marigold series, there is a story about a king from Manipur. The story introduces students to a number of themes such as multi-lingualism, leadership and gender awareness. It sensitises the students about the far-east states of India and its languages. The story familiarises them with Manipuri words too such as, "A king is called 'Ningthou' and a queen is called 'Leima' in Manipuri... Their beloved king and queen had three sons—Sanajaoba, Sanayaima and Sanatomba. Twelve years later, a daughter was born. She was named Sanatombi" (Page no. 167, Marigold Class V). Subsequently, the 'Let's Listen and Talk' exercise in the chapter encourages students to learn more about Manipur.

1. Can you point out Manipur on the map of India?
 2. What language do the people of Manipur speak?
 - (i) Assamese (ii) Maithailon (iii) Mizo
- (Page no.172, Marigold Class V)

Of course, it is a fact that the North-eastern states, even today, remain either under-represented or altogether neglected. A report by MHA, prepared under the chairmanship of Shri M.P. Bezbaruah to look into the concerns of the people of the North-East living in other parts of the country says, "One

of the most persistent suggestions placed before the Committee was to educate the future generation on the history and culture of the North-East by inserting appropriate chapters in the textbooks. We had detailed discussions with the Ministry of Human Resources Development (MHRD) on this issue; and officers of MHRD including Secretary-Higher Education, Secretary-Primary Education, representatives from the University Grants Commission, NCERT, etc., were present.

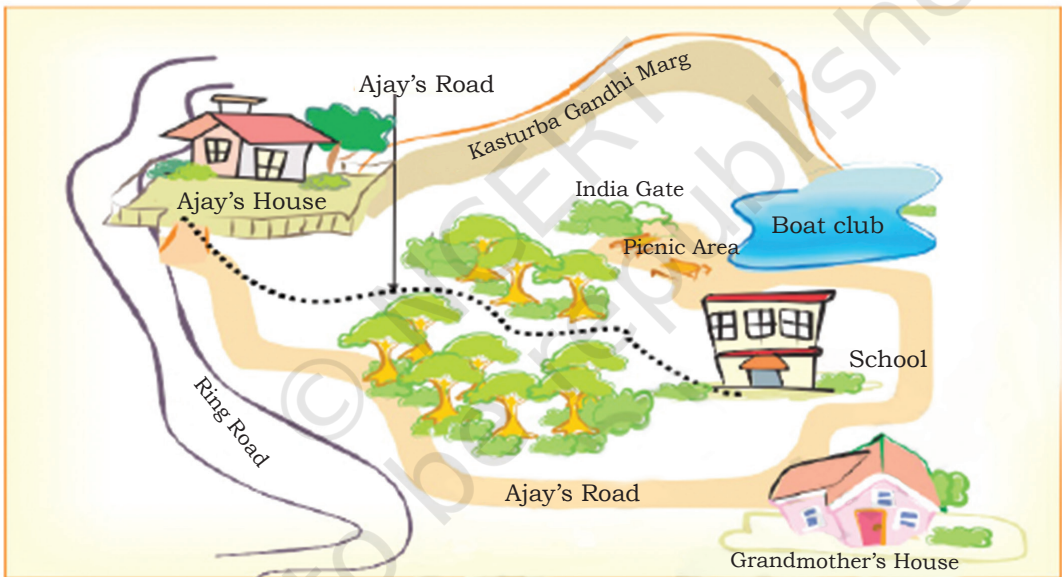
MHRD impressed upon us that the Ministry was aware of the important role played by the education system in creating awareness and in sensitising people about the North-East. The Ministry assured us that they have taken a number of initiatives in this regard. The note received from the Ministry can be read in Annexure 14B. The MHRD also informed us that NCERT had edited textbooks for secondary level on the basis of recommendations of the Mrinal Miri Committee." (Government of India, 2014).

Although the committee and its recommendation were primarily focused on the issues faced by people from the North-eastern region; its suggestion seems to be applicable to every lesser-known culture, history and language of India. In the same way, NCERT could add more and more 'native' stories from other parts of the nation in order to understand the vast geography of the country and the diverse people living therein.

Fundamental Duties mentioned in the Indian Constitution have also been quoted at the end of the last chapter of the Class V book to instill a sense of duty among students; to encourage them to abide by the Constitution and follow the noble ideals that inspired India's freedom struggle; to defend the country and perform national service when called upon; and to promote harmony and a spirit of common brotherhood that transcends religious, linguistic, regional and class differences.

has helped the nation grow. There is a chance to highlight specific locations, geographical elements or historical context that could otherwise be overlooked. Naming public infrastructure, such as roads, streets, junctions and buildings after national heroes is a common practice in every nation. This aspect could be elaborated in the textbooks.

In this context, Unit 9 of the Class V textbook, titled *Sing a Song of People* contains a navigation exercise



The names of public places, buildings, and monuments are an important strand of our history because they honour people and events from the past. They show not only who the person is, but also what he or she has done and how it

which has some important names pertaining to national history, such as *Ashoka*, *Kasturba Gandhi*, *India Gate*. Framing of such exercises around historically significant personages would certainly enable students to remember the country's

heroes, which would consequently lead to the celebration of past idols. The above exercise of navigation in the chapter encapsulates the whole concept of commemorating the legacy left behind by the national figures.

Cultural diversity is a characteristic of nearly every nation on earth today. India is one of the world's most culturally diverse nations. It affords a wide variety of cultures, perhaps making it the most multicultural nation on our planet. Its enormous population includes Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Zoroastrians and others. There is also a great deal of cultural variation depending on factors such as region, language, caste, and ethnicity. According to the 2011 census, inhabitants in this country spoke one hundred twenty one distinct languages. Twenty-two of

Mahatma Gandhi's approach, which includes inclusiveness, tolerance and compassion for the perspectives of people with other philosophical, religious, political, and cultural orientations, is regarded as not only relevant but urgently needed as a solution in today's conflict-ridden world. The current syllabus does have a certain message of diversity in a few chapters and exercises. For instance, the following exercises in Unit 2, titled *I Want* in the Class II textbook should instill an understanding of the diversity in people's facial appearance, in different parts of India.

Similarly, a story named *The Magic Garden* in the Class III textbook demonstrates the diversity in the form of a garden having numerous varieties of flowers. *The Magic Garden* seems to symbolise a place, where



Let's share

There are many kinds of people. They all look different. One face has been drawn for you. Complete the rest of the faces.



these were spoken by over 96 per cent of the population. According to the statement, there are seven hundred five Scheduled Tribes in India. Even within these groups, there is a great deal of diversity.

diverse people can live together happily by not only appreciating their similarities but also by celebrating the differences. (Page no. 4, Marigold Class III)

CONCLUSION

Since the idea of a nation rests on the idea of continuous history, bringing up children on the diet of nation and its history would likely result in a better future in terms of tolerance and respect for communities other than one's own. In this respect, right education at the primary school stage plays a significant role in a child's cognitive, affective and behavioral

make-up. Therefore, it is necessary to feed children with literature that can promote national unity, peace, and respect for diversity. Undoubtedly, there are stories, poems and exercises which lead the way. Yet, a little more visual representation of diversity of people and places would definitely result in making a desired impact on the children with whom lies the future of our nation.

REFERENCES

- ANDERSON, BENEDICT. 2016. *Imagined Communities*. Verso Books. 2016.
- MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS. 2014. *Report of the Committee Under the Chairmanship of Shri M.P. Bezbaruah to Look into the Concerns of the People of the North-East Living in Other Parts of the Country*. Government of India. https://www.mha.gov.in/sites/default/files/filefield_pathsReportOfMPB_ezbaruahCommittee.PDF. Accessed 22 July, 2022.
- NCERT. 2018 The Tiger and the Mosquito, Unit VIII, Class I, *Marigold*.
- _____.2018. I Want, Unit II, Class II, *Marigold*.
- _____.2018. The Magic Garden, Unit 1, Class III, *Marigold*.
- _____.2018. Sing a Song of People, Unit 9, Class V, *Marigold*.
- _____.2018. Who will be Nighthou, Unit 10, Class V, *Marigold*.