

## Raindrops

(A New Series of Textbooks in English)

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### Abstract

*The new syllabi and textbooks brought out by NCERT in the wake of NCF-2005 attempt to provide a somewhat equitable representation of rural and urban content, themes and images. However, there are states in India with a large number of rural or tribal children, or children from migrant families living in urban areas, whose exposure to English would be extremely limited. Most of these children are likely to be first generation school-goers, with little or no help from parents and siblings. In the context of English at the primary level, it was felt that rural children deserve an altogether distinctive series of textbooks. Raindrops marks an unprecedented attempt of this kind.*

*The textbooks in this series utilise the insights of modern theories in linguistics to bring home certain concepts to boys and girls studying in village schools: listening exercises have been included, grammar is introduced unobtrusively, and the themes favour the rural world.*

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### INTRODUCTION

The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) has brought out a new series of textbooks in English for Classes I-V. This series, titled *Raindrops*, is intended for first generation school-goers, of whom rural children would form an appreciable segment.

Since its inception, NCERT has been bringing out textbooks in the area

of school education in various subjects from Classes I to XII. The education of children in villages is the most challenging and daunting aspect of our educational system. The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 recommends that children's life at school must be linked to their life outside the school. This principle marks a departure from the legacy of pedagogic practices which overlook the child's own efforts to learn by observing

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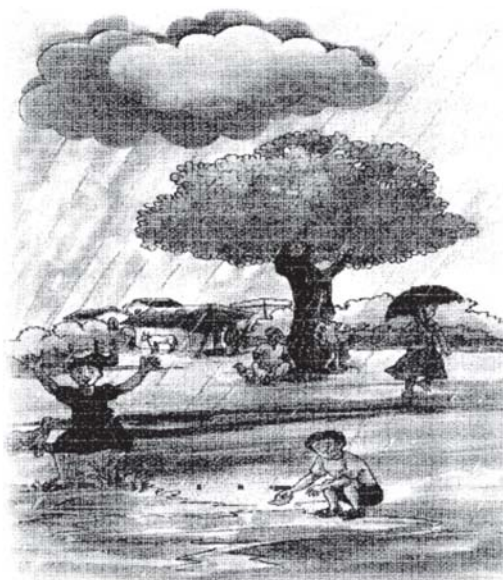
his/her environment, and by finding meaning in his/her everyday experience. The new syllabi and textbooks brought out by NCERT in the wake of NCF-2005 attempt to provide a somewhat equitable representation of rural and urban content, themes and images. In the context of English at the primary level, it was felt that rural children deserve an altogether distinctive series of textbooks. *Raindrops* marks an unprecedented attempt of this kind.

NCERT's another series of textbooks in English for the primary stage, *Marigold*, came to be associated with a particular kind of target audience: children who would have had some exposure to the English language, and who could expect parental help and support in learning tasks in English. However, there are quite a few states in India with a large number of rural or tribal children, or children from migrant families living in urban areas, whose exposure to English would be extremely limited. Most of these children are first generation school-goers, with little or no help from parents and siblings. It is likely that such states would connect to *Raindrops* better.

### Themes

The themes in *Raindrops* are those that are mentioned in the *Syllabus for classes at the Elementary Level*. Some emerging concerns like environmental issues, conservation of resources, animals and plants, human rights, safety norms, etc. have been incorporated in the course content.

## RAIN DROPS



Course materials also draw upon the following concerns in an integrated manner:

1. Self, Family, Home, Friends and Pets
2. Neighbourhood and Community at large
3. The Nation — diversity (socio-cultural, religious and ethnic, as well as linguistic); heritage (myths/legends/folktales)
4. The World – India's neighbours and other countries (their cultures, literature and customs)
5. Adventure and Imagination
6. Sports
7. Issues relating to Adolescence
8. Science and Technology
9. Peace and Harmony

- 10. Travel and Tourism
- 11. Mass Media
- 12. Art and Culture
- 13. Health

The thematic package is suggestive, and in line with the learners' interest and experience.

It was decided in the planning meeting itself that the content of *Raindrops* would not have overtly urban themes such as a birthday party, a visit to a mall, etc. But then it was not going to be stereotypically rural either. Indeed, both these would be self-defeating. A conscious attempt to maintain a rural-urban balance has been made, with the focus being on linking content to life outside the school. Further, themes like environment, peace and gender sensitivity figure more prominently in the series.

The consequences of the legacy of rote memorisation, and de-linking school life from life outside, have been especially grim for rural children. All the textbooks in this series attempt to provide opportunities for fantasy and wondering, interaction in small groups, and activities requiring hands on experiences, and in short, make the experience of learning English an experience of joy and confidence-building.

### **The Alphabet**

Conventional textbooks used to present the alphabet in the beginning

itself, in the 'A for Apple' mode. This is no longer the case. Research on syllable recognition and letter-sound matching has shown that exposure to a series of words focusing on a particular sound facilitates. As the syllabus says, 'We need to develop a focus in which the research on language learning is integrated with the language teaching.'<sup>1</sup>

In Class I, the alphabet is presented in two ways:

1. Letter recognition
2. Trace the letters

**1. Letter recognition:** Since it was felt that the target audience may not have had exposure to the English alphabet, the complete English alphabet (both small and capital letters) is presented at certain intervals. It has been given either horizontally, for instance, where a lesson ends, or vertically, as a sort of add-on border to the lesson. These would indicate to the child the order as well as the number of letters in the alphabet that he/she would glance at, perhaps touch with a finger, or simply chant along with others in the class.

**2. Trace the letters:** Tracing the letters of the alphabet begins only after Lesson 5.

The letters of the alphabet have been grouped as follows:

1. a c e o
2. m n r
3. s u v w x z
4. b d f h k l t i
5. g j p q y

The letters using the downward stroke, such as d, t, etc. are in one group; the letters using curved lines such as c and o are grouped together. Each group of letters has been given at intervals throughout the book. The letters are presented in dotted outline forms, and then space is provided for the child to practise further.

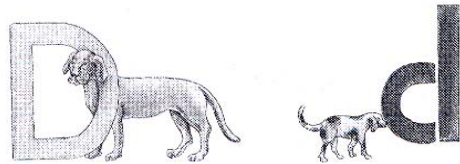
There is no inherent contradiction in these two ways of presentation. The letter groups for tracing are based on the hand movement required, and the letter recognition indicates the alphabetical order of the letters, which is necessary for reference skills later, to look up dictionaries, directories, and so on. Some teachers prefer to teach the capital letters first, while others insist on teaching the lower case, and yet there are others who introduce both at the same time. The team, after discussion, took a decision to teach the lower case first, because capital letters only account for about 5 per cent of the written word. Also, the lower case letters are the ones that children see more frequently in their environment.

It is found that sometimes some children may write 'b' for 'd', and vice versa. For, in writing 'b' the semicircle comes at the right side of the vertical

stroke; for 'd' the semicircle is at the left. A conscious attempt was made to address this problem, through illustrations.



The bee rests on the capital 'B', then takes away the top half semicircle to form a little 'b'.



'D' in for 'Dog', and a little dog pushes the semicircle from the left to form the little 'd'.

Ultimately, the real issue with most children is that they need repeated, constant exposure and time to work and rework the letters.

### Poems

The cluster of four poems that finally formed the initial pages of Class I *Raindrops* needs mention; what informed the decision needs mention too. The poems introduce the child to the language, in this case English, which some children may not have had much exposure to. They would in all probability know some words in English—perhaps even without being aware that the words are English—such

as radio, light, bulb, T.V., train, bus, car, etc. But they may not have had exposure to little songs or rhymes, as they would have had in their mother tongue. Hence, an attempt has been made to bridge this gap. As with rhymes for children everywhere, the sounds are the main focus in these poems; not so much the meaning. Indeed, the first poem is a series of action words:

“Clap clap clap  
Tap tap tap  
Hop hop hop  
Stop stop stop.”

Children would enjoy reciting them, with actions, and thus relate the meaning to the sound.

The second poem introduces children to counting. Most of us have learnt it as

One Two  
Buckle my shoe  
Three four  
Shut the door.

The rationale behind it not being included is that ‘buckle’ is a difficult word, both in terms of pronunciation and meaning. Further, the word ‘buckle’ may be alien to his/her economic and social environment of the first generation school-goer. After much discussion, the following poem was chosen for its simplicity of concept and ease in pronunciation :

One Two  
Cows moo  
Three four  
Lions roar.  
and so on.

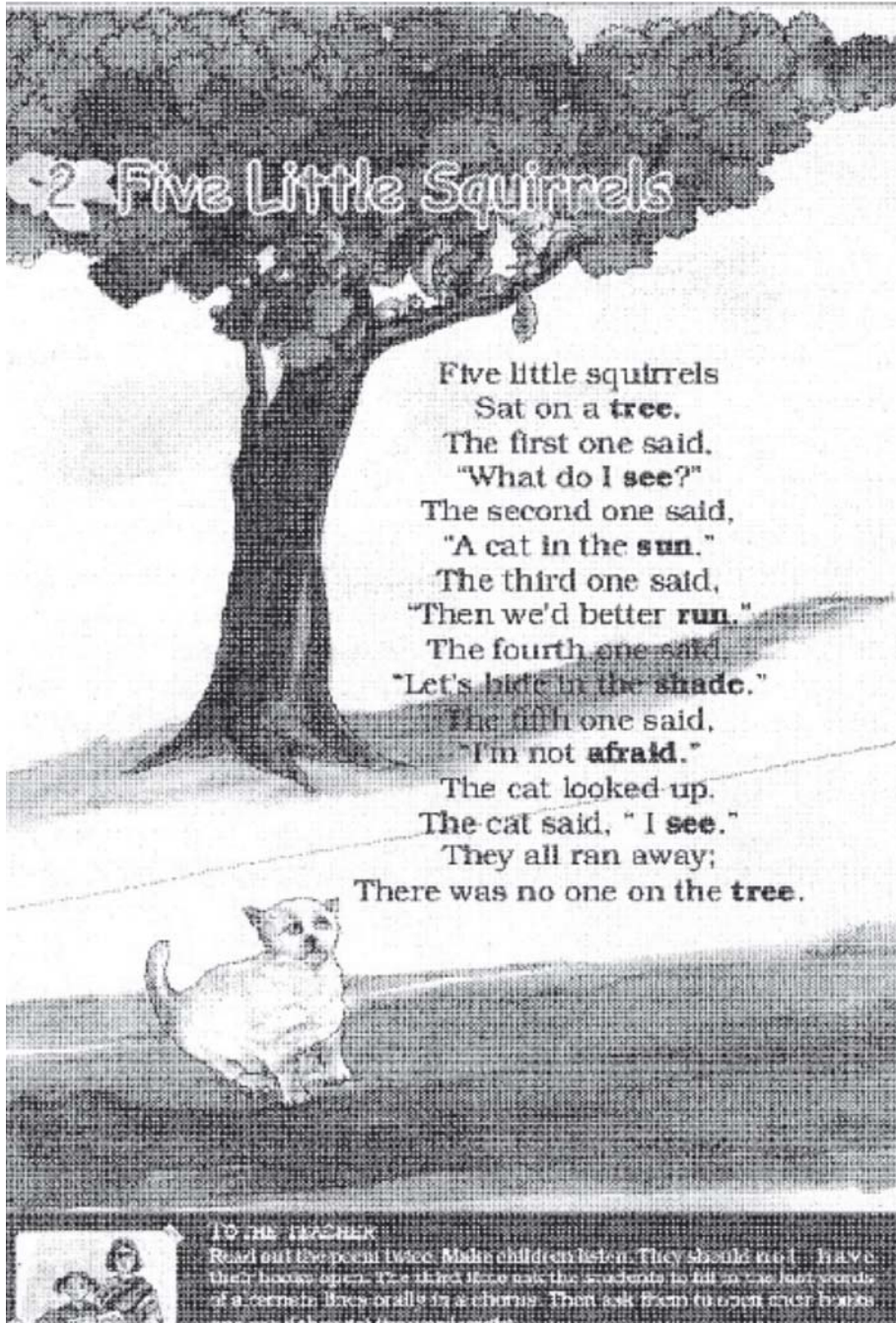
Some poems have been included as additional input, after certain lessons. For instance, the following short poem has been put in after the lesson ‘Directions’:

Mr East gave a feast  
Mr North laid the cloth  
Mr West did his best  
Mr South burnt his mouth  
While eating a hot potato!

*(Raindrops, Class III)*

### **Listening**

The textbooks in this series utilise the insights of modern theories in linguistics to bring home certain concepts to boys and girls studying in village schools. For instance, listening as an area of pedagogic activity has been much neglected. “Listening covers the ability to pay attention, to value the other person’s point of view, to stay in touch with the unfolding utterance, and to make flexible hypotheses about the meaning of what is being said. Listening, thus, forms as complex a web of skills and values as talking does.”<sup>2</sup> All this has important implications for the classroom. In the orbit of listening, detailed planning of activities for incorporation in textbook would go a



## 2 Five Little Squirrels

Five little squirrels  
 Sat on a **tree**.  
 The first one said,  
 "What do I **see**?"  
 The second one said,  
 "A cat in the **sun**."  
 The third one said,  
 "Then we'd better **run**."  
 The fourth one said,  
 "Let's hide in the **shade**."  
 The fifth one said,  
 "I'm not **afraid**."  
 The cat looked up.  
 The cat said, "I **see**."  
 They all ran away;  
 There was no one on the **tree**.

**To the Teacher**  
 Read out the poem twice. Make children listen. They should not have their books open. The first time ask the students to fill in the last words of a certain line orally by a chorus. Then ask them to open their books

long way in resurrecting the significant skill and value area.

As mentioned earlier, the poems in *Raindrops* I are meant only for enjoyment, with listening as the major factor. Furthermore, a decision was consciously taken not to include any activity or exercise for the first four poems, which would have led to a shift in focus.

Exercises that deal specifically with listening have been introduced in the series. In fact, for the first time in NCERT textbooks, a 'listening text' has been introduced. *Raindrops* Class III contains a short poem 'Five Little Squirrels' which has been given with some words missing. The complete poem is provided at the end of the book, which the teacher is instructed to read thrice. The poem is presented on page 30. The words given in bold are the 'missing words'.

In the first reading, children listen; in the second, they try to fill in the blanks; in the third, they complete the words they have missed.

Another listening activity makes children focus on the sounds that make up familiar words:

POT      TER  
TEA      CHER  
CAR      PEN      TER

The words are presented in 'blocks', and an element of fun is introduced here: the teacher is asked to make children clap according to the number

of sounds they hear; 'teacher' has two claps, and so on ('The Work People Do', *Raindrops*, Class II).

My personal favourite is the one in which children are asked to take 'a listening walk' to a big tree in their locality and consciously listen to the birds and animals that shelter in it (*Raindrops*, Class V).

### Reading

Generally, schools focus more on reading and writing. Yet, 'while reading is readily accepted as a focus area for language education, school syllabi are burdened with information-absorbing and memorising tasks of reading, so much so that the pleasure of reading for its own sake is missed out.'<sup>3</sup> Often, children are advised to read only textbooks; the reading of comics or fiction is frowned upon. Teachers and elders with this kind of mindset should be oriented to the fact that it is not just textbooks, but extensive reading that will enable a child to enjoy stress free reading, develop imagination and get a feel of the language. A reading culture should be encouraged by providing opportunities for individualised reading.

*Raindrops* attempts to introduce children to different 'kinds' of reading activities:

1. 'Reading' a picture: An illustration of a process is presented of sunrays on water, evaporation, cloud formation and rain. The child is asked to look

at the picture and describe the process in his/her own words (*Raindrops*, Class IV).

2. Reading to identify the odd word:

In each set of words below, there is one which is not the same as the other three.

Underline the odd word.

- (i) Wheat    rice    potato jowar
  - (ii) Carrot radish mango cucumber
  - (iii) Purple    green orange red
- (You have to be really smart to solve the last one!)

**Source Book on Assessment**

An important milestone in the development of *Raindrops* was the International Workshop on Assessment organised by NCERT in collaboration with UNESCO from 28-30 November, 2006, in order to share innovative international practices on assessment and national level experiences. Based on the vision of NCF-2005, NCERT developed a set of Source Book on Learning Assessment at Primary Level, with five sub-categories: Language, Mathematics, Environmental Science, Arts, Crafts and Aesthetics in

Education and Issues Across the Curriculum. With the cooperation of UNICEF, the draft of the Source Book was tried out in ten States in the country in 2007. The Source Book was further enriched with responses from the field. The Source Book signifies NCERT’s resolve to provide to teachers and administrators a new vision and approach for assessing children’s progress in a system which is accustomed to classifying and labeling children on the basis of a test or examination. Such a system makes it difficult for teachers to perceive each child’s progress as an individual trajectory. It also discourages the teacher from recognising the important role that a cooperative classroom culture plays in recognising learning. These ideas helped shape the material for the series.

The Source Book on Assessment (English) contains several illustrative tools for the measurement and analysis of the learner’s performance, and a few sample units. During the development of the new series, the following table was found particularly useful:

	<b>Listening</b>	<b>Speaking</b>	<b>Reading</b>	<b>Writing</b>
CLASS I	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can follow simple instructions.</li> <li>- Can follow simple stories, etc. narrated to her.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can differentiate various sounds of English.</li> <li>- Can talk about herself— what she likes and dislikes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can recognise small and capital letters.</li> <li>- Can read simple words with the help of pictures.</li> <li>- Can read simple poems and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can join letters with some help.</li> <li>- Can write simple words of day-to-day use.</li> <li>- Can use simple words in her/his own sentences.</li> </ul>



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can tell simple stories, particularly in her first language; if encouraged, she should be able to create novel stories.</li> <li>- Can recite poems.</li> <li>- Can talk about family and friends.</li> </ul>	<p>stories with the help of pictures.</p>	
CLASS II	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can follow simple instructions and directions.</li> <li>- Can understand stories narrated orally (as on Radio/TV) to her.</li> <li>- Can recognise the different sounds of English.</li> <li>- Can understand greetings and polite forms of expressions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can make requests.</li> <li>- Can recognise and pronounce most of the sounds in English.</li> <li>- Can talk about herself, family and friends.</li> <li>- Can recite poems.</li> <li>- Can use greetings and polite forms of requests.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can read simple stories, poems and descriptions.</li> <li>- Can locate information in a given text.</li> <li>- Can grasp ideas.</li> <li>- Can draw conclusion on the simple stories, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can write simple words and phrases.</li> <li>- Can write short sentences.</li> <li>- Can write small compositions comprising 5-6 sentences.</li> <li>- Can use full stop and capital letters.</li> </ul>
CLASS III	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can recognise difference between sounds of English.</li> <li>- Can follow simple directions, instructions, requests, questions and orders.</li> <li>- Can understand or identify the main ideas and important details in the stories</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can pronounce the sounds of English with ease.</li> <li>- Can talk about herself, her friends and family members.</li> <li>- Can tell stories and narrate his/her experiences.</li> <li>- Can retell main events and recall main ideas in the stories.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can read simple words and descriptions with the help of pictures.</li> <li>- Can read stories, poems and folktales.</li> <li>- Can grasp ideas and draw conclusions from the given text and materials such as posters, hoardings, poems, stories,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Knows the use of capital letters, and punctuation marks such as full stop, comma, question mark, and apostrophe.</li> <li>- Can talk dictation of simple words and sentences.</li> <li>- Can copy words and sentences from the blackboard.</li> <li>- Can write simple</li> </ul>

	narrated orally in the class in teacher-student interactions.	Make requests; give orders, advice; and use greetings.	folktales, etc.	descriptions of self, people and things around, and write short sentences (consisting of 5-10 words).
CLASS IV	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can follow a variety of oral directions instructions, requests, questions and orders.</li> <li>- Can summarise in her own words the key ideas and important details in stories, class lectures, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can participate in dialogues, role-plays, etc.</li> <li>- Can answer and ask simple questions.</li> <li>- Can produce an oral text in a logical sequence.</li> <li>- Can participate in pair works and group discussion.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can read texts orally and silently with increasing accuracy, fluency and confidence.</li> <li>- Can predict what the text may be about by looking at the pictures, titles, etc.</li> <li>- Can grasp meanings/ideas.</li> <li>- Can identify relationships between ideas/ events.</li> <li>- Can infer from a passage/text.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can combine related sentences using appropriate conjunctions (e.g., and, but, or because, if).</li> <li>- Can spell common words correctly.</li> </ul>
CLASS V	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can understand a class lecture, a TV/radio news broadcast, announcements, debates, instructions.</li> <li>- Can recognise or identify main words and phrases.</li> <li>- Can summarise main points in an oral text.</li> <li>- Can write sentences and passages dictated by the teacher.</li> <li>- Can draw conclusions and make predictions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can talk about personal opinion and support it with examples or details.</li> <li>- Can ask and answer questions about ideas presented.</li> <li>- Can carry out conversations on day-to-day matters.</li> <li>- Can participate in pair and group discussions.</li> <li>- Can express and support her opinion and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can read, understand and appreciate a story, a poem, an article, a poster and advertisement, etc.</li> <li>- Can grasp main ideas and details used in the above mentioned texts.</li> <li>- Can use the dictionary and encyclopaedia.</li> <li>- Can draw conclusions and make predictions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can organise ideas and information in logical sequences.</li> <li>- Can write descriptions of events, places things, process etc.</li> <li>- Can organise ideas and information in logical sequences, and make suitable paragraphs.</li> <li>- Can build a coherent and cohesive</li> </ul>

		conclusions clearly, concisely and accurately with examples.		paragraph (correctly ordered and logically sequenced) with facts, examples and arguments. Can write letters, reports, descriptions; prepare posters, notices; write message; take notes.
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### Grammar

The NCF believes that children are born with the capacity and skills to learn language(s). These inborn capacities grow spontaneously in a positive environment where children are encouraged to speak and write, without fear of being reprimanded for mistakes. It is important that children be provided an input-rich linguistic environment. Adequate exposure to the language will lead to better rule assimilation, and is preferable to repetitive exercises in grammar.

Hello! It **is** morning. Here **comes** the Sun. It **rises** in the east. The birds **start** singing. Our day **begins** now. The Sun **gives** us light and heat. The sun **sets** in the west.



Grammar has been introduced very unobtrusively in the series. The above

paragraph from 'Our Day' in *Raindrops II* contains the sentences which are solely in the simple present tense.

The simple past tense is introduced a few lessons later, with the present continuous following later in the book. In each case, children are asked to notice the words in **bold**, and the teacher can then take the exercise further.

### Multilingualism

The concept of 'mother tongue' has undergone a sea change over the years: globalisation and floating population have brought about changes in its meaning. The NCF prefers to use the term 'home language' instead of mother tongue to denote "the languages of home, larger kinship group, street or neighbourhood, i.e. language(s) that a child naturally acquires from his/her home and environment."<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the term 'home language', is suggestive, for the original reality of childhood is

'home'. It posits itself as such inevitably, and, as it were, naturally. By comparison with it, all other realities are 'artificial'.

Second language pedagogy, therefore, should seek to 'bring home' the contents of the textbook to the child by making them:

- (i) Vivid— making them seem as alive as the 'home world' of the child.
- (ii) Relevant— linking them to the relevant structures already present in the 'home world' and
- (iii) Interesting— inducing the attentiveness of the child to detach itself from its 'natural' to the other reality.

These are necessary elements although the degree and precise character of pedagogic techniques will vary. The more these techniques make subjectively plausible a continuity between the original and the new elements of knowledge, the more readily they are acquired.

Research has shown bilingualism has certain definite advantages. "Bilingualism/multilingualism raises the levels of cognitive growth, social tolerance, divergent thinking and scholastic achievement. Societal or national level multilingualism is a resource that can be favourably compared to any other national resource."<sup>4</sup>

The idea of multilingualism in itself is not new. It has existed in our day-to-day communication and is a part of the Indian linguistic landscape. This stems from the belief that languages do not,

and cannot, exist in isolation. Multilingualism has received belated academic acknowledgement. Its implication for education is that it does away with the old idea of mother tongue interference in the learning of English, which had spilled over classrooms and school corridors through injunctions of 'Speak English only'. Indeed, the greatest disservice to language is that well-intentioned parents discourage their child from speaking the mother tongue even at home, in the fond belief that this would lead to the development of a 'good English accent' in their child.

Multilingualism is more of a sociological fact than a textual one. However, it was agreed that every possible effort should be made to reflect the potential of using multilingualism as a teaching strategy in the classroom. It is of course neither possible nor desirable to have examples from all the 22 languages listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution. What is required is just a few examples in the textbooks that nudge classroom transaction to move towards multilingualism. Opportunities to link across languages are provided through activities that encourage children to recite a poem in their mother tongue, or say an idiom or a proverb and perhaps translate it as well. For instance:

"There are many huts and some *pucca* houses too. There are mango, *neem* and *peepal* trees in the village."

(My Village, *Raindrops*, Class II)

Further, the Notes to the Teacher do away with the 'Only English' campaign that some mindsets are prone to. For instance, following are some such instructions:

Make children talk about their families (in their mother tongue).

(Note to the Teacher, 'My Family', Class II, *Raindrops*)

Make children talk about the pictures. Do not reprimand them if they use non-English words.

(Note to the Teacher, 'Hide and Seek', Class I, *Raindrops*)

### Illustrations

The illustrations in *Raindrops* reflect the effort made to integrate visual content.

The following is an excerpt from *Raindrops*, Class II.



There are six children in the picture. Four children **are playing** carom. Two boys **are watching** the game. Two dogs **are chasing** a bird.

A picture, it is said, is worth a thousand words. This is almost literally

true in some cases in *Raindrops*. For instance, the lesson 'What's Going On?' in Class II describes a scene: some children are playing carom, two cats are playing with a ball, two dogs are chasing birds. One of the members of the textbook development team, who is familiar with the North Eastern culture, mentioned that most houses have a bamboo table permanently kept aside for carom—the game is so popular. This was told to the artist and the resultant picture brings this out although the text itself has no explicit statement on the North East.

The text of the lesson is a simple description of a scene: children playing carom, dogs running after a bird, two cats playing with a ball of wool and so on. However, an element of inclusiveness is added here. The child who is on a wheel chair is shown as being at par with the others, and the idea is brought out indirectly that what matters is her skill at the game. Moreover, the other children have accepted her as one of them. This illustration in *Raindrops II* is an example of moving 'beyond the text.'

### Conclusion

The series *Raindrops* is grounded in the principles articulated in the NCF-2005, and especially in the National Focus Group Paper on Curriculum, Syllabus and Textbooks, which regrets the fact that the present day classroom practices are, in almost all parts of the country, totally dominated by textbooks. All premises of flexibility of

the curriculum and syllabus and freedom of the teacher are completely forgotten by the time an educational plan reaches the classroom. It is sought to collect all the knowledge that a child is supposed to acquire at a given stage or class and is planned so that the child never needs to look beyond it.

As a result of this undue importance given to the textbook, it has acquired an aura of supremacy and a standard point. It has to be completed from cover to cover in strict sequence, has developed a language of its own that is difficult to comprehend, and is laden with dense concepts. It has become a symbol of authority difficult to ignore or disobey. <sup>5</sup>

An observation often made is 'Textbooks don't teach kids. Teachers do.' While the importance of a learned and sympathetic teacher cannot be overstressed, and though the series has been developed to be used by teachers in classrooms, so far as possible each textbook is self-teaching. Efforts have been made to make the textbook directly appealing to the individual learner, giving him/her directions in simple words, providing topics for pair work and group discussion, and so on. The books of the series are cumulative. While each of these textbooks can be read in isolation, presenting a year's interesting work in itself, when read in conjunction with the other books of the series, it will provide a sound developmental programme in English.

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