

Policy Report

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Communicating Caste and Gender: Understanding Narratives on Systemic Discrimination in Textbooks from CBSE, TN and UP Boards

Sumit Chaturvedi



THE HINDU CENTRE

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Politics and Public Policy

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ABSTRACT

School textbooks, which form the foundation of our education, play a vital role in shaping our understanding of the world around us. This rings truest for social sciences, which describe society and its multiple realities. In the process, social sciences tend to present a version of an issue or an event to young impressionable minds. Therefore, they have educational and sensitisation consequences. This becomes especially important in Indian society, which is rife with discriminatory practices and attempts to justify them, such as ones based on caste and gender. Both these forms of discrimination are systemic malaises and date to ancient times. Textbooks, then, have to be analysed to understand the narratives they adopt, to educate and sensitise students on such issues.

This study aims to look at three social science textbooks-History, Civics and Political Science, used at upper primary and secondary levels from three different educational boards:

1. National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT), taught in Central Board for Secondary Education (CBSE) schools;
2. State Council for Educational Research and Training (SCERT), Tamil Nadu (TN), taught in TN board schools, and;
3. SCERT, Uttar Pradesh (UP) in conjunction with State Institute of Education (SIE) and the UP board, taught in UP board schools.

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The study aims to understand, through a textual analysis, some of the pedagogic, policy, political, historical and social factors that determine the direction and shape of the narratives on gender and caste-based discrimination in these textbooks. This research report also provides examples pointing out the nature of discriminatory references from current textbooks. An attempt is also made to outline merits and demerits of the narrative adopted.

The author hopes that this research report will help in recognising the need to reshape and restructure the content of textbooks, wherever necessary. Such an exercise by policy-makers in education could provide a better frame of reference for young students to enhance their understanding of the systemic discrimination in their immediate socio-political reality.

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I. Education, Communication and Systemic Discrimination

“The key to understand the question of curriculum choice is to understand the relationship between the curriculum and the aims of education.”-

[Position Paper, NCERT, Curriculum, Syllabus and Textbooks (CST), 2006]

As a critical, reflective field of study, pedagogy keeps revising the aims of education. Studies on education and its various tools including curricula, textbooks and teaching practices have been conducted ever since education became a defining feature of the modern nation-state. These studies face the dilemma of achieving a fine and critical balance between developing education policies for the nation as a whole whilst maintaining a flexibility, which is reflective of the plurality of a richly diverse society.

Pedagogy is also involved in the constantly evolving task of finding the best educational practices in order to develop educational tools equipped to achieve the highest standards

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of knowledge and critical aptitude. For instance, textbooks have come increasingly under attack for not fulfilling their basic purpose as the following statement suggests:

“As a result of this undue importance given to the textbook, it has acquired an aura of supremacy and a standard format. It has to be completed from cover to cover in a strict sequence, has developed a language of its own that is difficult to comprehend, and is laden with dense concepts. (The recent attempts in certain States to tackle this problem have led to writing rather vacuous textbooks with very little conceptual content to understand.) It has become a symbol of authority difficult to ignore or disobey.”¹ (Ibid: 37)

Such an indictment of textbooks holds merit when seen from a pedagogical perspective. But there is another perspective from which textbooks can be seen - one that has not been explored conventionally. This perspective is that of communication. Seen from this perspective, textbooks fit neatly as a form of mass media. First, “the audience is large, and anonymous, and often very heterogeneous”, and second, “communication sources are institutional and organisational” (Harris, 2008:4). In fact the textbook is the

¹ Position Paper, NCERT, Curriculum, Syllabus and Textbooks (CST), 2006: 37

most expansive, structured and accessible communication medium, the content and message of which is prescribed or guided by the norms laid down by the state itself. The impact of this medium is far reaching, or at least, is designed to be so.

All mass media have their specific target audience. The target audiences of school textbooks are students who are yet to be adults and are not active participants in the socio-political and socio-economic processes of the world. Although most mass media have direct interface with their audience, students access textbooks directly as well as through their teachers acting as mediators. Depending on the aims of education as formulated by the organisation in charge, the teacher due to his or her social location will either interfere with or facilitate the achievement of these aims when dealing with the textbook. This interference, or the lack of it, can be explained as the presence, or absence, of noise in communication. Thus, if the aim of education as a communication process is to decrease the impact of noise in order to transmit the message, the textbook content must be in alignment with the intent of its communicator, i.e., the aims of education.

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Similarly, the social standing of the students is also an important factor to determine how effectively the message communicated by a textbook is received. India, with its vast size and a large and diverse population, provides multiple social milieus. An individual's social location is the sum total of different socio-political and socio-economic interactions, and therefore, she is involved in many simultaneous and parallel communication processes.

This realisation was echoed as far back as 1975 in the “Curriculum for the Ten-Year School”:

“For a vast country like ours with its diversity of languages, social customs, manners, mores and uneven economic development, the needs and demands of individuals and society will have pulls on the school curriculum, varying from one region to the other. For the sake of uniformity of standards and of national identity, therefore it is necessary to develop a common curriculum within a broad framework of acceptable principles and values”.²

However, the “Position Paper on CST”, warns against the homogenising tendency of this format instead of ensuring

² (Section 2.1)

“true plurality and flexibility in the curriculum”.³ Thus we see that throughout the history of independent India, textbook and curriculum design has been an important issue for the state as well as practising educationists. However, pedagogical concerns deal with the aims of education, while those of the state deal with the ideals of the nation and nationalism.

On the other hand, the communication perspective deals with a less static and a more dynamic worldview, which looks at how education affects the many communication processes involved in the construction of socio-political realities and what impact these could have on these realities.

In dealing with socio-political realities, social sciences have a unique vantage point. As the National Curriculum Framework, 2005, suggests:

“The social sciences encompass diverse concerns of society, and include a wide range of content drawn from the disciplines of history, geography, political science, economics, sociology and anthropology. Social Science perspectives and knowledge are

³ (Section 2.3)

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indispensable in building the knowledge base for a just and peaceful society”.⁴

Social science subjects, therefore, carry the responsibility of sensitising society, critically engaging with it and building a frame of reference to counter its prejudicial and discriminatory tendencies. From a communication perspective, social science subjects are the key focus points to understand how worldviews emerge from their content and narrative.

As the aims of education are contestable with respect to their responsibility to society, and, since social science subjects are the real bearers of this responsibility, this study aims to carry out a content analysis of these textbooks, building upon the existing pedagogical work done, *albeit* from a different perspective, that of communication.

To understand education, therefore, is to make an attempt to bring a different aspect to the on-going debate on education policy and develop a dynamic view of education policy instead of seeing it as a static policy prescription. In

⁴Section 3.4

this dynamic view, there exists not only a consistent narrative, but also an ability to deal with dynamic communication and opinion-making processes in society.

1.1 Education and Self Identification

“Education must be a continuous process of self-discovery, or learning the truth about oneself. This is a life-long process; but the school, through insightful teaching and learning situations of various kinds, can bring home to the child, the great importance of this process.”

Position Paper (NCERT, Aims of Education, 2006).

The above statement emphasises the role of education in the self-discovery of an individual. From a communications perspective this self-discovery role can be understood as the building of a frame of reference of an individual. A frame of reference is “a system of standards and values, usually implicit, underlying and to some extent controlling an action, or the expression of any belief, attitude or idea” (Kumar, 2007: 27). Based on these frames of reference, people approach reality and form their perceptions and views about it. While a mature adult has well-formed frames of reference, a pre-adult remains in the process of building her particular frames. For an adult the communication

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process becomes a process of interaction of different frames of reference where overlapping instances lead to agreement, and, incongruence leads to disagreement; the sum of which can be referred to as communication selectivity (Ibid: 28).

For a student the process of education is a major part of building this very frame of reference in order to deal with social realities in the years to come. Education as a communication process for a school student is important since it is a precursor to all other communication processes that the student will be involved in. Further, the message conveyed through textbooks shall counter or complement the socialisation process the student is going to undergo in the future.

A big part of one's frame of reference depends on how one perceives oneself in absolute and in relation with others. When it comes to self-identification, both as an individual and as a member of a community, we usually think about who we are and what our values are. As the position paper on the Aims of Education illustrates, "Self-knowledge can be achieved only through the knowledge of the other, and

one cannot know the other without being just to the other”.⁵ It further adds, “The process of education must therefore free itself from the shackles of all kinds of exploitation and injustice (e.g., poverty, gender discrimination, caste and communal bias), which prevent our children from being part of the process”.⁶

1.2 Understanding Systemic Discrimination

Before understanding what role education as a communication process plays in self-identification and perpetuation of systemic discrimination, it would be wise to understand what the term ‘systemic discrimination’ means. When we refer to any phenomenon as ‘systemic’, we imply that the entire body is affected by it. Thus systemic discrimination in society entails that an entire socio-political body is infested with discriminatory practices where one group remains disadvantaged at the behest of a socially privileged group based on a particular logic of discrimination. In India there are competing bases of discrimination. However, some discriminatory practices,

⁵ (Section 3)

⁶ *ibid.*

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like caste for instance, have been in place throughout Indian history.

In the present study we take two bases of discrimination – gender and caste. Gender discrimination is commonly found in countries across the world, and the Hindu caste hierarchy is a system specific to the Indian context.

Gender discrimination works on the logic of socially constructing a gender division in society by differently attributing specific qualities and roles to men and women and then using these constructed roles and qualities to claim a ‘natural’ superiority of males over females. The caste system is a much more complex phenomenon. It does not derive its principle from a biological basis of division but is a purely ritualistic system, which has established a hierarchy of social groups based on accidents of birth. Its implications cover a range of discriminations from severe social and occupational immobility to notions of social impurity. Gender and caste bias are manifested in historically instituted socio-economic and political exploitation, spatial segregation and experiences of utter and debilitating humiliation, indignity and disrespect.

1.3 Communication and Systemic Discrimination

Communication plays an important role in the foundation of discriminatory logic and manifestations of its effects. Narratives of social identities are communicated to the members of respective communities and the logic of group hierarchies is solidified in an individual's frame of reference. With these perceptions then he/she deals with social reality and reinforces the historical prejudices prevalent in society, be it notions of male superiority/female inferiority or high caste supremacy/ low caste inferiority.

Moreover, the most dangerous aspect of this phenomenon is that it has been so institutionalised that it has become internalised not only by the privileged groups but also by those groups which have been discriminated against. In a recently conducted nationwide survey by National Council of Applied Economic Research, more than one fourth of Indians (from different caste groups) admitted to practising untouchability in some form in the private domain (Chishti, 2014). A similar study in Uttar Pradesh on caste publications revealed that acknowledgement and propagation of upper caste identity is still prevalent and spread through modern

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forms of communication such as the print media. (Chaturvedi, 2014). Gender bias manifests itself not only in the inferior conditions of women in all areas of socio-economic and political activity but also through the patriarchal mind-set of Indian society.

The only realisations that have, over the years, awakened people to these discriminatory practices and their own social locations have been through extensive communication exercises by various social activists and radical reformers. These counter narratives have both exposed the privileged groups to their own compliance with these discriminatory practices and attempted to empower members of groups discriminated against by refuting the pre-existing prejudicial narratives.

1.4 Education and Systemic Discrimination

In India the purpose of education was to sensitise society to discrimination and generate counter-narratives to the logics of discrimination that exist. Such counter-narratives were supposed to build new perspectives and develop sensitised

frames of reference for individuals and society. As the Secondary Education Commission (1952) suggested:

“[A] democratic citizen should have the understanding and the intellectual integrity to sift truth from falsehood, facts from propaganda and to reject the dangerous appeal of fanaticism and prejudice”.⁷

A student is self-identified with a frame of reference through the process of socialisation. Now a frame of reference has already accumulated ideas on discrimination, either in favour or against it. For a school student, a frame of reference that leaps out of a textbook is powerful. If a textbook justifies a frame of reference either way i.e. whether it extols the virtues of a hierarchical order where one group is privileged, or, whether he/she protests against such practice will depend upon which ideology he/she identifies with and with what logic behind it. Education as a well-structured communication process through textbooks not only has the responsibility to uphold the values against the logic of systemic discrimination, but also to become the predominant communication process among all the existing

⁷ Cited in the National Curriculum Framework-2005 (NCERT, 2005: 7)

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ones so that the child owes her allegiance to the school textbooks when identifying herself.

There is another challenge that textbooks must successfully overcome in order to become the predominant communication medium. As illustrated earlier, the message of textbooks is communicated through the mediation of teachers and their social location plays a role in whether the aims of education are fulfilled successfully or not.

When it comes to communication of an understanding of discrimination in terms of its narrative and logic, a teacher's social location acquires vital importance. As the Position Paper by the National Focus Group on Problems of SC/ST Children (PSC) suggests:

“Teacher’s social background (caste, religion and language), affect their interactions with students. Middle class higher caste teachers are very unhappy with the environments of schools for the poor and are poorly motivated to teach children of the poor, particularly of SC/ST background, who are ‘derogatorily’ categorised as uneducable.” (Section IV)

It further adds:

“Teachers are observed to have low expectations of SC/ST children and girls and a condescending and downright abusive attitude to poor children from slums.” (Ibid)

The content of the textbook and its narrative must therefore, be able to counter the prejudicial frame of reference of such teachers. From a communications perspective, the message must be so structured that it is able to alleviate the effects of noise produced as a result of the mediator’s handling of the medium.

These textbooks then need to not only develop a principled content but also a principled narrative. As already mentioned, although identification comes through socialisation, there is also logic behind this identification. This logic is built on the foundations of the narrative. The identity of an individual, both for the self and the community depends on what is the narrative that the individual accepts for his/her identified social identity. For each social identity, there are various narratives available both in formal and informal communication. But among all these narratives, the one that should prevail must be

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structural, historically evidenced, logically coherent and completely representative of the reality, obscuring nothing.

However, there can be various approaches to these counter narratives, which depend on the way we deal with society and history. For historically ingrained practices of caste system or gender discrimination, which continue to be prevalent even in the present, though having been deinstitutionalised from social system by the modern democratic provisions of Constitution, the situation acquires a very complex dynamic.

Constitutionalism claims a break from the past by promulgation of modern democratic values. However, the socialisation process still has not been able to distance itself from prejudicial narratives as many values of the caste system and patriarchy (or other paternalistic privileges) still persist in social narratives often masking loyalties to the age old logics of social hierarchies and discrimination.

II. Overview of the Study

There can be different approaches, when describing systemic discrimination in textbooks to students. This study makes a two-fold attempt. First, to understand the extent to which textbook lessons have been able to provide a strong argument against all other narratives prevalent in society that promote prejudice and hierarchical social values. Second, to examine if textbooks fail to provide any counter narrative, or worse, strengthen narratives that promote prejudice and discrimination.

Towards this objective, the study looks at textbooks from three different education boards – Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and the Central Board of Secondary Education. This is done through content analysis, backed by perspectives from all three educational bodies mentioned above to understand how their respective textbooks deal with issues of discrimination and how they represent them. In this way, we situate the textbooks writing bodies and the

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state in the role of the communicator, the textbooks as the medium and their content as the message.

Since social realities fall largely in the domain of the social sciences, in this study, History, and Civics or Political Science are the subjects of our analysis. Both subjects deal with caste and gender, among other issues, although in differing capacities; but have a common mandate – to provide a structural understanding of social realities through historical and socio-political explanations.

History provides a window to the issues of systemic discrimination from a past and yet relevant perspective. It identifies and contextualises the causes and groups responsible for institutionalising discrimination in society.

Civics or Political Science, on the other hand, performs the same task of presenting social reality as it is today. As a discipline, therefore, Civics or Political Science should be able to draw from History to build a structural and historical argument about society and the prevalent discriminatory practices. What both subjects also share is the responsibility to portray with complete emotional subjectivity the

experiences of the discriminated and the compliance of the privileged groups in this scheme of things.

The education system in India is divided into three levels—primary, secondary and higher secondary. These two subjects are introduced in most States at upper primary level as compulsory components and continue to be so up to the secondary level. After secondary level, the curriculum is divided into Arts, Commerce and Science streams and students are given a choice of these subject combinations. In the present Indian scenario, at the higher secondary level, the Arts stream, which includes the subjects of social sciences, is not the preferred choice of most students and, therefore, very few schools offer these subjects. Although there are instances of students crossing over from other streams into Arts subjects at higher educational levels, the overall enrolment rate at this level is much lower compared with the secondary and higher secondary levels.

Add to this the fact that instances of crossing over are a small percentage of the total enrolment, and it can be safely said that the secondary level remains the last stage of education up to which a large percentage of students are

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likely to study the social sciences. This means that for most of the population, secondary level education is the last stage in their lives that their frames of reference are sensitised by a structural understanding of social reality. Therefore, the focus of this study is on the textbooks at the upper primary level and secondary level, i.e. from Class VI to X.

2.1 Content Analysis

The focus of this study is to analyse the textbooks using a communication perspective. Any communication process has a few basic components – a communicator, a medium, a message and an audience. For this study, we chose three of these components, i.e. the communicator, the medium and the message. As the frame of reference of the audience is assumed to be in the process of being built, the message and the intent of communication are the key factors that necessarily form the context for the content analysis of the textbooks.

Hence, this study uses an interpretive content analysis method by relying on connotative meanings, “arrived at by combining individual elements in a text to understand the

meaning of the whole” (Ahuvia, 2001: 142). This method is chosen because it has “the flexibility to take context more fully into account” (Ibid: 146). The context for this exercise shall be the aim of the state or its agencies when designing and writing the textbooks.

The coding for this study was used uniformly throughout all the textbooks across the boards and across the classes for both the subjects of History and Civics. Any mention of caste or gender was selected through a preliminary reading of the textbook. These extracts were re-read to categorise them under various heads. This was done in a layered format where one type of coding reinforces or counters the other. Thus any final observation can be derived through different permutations and combinations formed by different codes for the selected extracts. The categories that were used are explained as follows:

1. Evidentiary/Example based: For any text related to the social sciences, authenticity is very important. Here it is not the aim of the study to verify authenticity of the text only but also to see if the mention of caste or gender based

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discrimination has been backed by evidentiary support or by citing an example of a certain personality.

An evidentiary or example-based citation has been considered important for this study as it provides credibility to the narrative. Moreover, it introduces in many cases students to references of books from which extracts have been taken or examples of personalities who have been involved in issues of caste or gender politics. The extracts included in this category include:

- excerpts from books and speeches of certain famous personalities; **Example:** An excerpt from the famous Dalit writer Omprakash Valmiki's, autobiography- "Joothan" in NCERT, Class 7 Political Science textbook, describes his ordeal of being discriminated against by his headmaster as a Class IV student.
- biographical reference to social, political or historical personalities, **Example:** The chapter on Social and Religious Reform Movements in 19th Century in Tamil Nadu's Class X History textbook

gives biographical accounts of significant personalities including Raja Rammohan Roy, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, and E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker.

- photographic, or pictorial depiction of the issue, phenomenon or the personality referenced in the extract; **Example:** Following is a picture from the NCERT's, Class X History textbook, of the painting titled "The marriage contract" by William Hogarth, which depicts the differentiated gender roles in society with the woman in the background and the men busy with the signing of the marriage contract.

Picture 1



Source: NCERT: History textbook Class X

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- statistical data from sources such as the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) and the Census of India; **Example:** The NCERT’s Class X Political Science Textbook in an extract titled “Caste Inequality Today” cites NSSO 55th Round, 1999-2000 data to illustrate poverty levels of the different caste groups in India, or
- excerpts from fictional or non-fictional works. **Example:** The NCERT’s Class X History textbook quotes an excerpt from the noted educationist and literary figure Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossein’s speech in 1926 delivered at the Bengal Women’s Education Conference that challenges traditional Muslim society’s notions against women’s right to education.

2. Conjectural: When explaining social, political or historical phenomena, there are sometimes conjectures explaining the probability or possibility of certain scenarios. These conjectures depending upon the context of the chapter can be sometimes justified and on other occasions be completely unwarranted and may damage the credibility

of the narrative. Moreover, an unstructured or ahistorical conjectural argument may end up propagating a false understanding or stereotypes, a consistent problem with the issues of systemic discrimination. **Example:** The Uttar Pradesh State Board's Class IX History textbook makes a conjectural argument based on excavated evidences from Mohenjo-Daro that Indus Valley Civilisation could be a matriarchal society.

3. Structural, Historical, Conceptual understanding:

This category is perhaps the most important one in understanding how systemic discrimination is communicated to students. Social science as a subject dealing with social reality is always vulnerable to debate about subjectivity and objectivity. As has been argued already, objectivity devoid of subjective experiences and an emotional quotient does not necessarily lead to objective knowledge. To represent social reality, therefore, it becomes necessary to maintain structural, historical and/or conceptual clarity and understanding. Narratives about discrimination can only be convincing when their underlying arguments have a strong foundation. The aim of sensitising the frame of reference of students so that they

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can be less vulnerable to propaganda or dubious logic can only be achieved by ensuring that the textbook narrative is strong and sound in three respects: structural, historical and conceptual.

For this study, the coding for structural understanding has been accorded to the extracts, which provide a structural understanding of any caste- or gender-related phenomenon. These extracts give structural reasons for the occurrence of any gender- or caste-related social or historical event or trend by giving a causal explanation for the same. **Example:** Uttar Pradesh's Class X Civics textbook refers to the suggestion of removal of caste inequalities for achieving a healthy and constructive mandate through elections.

The coding for historical understanding requires an extract to provide a historical explanation of any phenomenon described. Such an explanation should give a historical argument for how things evolved for an event to occur or a trend to emerge. **Example:** the NCERT's Class VII History textbook provides a historical argument regarding the emergence of Rajputs in the eighth and fourteenth centuries in India. While coding for the first two criteria, structural

and historical, is more complex, conceptual understanding has been coded for any extract that provides a conceptual elaboration of social or historical significance related to caste or gender. This category involves simple definitions of concepts used in social science or an elaborate conceptual understanding of a complex phenomenon.

Example: The Uttar Pradesh Board's Class IX Civics textbook provides conceptual understanding of universal adult suffrage.

4. Question/ Exercise/ Storyboard/ Story Line: This coding has been designed to explain textbook design strategies. A big part of pedagogical research focuses on how to make the content of textbooks more accessible to students, i.e. how to make the content more appealing and understandable to them, so that they not only get freedom from rote learning and retain what they learn from their textbooks but also prefer the textbook narrative to other alternative narratives available to them. To achieve this task, many textbooks have evolved new strategies of communication such as storyboards and story lines.

Example: The following image from the NCERT's Class VIII Civics textbook, is a part of a storyboard that tells the

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story of Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act coming into effect in 2006 after a long process of parliamentary and civil society procedures.

Picture 2



Source: NCERT Class VIII Civics textbook

To make retention of the chapters more relatable, reflective questions are now interspersed in most textbooks within the content of the chapters. **Example:** Tamil Nadu's Class VI Civics textbook asks students to list names of exemplary women and their reasons explaining these choices.

5. Perspective Building/Sensitisation: This is an overlapping category which adds to the qualitative dimension of other categories. All the above categories,

which relate to various aspects of the text such as evidentiary or example-based, structural, historical or conceptual understanding, and reflective strategies such as questions, storyboards, storylines and exercises are only relevant when they lend a perspective or sensitise a reader.

Example: Uttar Pradesh's Class VIII History textbook provides a structural explanation of transformation of penal code from one based on the caste system in pre-British era to a uniform one during the British rule, thus providing a historical perspective on caste discrimination from a legal point of view.

This coding depends on whether a particular extract is a mere descriptive passage on caste and gender related practices or it provides a particular take on the issue. When an extract provides this, not merely in retrospect but also in the present context, the student can relate that account with something current and relevant, it is classified as a sensitising extract.

Example: The NCERT's Class VIII Political Science Textbook provides a sensitising perspective on using the correct terminology for describing women as survivors and not victims with reference to domestic violence cases.

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6. Suggestive: This coding uses the term suggestive in its pejorative sense. A textbook must always give a strong argument behind its logic, but when it takes it upon itself to suggest a specific point of view regarding any social or historical phenomenon, without giving a valid argument then the extract has been termed as a suggestive one.

7. Reference to Caste: Having described the previous categories, which fall under general criteria about textbooks analysis, now we look at specific reference to the caste system. Under this category, various approaches are coded based on the style of the narrative adopted. These approaches include Descriptive, Differentiating, Antagonistic, Proactive, Reconciliatory, Defensive and Obfuscating.

The Descriptive approach to a narrative, as the name suggests, is a simple descriptive account of a caste system related phenomenon without giving a value based judgment. Such a description does not provide any insight into the discriminatory repercussions of the caste system.

Often it is in reference to the castes of certain historical personalities or an occupation of a particular caste group in a matter of fact way. With a layered coding system that this study follows, an exclusively descriptive coding does not overlap with a perspective building or sensitising extract coding. **Example:** Uttar Pradesh's Class IX History textbook refers to Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, a fifteenth and sixteenth century reformer, as a Brahmana in a mere descriptive capacity.

The differentiating approach to a narrative refers to the very basic description of discriminatory aspects of the caste system. This description provides an account of how the caste system mandates different status, occupation or roles in society. This coding may overlap with a structural, historical or conceptual coding, and, in some cases may also prove to be perspective building or sensitising and in other cases may simply be a description of how the caste system works without giving an outright value judgment on the same. **Example:** The NCERT's Class VIII Political Science textbook refers to the differences between the *adivasi* and caste based societies, with the latter being based on caste differences.

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What separates this account from a descriptive one is that this does refer to discrimination based on the caste system and is not a mere mention of castes of certain personalities or occupations based on caste groups. At the same time, such an account is neither antagonistic nor reconciliatory in intent.

That said, there could be instances of a proactive role played by a certain member of a discriminated group or by an entire discriminated caste thus coding them as *proactive narratives* within the differentiating category. **Example:** Tamil Nadu's Class VI History textbook provides examples of Sisugana and Mahapadmananda, Shudra kings from ancient history who beat the odds to attain power and provided a satisfactory and fair rule thus depicting them in proactive roles.

The Antagonistic narratives are those that provide an antagonistic perspective against the caste system, discrimination, and caste practices. Such an account has a distinct value judgment, as it either condemns or highlights the extremely unjust, humiliating, disrespectful and

emotionally scarring provisions of the caste system such as untouchability, notions of impurity, and spatial segregation.

It may also refer to structural explanations of how the caste system has evolved, and which social groups or individuals have fuelled its discriminatory politics, support and legitimacy over the years. At the same time, it may also refer to individual or collective protest and condemnation against the injustices of the caste system, in the process highlighting its discriminatory potential.

Example: The NCERT's Class VIII Political Science textbook cites a poem by Soyra Bai, a poet belonging to the Mahar caste, protesting against the caste system and practice of untouchability.

A Reconciliatory narrative is most characteristic of a nationalistic perspective that aims to override discriminatory practices of the caste system by alluding to instances where different castes have or need to come together for building social or national unity.

It may overlap with a descriptive or a differentiating passage but can never be consistent with an antagonistic one.

Example: Uttar Pradesh's Class VI History textbook refers

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to stability in south Indian society because of Brahmins and non-Brahmins following their duties obediently, which provides a reconciliatory narrative with reference to the caste system.

The Obfuscating or Defensive narrative is one where descriptions of the caste system or its practices are either insufficiently explained, or defended. Discriminatory caste practices are played down using inconsistent references, or are defended under some historical or socio-political pretext. Omitting details of certain discriminatory practices based on the caste system or defending the caste system with an unfounded explanation qualifies as an extract for this coding. This coding is completely irreconcilable with a structural, historical perspective and can never be antagonistic.

Example: Uttar Pradesh's Class IX History textbook mentions that in the Vedic period all *varnas* had the right to education, which misrepresents the narrative of discrimination usually associated with Vedic period.

1. Caste Addressed: Besides these codes for narratives, the reference to castes, sub-castes and *varnas*, were recorded. Combining these observations along with the narratives can

provide insights into how various castes and sub-castes were represented in the scheme of caste system and its discriminatory practices.

2. Reference to Gender: As in the case with references to caste system, gender discrimination too can have different approaches when being referred. The different codes for the narrative are Descriptive, Differentiating, Antagonistic, Proactive, Reconciliatory, Regressive, Obfuscating and Unrepresentative.

Descriptive category – as in the case of the caste system – gives a descriptive account without any value judgment to male and female references in the extract. These usually refer to both genders when giving a simple reference to any historical event or social process, which involves both of them.

This is different from a reconciliatory narrative. There is no overt effort to provide a reconciliatory tone to the narrative between men and women, but merely a simple description of their condition or their participation in society or history.

Example: The NCERT's Class X History textbook clubs women and children together in describing the atrocities

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committed against them during the Indian national freedom struggle.

The Differentiating category is based on the same principle as in the case of references to caste system. The very basic description of gender differentiation in society qualifies an extract to be coded in this category without elaborately providing a structural, historical explanation of how things came to be and holding accountable the responsible groups in society.

Example: Tamil Nadu's Class X History textbook refers to legislations passed by the Justice Party in Tamil Nadu for the improvement of condition of women, thus indicating a differentiated attitude against them.

Based on which other category it overlaps with, it can be a mere description of gender differences or a perspective building or sensitising extract.

Example: the NCERT's Class VIII Political Science textbook asks a question from students as to which fundamental right is violated in case the army denies promotion to women. This provides a perspective building

opportunity on gender in the context of constitutional provisions.

As was the case with caste references, it could also be a description of a proactive role played by a female personality or an example of a personality who worked against the gender discrimination prevalent in society but without an antagonistic perspective.

Example: Uttar Pradesh’s Class IX History textbook provides examples of intellectually outstanding women from Vedic times such as Apala, Ghosha, and others.

The Antagonistic narrative provides the definitive perspective against all forms of gender discrimination. It highlights the unfair or unjust practices that women were or continue to be, subjected to such as *sati*, child marriage, female foeticide, denial of education, right to work, right to remarriage and other forms of gender-based discrimination.

It aims to sensitise students to the debilitating systemic discrimination inflicted upon women – both historically and in the present. This narrative in most cases provides a clear view as to what social and political structures and systems have been responsible for the discriminatory practices

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against women as well as how male privilege is the root cause behind gender discrimination.

Example: Tamil Nadu's Class VI Civics textbook provides an antagonistic structural argument on how social differences are created between men and women in society especially referring to manufacturing dependence of women on men.

The Reconciliatory narrative is again in tandem with the nationalistic perspective where ideas of overcoming gender differences are presented in favour of achieving social cohesion for a common cause, mostly nationalistic in nature. Here differences between men and women are downplayed and a united picture is presented often promoting ideas of progress, unity and patriotism.

Example: Uttar Pradesh's Class VIII History textbook provides a reconciliatory narrative of men and women uniting for national freedom struggle.

The Regressive, Obfuscating and Unrepresentative categories are all in the same spirit. They represent extracts that work against providing a structural and sensitising perspective on the issue of gender discrimination by providing an outright

regressive narrative that upholds discriminatory values against women; giving an incomplete explanation of gender discrimination; or not adequately representing the female gender in certain extracts, which can explain a certain phenomenon or perspective by referring to both genders.

As in the case with the caste system, these extracts cannot be coded alongside the structural, historical or perspective building and sensitising extracts.

Example: Tamil Nadu's Class IX History textbook provides a regressive narrative of chastity being a "meritorious quality" for women in Sangam Age in Tamil society.

3. Gender Addressed: A big part of gender review of any text involves which gender has been referred to, when explaining social phenomena or reality. In case of example-based references to historical or social personalities, female examples have been given priority as a major part of gender sensitisation involves providing adequate examples of women who have played an important part in history, society or politics.

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Male personalities have also been included, provided they have worked against gender or caste discrimination. In non-specific extracts the pronouns addressing the individuals are coded as male or female or both to understand the general theme of the textbook in terms of who has been privileged in the narrative.

These categories have not been imposed upon the observations but have rather been evolved after a thorough reading of the text. There are two categories involved in this exercise.

One category is general and the other is narrative specific. The general categories are complementary in nature as they support the observations arrived at by the narrative specific categories. The narrative specific categories record what kind of approach the textbooks have on issues of caste and gender discrimination.

The general categories complement these observations by recording the strategies used in the narratives. These strategies include reflective questions, storyboards, storylines, biographical accounts, pictorial representations

or projects for students to do. These show how much importance was given to achieving effective communication, one that has high retention value and leaves a lasting impression on the frame of reference of students.

With a combination of these observations, this study aims to provide a comprehensive view of textbook narratives in communicating caste and gender based systemic discrimination to students at upper primary and secondary level. The observations recorded from textbooks, interviews and policy documents from the three education boards, that of the CBSE, Tamil Nadu board and Uttar Pradesh board have been used to construct logics for how each deals with issues of caste and gender based discrimination and what factors affect their approach to the narrative and communication strategies.

2.2 Research Questions and Hypothesis

The study works with two central questions. First, what are the important factors that must be incorporated when developing an adequate counter logic to the prejudicial parallel narratives prevalent in society, which reinforce systemic discrimination. Second, what factors affect the

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decision of the textbook authorities when deciding upon the approach to issues of systemic discrimination in respective textbooks. The hypothesis that the study intends to prove, which is related to the second question, is the following:

The way a textbook making unit, i.e. a nation or a constituent State, approaches the issues of systemic discrimination in its textbooks is directly affected by the way politics has evolved with respect to these issues in the public domain of the respective units.

Based on the verification of this hypothesis, this study will attempt to answer the first question i.e. to identify the important factors in developing a sustained critique of systemic discrimination through textbook content and narrative.

III. An Analysis of Central Board of Secondary Education Textbooks

Since 1952, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has been providing affiliation to schools all over India and conducting high school and school leaving examinations officially. As per the information available on the CBSE website, currently almost 16,000 schools in India and about 200 in other countries are affiliated to the CBSE. As an expansive educational enterprise, CBSE remains the predominant authority when it comes to imparting education in India. From a communication perspective, this board affects the most number of students in terms of sensitising their frames of reference.

The NCERT, established in 1961, prepares the curriculum, syllabi, and textbooks prescribed by the CBSE board. The NCERT has separate departments to deal with each discipline. The responsibility for writing and designing Social Studies textbooks for all the classes rests upon the Department of Education in Social Sciences. The

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department, in turn, houses different faculties for specific subjects such as History, Political Science, Geography, or Economics, among others.

The guidelines provided by the National Curriculum Framework–2005 (NCF–2005) are followed when formulating the syllabi and writing textbooks for social studies subjects. The NCF-2005 itself was prepared based on the recommendations of XXI National Focus Group Position Papers. Before understanding the intent of the state in addressing issues of caste and gender, it would be appropriate to take a comprehensive look at the textbooks to understand how they construct the narrative of caste and gender through the upper primary and secondary levels of education.

3.1 The Textbook Analysis

For the purpose of this study, NCERT textbooks for the subjects of History and Political Science from upper primary and secondary levels were studied and categories evolved to describe them. First, we provide a brief overview of History and Political Science in terms of their curriculum, syllabi,

and textbooks, as planned and prepared by NCERT for the students of CBSE.

3.1.1 History

The syllabus for History at the secondary level education is spread across five classes, three from the upper primary and two at the secondary level. Class VI covers Ancient History from Pre-history to the Asokan Empire. The Class VII tracks history from the Sultanate period onwards to the eighteenth century. Class VIII history textbook starts from the British period and covers history up to the national independence movement. Together the textbooks are titled “Our Pasts” with three parts covering the three classes respectively.

The Class IX History textbook attempts to place the history of India in the context of world history. This book covers historical events from other nations such as the French Revolution, Russian Revolution, German history with reference to Nazism, and the World Wars. The Class X textbook continues with this theme by looking at the rise of nationalism in Europe, Indo-China and then contextualising these by covering the rise of nationalism in India. These

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textbooks are collectively titled *India and the Contemporary World*, Parts I and II, respectively.

These being the themes conventionally addressed in all history textbooks, the NCERT, on the recommendations of the NCF, experiments with the content by constantly exploring other areas of historical studies, those that are not strictly related to chronological themes of ages and empires. In Class VI, for instance, the textbook begins with how history is understood and studied. This includes an understanding of what is meant by history and how it is built from various resources.

In Class VII, common people's history is also included with accounts of how towns were built, and who contributed to their upsurge, including people from various vocations including traders and craftsmen. In Class VIII, themes of colonialism are explored through their contribution to development of modern cities among other such social phenomena. Class IX also explores certain themes of colonialism and modernity with reference to sports, clothing and other attributes of lifestyle. Class X similarly looks at globalisation and industrialism with reference to the

development of print culture, novels and other related issues.

The aim appears to be an attempt to move from a conventional view of history to a more representative one, covering different aspects of the past, including common people's history including their lifestyles, leisure and contributions to society and civilisation. Pedagogically, these textbooks have come of age as they intend to impart multiple perspectives to students regarding history and provide a more nuanced understanding of the subject.

3.1.2 Political Science and not Civics

One of the biggest overhauls suggested by the NCF–2005 and implemented by NCERT is the makeover of the subject erstwhile known as Civics. The NCF–2005 document notes:

“Civics appeared in the Indian school curriculum in the colonial period against the background of increasing ‘disloyalty’ among Indians towards the Raj. Emphasis on obedience and loyalty were the key features of Civics. Political Science treats civil society as the sphere that produces sensitive, interrogative, deliberative, and transformative citizens.” (Section 3.4.1)

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In their new *avatars*, the nomenclature of the textbooks has changed. At the upper primary level for Classes VI, VII and VIII, the book is titled *Social and Political Life*, divided into three parts, respectively. At Class VI the subject is divided into four units covering concepts of diversity, government, local government and administration and livelihoods respectively. The Class VII textbook has five units, namely Equality in Indian Democracy, State Government, Gender, Media and Advertising, and Markets. Textbooks in Class VIII also have five units covering The Indian Constitution and Secularism, Parliament and The Making of Laws, The Judiciary, Social Justice and The Marginalised, and Economic Presence of the Government. The Class IX and X textbooks exclusively cover democracy as a concept and explore various themes in the context of democracy. Titled *Democratic Politics*, part I and II, these textbooks cover Democracy in the Contemporary World, What is Democracy and Why Democracy, Constitutional Design, Working of Institutions and Democratic Rights in Class IX; and Power Sharing, Federalism, Democracy and Diversity with reference to Gender, Religion and Caste, Popular

movements and Political Parties and Challenges and Outcomes of Democracy in Class X.

The attempt is to find a coherent theme, covering various sociological, political, economic and administrative issues by addressing these topics conceptually. The books are evolved, with the inclusion of teaching learner material, notes on how to approach the text for students as well as teachers, and many innovative strategies to approach the content and the narrative. As a subject, it is vastly different from its previous version of Civics and its approach to issues of systemic discrimination for the purpose of this study, must be viewed from a fresh perspective.

3.2 Observations

The observations from the textbook analysis will be covered separately for the subjects of History and Political Science and the issues of caste- and gender-based discrimination.

3.2.1 Understanding the Narrative: History

Caste: Based on the communication perspective, we shall now try to track the narrative with reference to the portrayal

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of caste in History and Political Science textbooks from upper primary to secondary levels, which are the mandatory years of social science education at school level. There are 46 references to caste in the Class VI textbook, 70 in Class VII, eight in Class VIII, 12 in Class IX and 24 in Class X.

Most references to caste issues in the History syllabus are in the earlier classes at the upper primary level. These classes, i.e. Class VI and Class VII, deal with ancient history and the period from Delhi sultanate up to eighteenth century respectively. The Class VIII textbooks dealing with the advent of colonial powers in India has very few references to caste as compared to earlier classes.

As is obvious, with Class IX and X textbooks, which deal with world history and history of global phenomena such as nationalism and industrialism and national history, these references remain comparatively low. As these books also deal with national history by situating it in international perspective there are references to caste but limited to a fewer chapters.

What can be observed regarding caste references in the earlier classes is that while there are many more references as compared with the more advanced classes, the approach is to adopt, in most cases, either a descriptive or a differentiating narrative. In other words, issues related to the caste system or caste-based references have been explained mostly, merely with a very basic description without explicitly communicating a perspective over them. For instance, the Class VI textbook delves into some very basic explanations of caste terminology like evolution of the word “Vaishya” from “Vish” meaning common.

Together textbooks from both these classes account for very few references that can be termed as ‘antagonistic’. Antagonistic references are those that not only oppose or condemn the caste system but also attribute the origin and propagation of caste and the *varna* system to Brahmins.

In Class VI textbook a poem by the poet Appar, belonging to the Vellala caste (a lower caste group) has been cited which deems all those whom Brahmins ostracise due to their lower caste status as gods and thus attempts to demolish the logic of caste hierarchy. This is one of the few

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antagonistic references to caste system at this level. In terms of sources, they constitute literary works, (like one mentioned above) and biographical accounts to provide perspective and sensitisation on caste discrimination.

There are also reconciliatory narratives used on some occasions. Most of these refer to assimilation of all castes, including the untouchables for social inclusion or fighting for a common cause. However, there is a consistent problem in the narrative, whereby the terminology used to refer to the caste system is not consistent. Some of the occupational groups have not been referred to in terms of their castes and in other places, the term 'priest' is used in place of 'Brahmins' when referring to people responsible for originating caste or *varna* system and the practice of untouchability. Such passages have been termed as 'obfuscating' or 'defensive' in this report, as they do not provide the truest picture of caste discrimination.

With fewer references to the caste system, the textbooks from Class VIII, IX and X also have fewer references in an antagonistic perspective. In fact, the number of such references were found to be almost the same across

textbooks from all the classes. As Classes VIII and X deal with the national movement and nationalism in India, it is worth mentioning that chapters dealing with the nationalistic narrative have lesser antagonistic references to caste discrimination than all other classes.

Almost all of these references figure in offbeat thematic chapters such as those dealing with lifestyle. The references in this case too are mostly literary, biographical and cultural. Throughout all the textbooks, most of these references are descriptive or differentiating and incidence of reconciliatory or obfuscating extracts in Class VIII, IX and X textbooks is very rare or non-existent.

In all the five textbooks, most of the references provide a structural, historical and conceptual understanding. However, as the total number of references is low at secondary level and there is a general lack of antagonistic narrative, History textbooks from NCERT provide mostly a basic understanding of caste system to the students. This understanding provides a perspective to students on caste issues and, in some cases, sensitises them by making extra-academic references to fashion, sports, culture and

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literature. However, it generally does not provide enough of emotional subjectivity to students when dealing with caste discrimination. Thus, even though students may have a good understanding of the caste system, they are unlikely to retain many examples or references to the discriminatory logic of caste hierarchy in its most intense and prejudicial form.

Moreover, except in the Class VII textbook, there are not many questions for retention or reflection-based learning on the caste system. This is a crucial oversight as such questions go a long way in helping children retain key issues related to the content of the chapter.

Gender: With respect to gender, there is a consistency in terms of the number of references across textbooks from all the classes. There are 73 references in Class VI, 36 in Class VII, 31 in Class VIII, 73 in Class IX, and 74 in Class X.

Textbooks from Class Six, which deal with ancient Indian history, and Class X, which provides material mainly on nationalism, globalisation and industrialisation, have more references than other classes. Nevertheless, adequate space

has been given to gender in all the textbooks, perhaps because gender is an all-pervading issue, compared with caste.

There is a high incidence of descriptive passages in Class VI and after that, there are fewer such extracts. The least number of descriptive passages and the lowest ratio of such extracts are found in Class X.

The incidence of antagonistic narratives of gender discrimination is low at the upper primary level, but in Classes IX and X, there are more such extracts, with most of them coming in the class nine history textbook. It is worth mentioning that all these references have been made in the chapter dealing with the social history of clothing in context of western society's history of discriminatory notions of beauty, which enforced femininity's association with frailty and weakness.

One of these extracts for instance questions in very explicit terms the notions of womanhood in Victorian era in western society where women were expected to be "frail" and "submissive" and their clothing was so designed that it stifled their movement and suffocated them. However, in

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Class X, similar references have been made in the Indian context, when dealing with women's tryst with literature and their awakening to modes of self-expression. Rashundari Debi, a Bengali woman from colonial times who rebelled against social norms and wrote the first autobiography by a woman in India called "Amar Jiban" is one such reference.

Thus, while dealing with ancient, medieval and British history, we do not see a distinctly antagonistic perspective, which sensitises students to gender discrimination; modern history of the world and India provide more opportunities apparently to represent these issues as such. It is noticeable that non-conventional areas to address history such as clothing and novels have provided space for addressing the issues of gender from a fresher perspective, one that is more adaptable to conveying an emotional subjectivity on the discriminatory practices.

Another observation relates to the examples of women who were proactive and did something to challenge gender – based discrimination, or simply achieved something for themselves on their own accord. History has traditionally been a male preserve and examples of women from all walks

of life are important to provide young students not only with female role models, but those of also women who broke the stereotype of the passive, dependent woman.

From this perspective, we see an increase in such examples from upper primary level up to secondary level. Most of such examples are found in classes IX and X.

In Class IX, there is a separate chapter, which looks at the role women played in revolutions from world history and the impact these had on their conditions. This chapter and those on the Russian revolution and social history of clothing, provide several examples from the western world of women who actively participated in movements of change and revolt for their own betterment and empowerment. Similarly, in Class X, most of these examples come from the chapter on literature and novels, which give references to women as exemplary novel writers and avid readers.

However, there is a consistent problem with references to gender as well, *albeit* mostly in the Class X textbook. Some of the reflective questions and pictorial depictions portray regressive attitudes towards women in society, perhaps to

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highlight regressive attitudes present in society. However, these have not been placed in perspective by a counter-narrative, which exposes the regressive nature of these depictions.

Most of these depictions are related to women shunning their traditional roles and this leading to a moral decrepitude in the society where houses and social norms are in complete disarray.

The following picture from a Class X textbook represents a black and white woodcut image of an Indian couple where a woman is shown smoking a *bukkab* and the man playing the *veena*. This represents a role reversal of gender roles due to breakdown of traditions and the advance of women's education.

Picture 3



Source: CBSE, Class X, History textbook

Thus, from these observations, we can understand that gender is an important concern when writing History textbooks.

As the classes progress, the incidence of antagonistic perspective increases and purely descriptive passages decrease. As was the case with caste, references that are antagonistic in nature or provide examples of proactive women mostly come from chapters dealing with areas that are not conventionally explored in school history such as clothing, literature and art.

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It is self-evident that certain care must be taken when depicting regressive attitudes of society towards women. One of them is to provide adequate counter-narratives that put things in perspective and save students from absorbing wrong influences and messages. There can be more engagement with the concept of providing an emotionally subjective and critical perspective in textbooks at the upper primary level.

Nonetheless, there is a healthy amount of reflective questions and perspective building exercises on issues of gender throughout all the classes. These have the potential to sensitise students not only to historical but also to currently prevalent manifestations of gender discrimination.

3.2.2 Understanding the narrative: Political Science

Caste: References to caste in Political Science textbooks are more in number. They are also more evenly distributed than in the History textbooks. There are 16 such references in Class VI textbook, 14 in Class VII, 31 in Class VIII, 24 in Class IX and 27 in Class X. One of the most noticeable trends in the references to caste in these textbooks is that

there are hardly any descriptive extracts. What balances the high incidence of differentiating passages, which give an understanding of caste discrimination without any overt perspective, is a fair number of antagonistic narratives distributed evenly in all the textbooks.

Most of these antagonistic references, however, are in connection with atrocities committed against Dalits, untouchables and other lower castes by the rules of the caste system. What is missing is a direct attribution of the groups that are responsible for the caste system or are committing these atrocities.

The extracts include biographical references from Dalit thinkers including Om Prakash Valmiki and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. There are also very explicit details in the Class VIII textbook about laws such as “The SC and the ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989” which provide a very graphic description of the kind of humiliating and exploitative acts that members of Scheduled Caste community are subjected to daily.

Reconciliatory narratives with reference to caste discrimination are either rare or absent. A positive trend

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among these books is that there are no obfuscating or defensive passages. Instead, there seems to be a legitimate effort to provide a structural, historical and conceptual understanding of caste discrimination and caste system with a fair amount of antagonistic references. Many of the passages are sensitising in nature by relating experiences of caste discrimination from the present times.

In terms of narrative strategies and reflective exercises to provide a perspective to students, mostly questions and storylines have been used in all the textbooks. The innovative technique of storyboards, which NCERT has begun to use, has not been employed to narrate issues of caste discrimination. It would be interesting to examine if these issues are considered too sensitive to explore through storyboards, including sketches and drawings or they are considered too vast to be explored in the limited narratives of storyboards. The questions, however, have a good potential for providing students a perspective for caste discrimination. In fact, some of the questions even use psychological logic by asking students their feelings when reading about experiences of discrimination based on the

caste system, thus prompting them to empathise with people who have to struggle against such practices.

There has been a healthy mix of references to caste in almost all the chapters, whether they deal with social scenarios, public administration, constitutionalism or political movements. A chapter exclusively devoted to caste, gender, religion and marginalisation in the Class VIII textbook goes a long way to provide students with perspective on the debilitating repercussions of caste discrimination. Another chapter on confronting marginalisation and struggles in a democracy also sensitises students on the need and ways to address these issues. The textbooks also address the need to provide sufficient examples of personalities from lower castes who have either condemned or struggled against caste practices.

Gender: References to gender have high incidence across all the textbooks. There are 25 such references in Class VI, 58 in Class VII, 30 in Class VIII, 32 in Class IX, and 43 in Class X textbooks.

There are several basic differentiating extracts in the textbooks. Some of these also provide proactive examples

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of those who have addressed these gender differences in different capacities. There is a high incidence of antagonistic narratives relating to gender discrimination in all the textbooks.

These references sensitise students to historical, structural and conceptual notions of gender discrimination. The practice of devaluing girls with respect to boys and the resulting discrimination meted out to the former is mostly the theme of these extracts. There are references that are biographical, literary, sociological, political and legal to this effect.

Many proactive examples are provided in these textbooks of women, who have spoken or acted against these discriminatory practices such as Ramabai, Roquia Sakhawat Hussain among others.

There are also pictorial depictions of posters and agitation material used by women's groups, organisations and movements portraying slogans, messages and themes for mobilising society against gender discrimination. Picture 4 is from a Class X textbook of a poster from a women's group

in Allahabad. These textbooks also constantly emphasise, through structural explanations, how gender issues are not only those of women but of entire society, including men. A perspective building exercise from Class VII textbook, which asks students to write out lists of toys and games for girls and boys respectively, provides an opportunity to students to understand the process of formation of gender roles in society.

Picture 4



Source: Class X Political Science textbook

There is a very high incidence of structural and historical arguments and conceptual elaboration throughout all the textbooks. Between caste and gender, the storyboard

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technique has been used only for representation of the latter. These storyboards deal with issues such as legal provisions against discriminatory practices based on gender, and the role played by mobilisation of women in bringing in such provisions. For instance, a three-page spread displaying a storyboard in Class VIII textbook outlines various stages in the passing of the Domestic Violence Act. There are also reflective questions and exercises, which hold potential for students to develop a critical understanding of gender issues.

As with caste references, the sources for these extracts include literary works, newspaper material, legal provisions, biographical accounts and artistic depictions. Cartoons from leading dailies have also been used as extra-textual references, for sensitisation on these issues. The following picture (Picture 5) is a part of an exercise in Class X textbook that asks students to identify challenges to democracy in the contest of liberal politics of the West.

Picture 5



Source: Class X, CBSE, Political Science textbook

In general, these textbooks have made much innovation when dealing with gender discrimination. Gender remains a constant theme throughout all the classes. Unlike history textbooks, an antagonistic perspective is communicated almost evenly throughout all the classes. A complete transformation of Civics as a subject into Political Science has resulted in a fresh approach that addresses concerns about gender issues in social science textbooks being merely descriptive. Most of the extracts in these textbooks are found to be holding society's structural and historical makeup responsible for gender discrimination.

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3.3 Intent of Communication - Caste and Gender Discrimination

Two of the 21 National Focus Group Position Papers are exclusively committed to SC/ST (Scheduled Caste/ Scheduled Tribe) and Gender issues in education and cover the curriculum, syllabus and textbooks. These position papers review a range of education policies including teaching, textbook preparation, syllabus and curriculum design and overall decisions regarding the direction of pedagogy and education with respect to caste and gender based discrimination.

By looking at these documents along with the NCF–2005 document, and through insights provided by the faculty of Department of Education in Social Sciences (DESS)⁸, we can understand the intent of the NCERT, the council responsible for CBSE textbooks, when communicating perspective to students on issues of caste and gender discrimination. This intent can be construed as the aims of

⁸ The insights and inputs are derived from the interviews conducted with the faculty members of DESS in October 2014.

education, envisioned by the state. This can then be contrasted with our observations to understand whether they contradict or complement the aim—to sensitise the frame of reference of students to equip them with a counter logic to prejudicial narratives prevalent in society. The PSC document says the following with regard to caste and gender discrimination in education:

“In India, curriculum and the content of education have been central to the processes of reproduction of caste, class, cultural and patriarchal domination-subordination. In post-independence educational policy, modification of content supposedly aimed at indigenisation resulted in Brahminisation as a key defining feature of the curriculum.” (Section III).

It adds:

“The heavily gendered nature of school curricular content was evident in that women’s specialised knowledge and skill systems found no place in it or in the general curricular discourse.” (Ibid)

In other words, lopsided curricular content in favour of the dominant male-Brahminical sections has been identified as the root cause for creating a Brahminised-gendered content design. The group suggests adopting an approach that draws from

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“[C]ritical theory and critical multiculturalism... to critique the unjust social order, to indigenise and incorporate diverse cultures and prevent loss of valuable cultural heritage” (Ibid: 34).

On the recommendation by the national focus group on Gender Issues in Education (GIE), the position paper expresses concern over “silence on the issues of masculinity” (NCERT, National Focus Group on Gender Issues in Education: viii). It favours moving away from seeing “gender as mere difference to analysing gender as domination” (Ibid: ix). This would enable students to “critically engage with and challenge received knowledge about fixed gender identities” (Ibid: 38) and to completely do away with the “add women and stir approach” (Ibid: 54). These recommendations and concerns, thus, insist on adequate representation of women but not in an isolated thematic fashion. The issues of gender need to be interspersed throughout the text to do away with the gendered nature of the content be it in history, political science, sociology or any other subject. Moreover, the paper recommends representation of gender as not just an issue of differences between the two categories but in an

antagonistic way as relations of domination and subordination and a complete rejection of fixed notions of gender identities prevalent in the society.

These concerns and recommendations reflect an understanding of communication of systemic discrimination, which more or less correlates with the theoretical position taken by this study that education as a communication process needs to present a counter logic to the prejudicial caste and gender narratives prevalent in society.

The idea that narratives of the dominant groups must be challenged, and those of the historically subjugated groups must be positioned in an antagonistic perspective to highlight relations of domination and subordination are echoed by these position papers as well.

Yet, we observe a gap between intent and execution of these recommendations, at least in History textbooks, if not to that extent in Political Science textbooks, specifically on the issue of caste. The transformation of Civics to Political Science is not restricted to mere nomenclature, but includes content, approach, strategy and vision. The textbooks

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provide good examples of sensitisation and perspective building on almost all counts that this study as well as the aims of NCERT itself have considered important.

The plus points of these textbooks are: the references to Dalit scholars and social and political personalities, the emotional subjectivity narrated through experiences of Dalits, prompting students to empathise with such experiences, and a consistent antagonistic approach to discrediting and condemning the discriminatory logic of the caste system are all plus points of these textbooks.

On the flip side, there is a significant failure to challenge the Brahminical authority when constructing narratives about the caste system. There are many references to Dalit perspectives and experiences of humiliation and exploitation. However, unless the Brahminical authority is implicated as the source for caste discrimination, the students will always be left with a missing piece of the puzzle.

On issues of gender, the textbook adopts a fairly structural and historical approach. The evolution of this subject to

Political Science from Civics, has allowed it to draw from other disciplines such as history, literature and art, and not limit itself to the traditional approach of subjects like Civics, which dealt only with the constitution, administration and governance.

Thus, the concept of gender avoids the ‘add and stir approach’ that was alluded to before, by incorporating a narrative representative of women in all the issues that the books have dealt with. The fixed gender identities have been challenged and the logic behind how these stereotypes came to being have been elaborated. The prejudicial narrative that establishes relationships of domination and subordination between men and women has been countered by providing a narrative, which is antagonistic in many instances and draws on structural and historical arguments throughout.

Another shortcoming that these textbooks have avoided is to include more examples of exemplary women than just the few who have been traditionally paid homage to such as Razia Sultana or Sarojini Naidu. This inclusion begins to remedy the criticism that thinkers like Uma Chakravarti have raised which asks:

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“Why has the life and work of Ramabai and, more importantly her critique of society been marginalised from mainstream history which otherwise is more than generous to the great men (and occasionally women) school of history?” (Chakravarti, 1998: vii)

As argued by the DESS faculty (in a panel discussion), care has to be taken, when designing textbook content that it is age appropriate. That is why though the aim of NCERT is to sensitise students on issues of caste and gender, only so much can be said to students at upper primary and secondary levels.⁹

This seems true more for the History textbooks than political science. History textbooks as we have seen have firstly much lower references to caste in Class VIII, IX and X, and secondly a low proportion of antagonistic references on issues of caste and gender discrimination. Granted that chapters dealing with world history are liable to have lesser references to caste, but lack of such references in chapters dealing with nationalism and colonial history in India seems

⁹ The inputs are drawn from the interaction with NCERT faculty in a panel discussion comprising different faculties of DESS.

a missed opportunity to present these issues in proper perspective.

With respect to gender, the references in the history textbooks stick mostly to a very basic description of the gender divisions in the society and do not provide a perspective on the relations of domination and subordination that characterise them. However, exceptions to this are found in the chapters related to clothing and literature which represent an emotional subjectivity to this aspect in terms of how women's self-expression has been historically suppressed and how they have managed to come of age by revolting against the prejudicial societal norms about women and femininity. Thus, there is a healthy trend in these books to look at extracurricular interests such as fashion and literature, and in the case of caste references, to a popular sport like cricket. These may inspire students to seek caste and gender explanations from outside the traditional curriculum.

Although History textbooks acknowledge the differences between the male-Brahminical privileged section of society and the gendered non-upper caste discriminated section,

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they do not actively encourage students honestly to critique the logic of discrimination and its propagators as well. This shortcoming has been avoided in the Political Science textbooks to an extent.

However, any antagonistic description of discrimination needs not only to describe the subjective experiences of humiliation and oppression of Dalits and women but also situate them relationally with the dominant groups. The attractions of masculinity and upper caste identity in society derive from their privilege for wielding power over others. To demystify this power and expose its discriminatory aspect, it is necessary to reject the logic of male-Brahminical superiority by not only attributing the systemic discrimination to social and historical factors but also by exposing the dominant groups in their roles in perpetuation of this state of affairs.

IV. Analysis of Uttar Pradesh Board Textbooks

The Uttar Pradesh Board of High School and Intermediate Education, which provides education and conducting examination up to higher secondary school level, was established in 1921. It also lays claim to being the “biggest” examining body in the world.¹⁰

Uttar Pradesh (UP) being one of the few modern States established during colonial rule has a long history of such institutions, the educational board being one of them. Catering to a large State like UP, the board has many regional offices in four cities. The UP board, according to its website, currently meets the educational needs of about 32 lakh students. The responsibility of school curriculum

¹⁰ Board of High School and Intermediate Education Uttar Pradesh. n.d. *About us*. Accessed December 12, 2015. <http://upmsp.nic.in/aboutus.htm>.

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and textbooks has been divided for upper primary and secondary levels. While for the former, the SCERT (State Council for Education Research and Training), UP is responsible in conjunction with the SIE (State Institute of Education) (Yadav, 2013: 60, 100), for the latter, the UP Board prescribes the curriculum and approves textbooks from different private publishers from which schools can choose which textbooks to implement¹¹.

4.1 Textbooks Analysis

At the upper primary as well as secondary level the State follows both a disciplinary and an integrated approach to teach social sciences subjects. The SCERT, UP, has developed a State curriculum framework based on a revision and critique of the NCF–2005. At the upper primary level in collaboration with the NCERT and in conjunction with

¹¹ For example in Agra block, there were 15 approved publishers by the UP board for 2012-13 session. Any books other than these publishers as per the direction of the Joint Education Director for the Agra Block were prohibited from being sold in the free market. However, the textbooks, which were not from these publishers, were accessible in the market. (Letter from Joint Education Director for Agra Block addressed to District School Overseer on 12th Jul 2012 as accessed from the website of the city administration).

the SIE, the SCERT has developed textbooks, which combine History and Civics. At the secondary level, the UP Board has approved private publishers who follow the syllabus of UP Board prepared textbooks of social studies, which include subjects of History, Civics, Geography and Economics.

4.1.1 Upper Primary Level

Since textbooks in the State are prepared or prescribed by different State bodies, there is a different approach to addressing topics of historical and socio-political concerns. At the upper primary level, these textbooks combine the subject of History and Civics together to form one textbook.

History teaching at this level mostly adopts the conventional approach of studying the ages and empires. There is a chapter, however, at the beginning of the Class VI textbook that looks at conceptions of history and methods of constructing them. The first chapter in Class VII puts medieval history in an Islamic perspective by first referring to the spread of Islam in India. In Civics as well most of the

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themes are conventional except for a chapter in Class VIII on disability and its social implications.

4.1.2 Secondary Level

From among a list of approved publishers by the UP board of High School and Intermediate Education, the books selected for this study are from Rajeev Prakashan publishers, Allahabad. These textbooks have been jointly written by two authors instead of a textbook committee comprising writers, reviewers, advisors and coordinators as is the practice with NCERT and the upper primary level in UP itself. These textbooks follow the ‘common core points’ as laid out in the National Education Policy, 1986. (Dwivedi and Jain, 2014: 3)

Based on the UP board syllabus, these textbooks at the Class IX reintroduce themes covered in Class VI and VII, *albeit* in a wider context. The topics include the prehistoric period, evolution of civilizations in India with reference to the ancient civilizations of China, Mesopotamia and Egypt, ancient period empires and kingdoms and eventually the Sultanate and Mughal empires ending with Maratha

kingdoms. In Class X, these books look at modern world history covering European renaissance, revolutions in France and Russia, European nationalism and the world wars. With reference to India it looks at colonialism, struggles for independence, nationalism in India and eventually partition and independence of India.

The Civics syllabus in Class IX includes the Indian constitution, democracy and local self-governance along with exploring challenges to and expectations with respect to minorities, women and secularism. Class X explores federalism, judiciary, foreign policy and internal and external security issues in India. Apart from the traditional approach to the subject, the chapters with a slight difference are those exploring conditions of women and weaker sections of the society.

4.2 Observations

Unlike the NCERT textbooks, the textbooks for UP board have been prepared for upper primary and secondary levels by different bodies for both History and Civics. Therefore, the narratives will be understood based on the levels of education instead of the subjects.

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4.2.1 Understanding the Narrative: Upper Primary Level

Caste: The size of the textbooks at the upper primary level is fairly small in terms of number of pages. Therefore, references to different issues are also less in number in general. There are 12 references to caste and related phenomenon in Class VI history, 13 in Class VII and 12 in Class VIII. Moreover, within these limited references most of them also have differentiating content. These include basic description of caste differences and reference to certain historical personalities being against untouchability but not extending to a complete rejection of the caste system itself. There are quite a few descriptive passages as well. The incidence of antagonistic passages is low.

There are references to certain historical personalities protesting against the caste system but hardly any sensitising passages on the issue of caste discrimination. There are a few reconciliatory and defensive extracts, which attempt to portray the caste system in a less harsh light. For instance, the Class VI textbook credits the relative stability of ancient South Indian society to Brahmins and non-Brahmins

following their respective duties. This is an example of defending the caste system (Chapter 12). Similarly not explaining the provisions of the caste system in antagonistic detail leads to an obfuscation of the reality of caste discrimination.

These textbooks also attempt to use different reflective and communicatory strategies such as reflective questions and exercises along with modes of storyboards and story. With reference to caste however there are almost no questions in all the three classes even in a mere descriptive capacity.

Since Civics is a smaller part of these textbooks than History, the subject has even fewer references to social issues in general. It is only in Class VI that there are a credible number of references to caste, while Class VII and VIII record three and two references respectively. Looking at Class VI, most of these references can be categorised as differentiating content, usually referring to provision of reservation to members of scheduled castes in various levels of government.

There is a fleeting reference to Dr. Ambedkar's efforts in his struggle against the caste system and untouchability in few

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of the textbooks. There are very rare questions on the issue of caste discrimination, that too only in the textbook of Class VI, and none in the other two classes. These too are merely differentiating content, and do not provide much scope for reflection on the issue.

Gender: There are many more references to gender as compared with caste and these increase from Class VI to Class VIII. In Class VI, there are 14 references, 21 in Class VII and 36 in Class VIII, to gender and related issues. As a proportion, the number of differentiating content far exceeds the antagonistic references even with an increase in the total number of references to gender.

Significantly, the few antagonistic references include opposition to practices of gender discrimination by both male and female historical personalities. The inclusion of Ramabai is an important example of the proactive female.

There are other examples of women such as Annie Besant and Savitribai Phule but more as differentiating content than antagonistic. There are a few reconciliatory passages with reference to ancient history and to nationalist movement in

India. There is one instance of the Class VII History textbook attributing the worsening of conditions of women to the arrival of Mughals. However, as there is insufficient elaboration, this can be considered as obfuscating content. (Chapter 14).

There are a few questions, storylines and exercises that aim to provide food for thought to students on issues of gender discrimination in an antagonistic perspective by referring to the emotional subjectivity involved in these issues.

In Civics textbooks, there are fewer references to gender than those in history but a considerably larger number of references to caste. There are 16 references to gender issues in Class VI, 10 in Class VII and eight in Class IX. Most of these are differentiating content. There are a few, which provide proactive examples of women and a few antagonistic references as well. The proactive examples come from present times, of women achievers and a few in fictional narratives where the protagonist of the story either highlights practices of gender discrimination or protests against them. Most of the questions, storylines and exercises in the textbooks for all three classes are with reference to

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gender, which include, as already mentioned, sensitising story lines and perspective building reflective questions.

4.2.2 Understanding the Narrative: Secondary Level

Caste: As the textbooks at the secondary level are more expansive, they have more references to caste and provide more scope for analysis of the text. There are 43 references to caste in Class IX and 18 in Class X. This is unsurprising as Class IX deals exclusively with Indian history, and Class X deals with world history along with some sections on modern Indian history. Most of these references come from the chapters on Vedic society and culture and the Sultanate period. However, in general, these references are distributed almost evenly throughout the textbook. In the case of Class X, there are no references in the section on world history. In the case of Indian history, most of these references come from the chapters on Indian renaissance and nationalism.

In Class IX, most references are descriptive, giving only basic details such as which caste or *varna* certain rulers belonged to, the basic explanation of the caste system and how the castes and sub-castes evolved.

In modern history, there seems to be a trend to introduce all the social reformers and national leaders on the basis of their *varnas* especially if they belonged to Brahmin *varna*. There are many examples of differentiating content, though these are fewer than the descriptive ones. These refer to the basic differentiation inherent in the caste system without any antagonistic perspective regarding its discriminatory logic.

There are very few purely antagonistic descriptions of caste discrimination in both the classes. Most of these describe the opposition and condemnation of the caste system by certain social reformers and leaders. The textbook does not take it upon itself to provide an antagonistic perspective or sensitisation on the issue. There are, however, some reconciliatory references in the Class IX textbook to the caste system, which in few cases are also obfuscating and defensive about caste hierarchy. These are in reference to ancient history and the need for the caste system in the beginning for social harmony and order. In one instance, in the Class IX textbook, the hardening of caste rules has been attributed to the advent of foreign rulers in the medieval period without providing the evidence or context for it.

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(Dwivedi and Jain, 2014: 146). This seems in line with what Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) has been propagating regarding the creation of Dalits and tribals in India due to the invasion of Muslims.¹²

The textbook does not use any innovative techniques such as storyboards, storylines, or reflective questions. There are no end of the chapter questions regarding the caste system in Class X and only two in Class IX.

The consistent reference to caste observable in History textbooks is not reflected in the case of the Civics textbooks. In Class IX there are 27 references to caste whereas in Class X there are only two. Most of the references in Class IX come from the chapters covering challenges to the Indian nation in context of caste, gender and religion. Most of these references are differentiating content, as they tend to explain the constitutional provisions for empowerment of members

¹² These views have been expressed in the foreword to three of the books on different castes written by BJP spokesman Vijay Sonkar Shastri and released by RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat. (As reported on Indiatoday.in on Sept 22, 2014)

of scheduled caste and their protection against oppressive and discriminatory practices of caste system.

The perspective is mainly nationalistic, viewing the discriminatory practices as an obstacle to national progress, healthy politics and unity. It is more utilitarian and from a nation building perspective than sensitising. There are only a few antagonistic references that go into the historical and institutional reasons behind the suppression of the 'lower' castes, and the irrationality of caste belief. There is an entire two-page elaboration of the oppressive practices of caste system but the idea behind this elaboration is not so much to express the emotional subjectivity of the people discriminated against or the relations of subordination and domination but mostly the aforementioned nationalistic project of healthy politics and a healthy social order.

In the case of Civics, there are a few questions about caste in Class IX and none in Class X. The questions that are asked are mostly based on the basic description of caste divisions and do not have any reflective or sensitising value. However, one extract in the Class IX textbook suggests that one of the ways of removing caste system is to build an

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effective educational system, which sensitises the students to the evils and problems of the caste system and mobilises them to agitate against the prevalence of this evil system (Dwivedi and Jain, 2014: 267).

This extract sums up the theoretical position of this study in that it deems students as an appropriate audience to sensitise their frames of reference against the logic of the caste system and reject it. Nonetheless, contrary to what the Class IX extract recommends, the UP textbooks themselves fail in the task of sensitising. This is primarily because of their inability and perhaps unwillingness to provide a consistent counter logic to prejudicial narratives based on caste discrimination.

Gender: With respect to gender in different capacities, there are almost equal references in both classes in the History textbooks. In Class IX there are 56 such references and 50 in Class X. Most of the references in both the classes, as in the case of caste, are differentiating content. They refer to the basic differences in gender relations, without providing a subjective perspective on the aspect of discrimination. Moreover, these issues are addressed cursorily with one

passage in each chapter of ancient history providing three or four lines about the status of women in the then society.

There are many examples of women rulers not only from ancient and later history of India but also from other ancient civilizations who provided able leadership and effective rule. Similarly, there are many examples from modern history of women who actively participated in the national movement for independence. However, there are few instances of antagonistic references with respect to gender discrimination. Thus, the approach to addressing gender issues is either through enunciating the basic gender differences or providing examples of women rulers and participants in the national movement.

The questions pertaining gender, whether in the textbooks of Class IX or X, are either differentiating content or seek descriptive answers with regard to social, historical personalities. The only real potential for sensitisation that can be found in one of the exercises is the project work to compile contributions of women in history.

In the Civics textbooks, as was the case with caste, there are many references to gender and related issues in Class IX, a

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total of 33, and very few in Class X, a total of 11. Most of the references are again either differentiating content or in the category of providing proactive examples of women leaders or famous personalities.

There are only a few antagonistic references in both classes. However, there is a four-page spread on the issue of crimes against women. This reference highlights the vulnerable position that women are in due to the various oppressive, exploitative and violent practices against them. Thus, as with caste issues, through specific chapters or multi-page spreads gender also finds a long expansive mention in these textbooks more or less as an attempt to balance the narrative between descriptive and differentiating content on the one hand and an antagonistic, sensitising one on the other. There are a few questions in Class IX textbook on gender, which emphasise the understanding of gender discrimination in an objective, informative way and none in Class X.

4.3 Intent of Communication

From a communication perspective, the organisational divide between upper primary and secondary levels suggests an apparent break in the communication process in various subjects, but most importantly in the social sciences. This inference is confirmed by the observations from the analysis of the textbooks. There are differences not only in the size, topics and design of textbooks but also in the content, syllabus and approach. Students are initiated into social science education at upper primary level and are expected, at secondary level, to encounter a completely new interface.

In addition, there is a repetition of topics in areas such as ancient and medieval history, where the entire syllabus is included again in Class IX. This repetition instead of further exploring various social and historical topics leads to a stagnation of curriculum and curbs the space for engaging with newer ideas and unexplored viewpoints towards history and social sciences in general.

This break in the narrative also reflects in the intent of communication. At the upper primary level, the SCERT in conjunction with the SIE has come up with UP curriculum framework–2013 and curriculum. The document from the

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outset asserts the importance of keeping students away from any partisanship in matters of caste, communal, gender and disability-related challenges, and develop a healthy, nurturing and inclusive environment for students to learn and become empowered (Preface)¹³.

However, the message to remain unpartisan in these matters tends to become a foundation for not engaging with these issues or challenges. In other words, even though the document speaks against systemic discrimination and stresses the importance of an inclusive environment, (Section 2.4), it does not provide a roadmap for how this is to be achieved.

Compared with the National Focus Group Position Papers or even the NCF–2005, this document falls short on two goals: one, critiquing the erstwhile content and curricular policies on dealing with systemic discrimination, and two,

¹³ All the inputs from the UP Curriculum framework 2013 have been included in the study after having been roughly translated from Hindi to English.

providing specific recommendations for better sensitisation of students to these issues.

These shortcomings in the curriculum framework with respect to its engagement with issues of caste and gender discriminations also reflect in the textbook content and approach. As observed earlier, with few references to caste in total, and even lesser of antagonistic ones, there is no real scope for reflection on the issue of caste discrimination in either History or Civics sections of upper primary level textbooks. Gender fares slightly better. There is some effort to engage with the issue of gender in these books and to provide sensitisation on gender discrimination. However, what is lacking is a consistent attack on masculinity or the logic of male superiority, an important element to provide perspective on gender relations in society.

The incidence of proactive examples and a few antagonistic references is a positive step. However, unless there is a conscious effort to give more attention to gender as well as caste discrimination, students reading these textbooks will have no opportunity, through their curriculum, to imbibe a sensitised and anti-discriminatory perspective.

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The only common thread in the narrative between upper primary and secondary level is a passive engagement with issues of systemic discrimination. As observed, on the issue of caste discrimination, the textbooks at secondary level fall short of providing any real, subjectively sensitising perspective to students.

There are very few antagonistic references but the tendency to identify the origin of many social reformers, who worked against gender and caste discrimination, as Brahmins is ironical, considering that the caste system has been credited to Brahmanical order.¹⁴ Similarly, in Civics, most of the passages are differentiating content and only refer to constitutional provisions that have been put in place against caste discrimination. This reflects a lack of understanding that references need to be reinforced with a proper perspective on how caste discrimination is emotionally and

¹⁴ Chakravarti, Uma. 1993. "Conceptualising Brahmanical Patriarchy in Early India: Gender, Caste, Class and State". *Economic and Political Weekly* 28 (14). *Economic and Political Weekly*: 579–85. Last accessed: December 12, 2015. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4399556>.

structurally destructive and debilitating for the oppressed caste groups.

The add and stir approach used for gender (referred to earlier in the study) has been adopted here for caste with a two-page spread. As with gender discrimination, caste too is looked at from a social and nationalistic reconciliation perspective and not to address the historical injustices, which continue to be committed against the lower castes and specially the scheduled caste community members.

The two-page spread on crimes against women in the civics section is not really a revelation. It does not build a consistent argument against male-privilege, patriarchy, sexism or misogyny, which are the underlying causes behind these incidents. In fact, the entire narrative in both the History and Civics section fails to build any consistent argument against the structural underpinnings of gender discrimination and its justification.

This archaic approach to history shows that there is no real effort to evolve these textbooks from mere data carriers to insightful, engaging and sensitising communicative media. On other counts of not providing any innovative techniques

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like storyboards, reflective questions, story lines or other associative communication strategies, the textbooks at secondary level fail on the very provisions provided by the UP school curriculum framework 2013. Would it be wise to assume that the strategies that have been deemed as beneficial and engaging for students up to upper primary level suddenly become redundant for them a year later?

The common core points referred to by the NPE 1986 are the basis on which these textbooks have been written. The NPE 1986, as cited in the NCF–2005, says:

“[A]wareness of the inherent equality of all will be created through the core curriculum. The purpose is to remove prejudices and complexes transmitted through the social environment and the accident of birth.” (NCF, 2005: 5).

The National Curriculum Framework in 1988 recognised the importance of social sciences in achieving the aims of the NPE–1986. It said:

“Social sciences is perhaps the singular curricular area which can prove to be the most effective tool for

providing education in the context of all the core components indicated in the NPE-86.” (Section 2.6.4)

The common core components mentioned in the policy emphasised

“[I]nstilling a nationally shared perception and values and creation of an ethos and value system in which a common Indian identity could be strengthened.”
(Section 2.3)

Thus, it can be inferred that the main thrust of the common core components was promoting a common nationally inspired identity for all. The section on social sciences in the NCF–1988 document or any section throughout the document, therefore, does not give any special emphasis on how to tackle discrimination of any kind. Thus, if it is found that social sciences textbooks at secondary level in UP do not really engage with caste and gender based discrimination, it is not totally unexpected, as it follows the common core components which themselves have a reconciliatory approach of nation building as its aim. Such a reconciliatory approach is more interested in ironing out social differences than critically engaging with them.

V. Analysis of Tamil Nadu Board Textbooks

The board for secondary education was established in Tamil Nadu in 1910. Like many other States, Tamil Nadu has adapted the NCERT syllabus and textbooks (Yadav, 2013: xix). At present the school education in the State is being conducted on the provisions of *Samacheer Kalvi* (Tamil Nadu Uniform System of School Education) implemented by an Act in 2010. The aim of the system is to provide an integrated education system at all levels to provide common syllabus and textbooks across all the schools that are not affiliated with the CBSE board. Thus different schools, whether State Board controlled, Matriculation Schools, Oriental Schools or Anglo-Indian Schools, follow the same syllabus as prescribed by the State Common Board of School Education. Moreover, unlike UP, the same authority prescribes syllabus and textbooks at both the upper primary and secondary levels (Ibid: 60, 100).

The textbooks have been prepared and compiled by the State Council of Education Research and Training, Tamil Nadu. The revision of the syllabus commenced based on the recommendations of the NCF–2005, in 2007-08. It was decided that 70 per cent to 80 per cent of the syllabus would be retained from the national curriculum, and the rest would be contributed by the State. A long process culminated in the formation of these textbooks, which are in place in the Tamil Nadu school system. The State follows an integrated approach for teaching social sciences both at the upper primary and secondary levels. The new policy has also provided for textbooks to be divided into three parts according to the three terms in which an academic year is divided. This was done to reduce the physical load of students who had to carry books for all the three terms. Textbooks for all the classes from VI to VIII have all subjects included in one textbook divided only by terms. For Class IX, the subjects of Science and Social Science have been combined in one and for Class X the entire book for Social Science has been compiled without any division based on terms.

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5.1 The Textbook Analysis

As one organisation, SCERT, Tamil Nadu, prepares textbooks for all classes, the same pattern used to make observations for NCERT-CSBSE textbooks will be followed.

5.1.1 History

The subject, History, follows the NCERT curriculum. However, as already mentioned, about 20 per cent to 30 per cent of the syllabus and content covers the history of Tamil Nadu. This representation of the State's history reflects throughout all the chapters and in separate chapters that are specifically on the State. Class VI covers pre-history and ancient history of India with a separate chapter on ancient Tamil Nadu. Class VII gives substantial attention to south Indian empires besides the north Indian empires, Delhi Sultanate and movements like Bhakti and Sufi traditions. Class VIII looks at the Mughal Empire and the advent of British rule in India. The British rule is explained through individual chapters on various British officials, and mutinies and revolts against the British in various parts of the

country. The textbook also looks at certain kingdoms and rules in southern India.

Class IX revisits portions already covered and has chapters on ancient history, medieval history and modern history with respect to international events and a separate chapter on Tamil Nadu's cultural heritage. Class X looks at modern world history with reference to world wars and the evolution of international organisations. Indian history covers topics of 1857 revolt, social reform movements, Indian independence movement and special attention is given to Tamil Nadu's role in the freedom movement and social transformation.

The syllabus for the first three classes follows the usual divisions of ancient, medieval and modern history. In class IX, the selective recap of previous classes is differently done than in the UP textbooks. It is also different as the same authority designs the textbooks at upper primary and secondary levels. What is noticeable is the separate attention given to Tamil Nadu in terms of its history, culture, social transformation and its role in the freedom movement. This is in complete contrast to History textbooks in UP, which

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do not present specific historical themes from the State from any of the conventional divisions of time-period in historical studies.

5.1.2 Civics

The Civics subject acquires a secondary role in the social science textbooks in all the classes. Class VI is introductory with topics including society, family, villages, cities and local self-government. The stand out chapter is on democracy and women empowerment. Class VII looks at Indian and world politics, covering political institutions at both levels. As with Class VI, there is a separate chapter in this textbook, which looks at political provisions such as laws and schemes for women. The chapters in Class VIII are not related to each other in any particular way. These include topics as diverse as national integration, international organisations and road safety. Class IX covers federal relations and rights and duties of citizens. The chapter which stands out here is on contemporary social issues in Tamil Nadu. The Class X textbook includes chapters on Indian democracy, unity and its role in world peace besides the consumer rights.

As in the case of history textbooks, Civics textbooks pay particular attention to Tamil Nadu. What is also noteworthy is the attention given to women's issues and in general to contemporary social issues. Although these textbooks are limited in their scope, a few chapters on such topics do increase their scope for dealing with social and political issues.

5.2 Observations

Based on a study of these textbooks, we can make an attempt to understand the subjects of History and Civics separately as was the case with NCERT textbooks, *albeit* with the difference in nomenclature and emphasis on the subject of Civics.

5.2.1 Understanding the Narrative: History

Caste: The references to caste in the History textbooks are not evenly distributed across various classes. There are 13 such references in Class VI, 11 in Class VII, five in Class VIII, 17 in Class IX and 41 in Class X.

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In Class X, the most number of references are found in later chapters. These include mainly those dealing with social and religious reform movements of 19th century and social transformation in Tamil Nadu. The dedication of an entire chapter to social transformation is an indicator in itself of the priority textbook authorities accord to communicating the history of social change in the region. The fact that this chapter has many references to caste shows how caste is an important aspect of this social change. With respect to ancient history, the references to caste are evenly distributed across chapters on Vedic society, Jainism and Buddhism and new kingdoms and empires. For Class VII, the chapter on Bhakti and Sufi movements has the most references to caste thus continuing the trend of engaging with the issue within the ambit of social movements.

Class VIII does not have too many references to caste as the textbook in this class deals mostly with British rule in India; indeed, there is a clear disengagement with the issue of caste with reference to this period of Indian history in the textbook. In Class IX, most references to caste and related phenomena are in chapters dealing with intellectual

awakening in the ancient period and the cultural heritage of Tamil Nadu – again indicating a clear intent to deal with the issue within the realm of social change and social history.

In terms of the approach to address these issues in textbooks, the incidence of purely descriptive passages is low in all the classes, except for Class VIII, which more or less has a descriptive approach throughout for the period of modern history of India. There is a fair amount of differentiating content in all the textbooks except for Class VIII, for reasons already mentioned. There are mostly structural or conceptual explanations of caste-based differences in society during the ancient, medieval and modern periods of history but there is no specific subjective narration on issue of discrimination and its different forms of manifestation.

There are a good number of antagonistic references, which provide a perspective, if not sensitisation, on the issue of caste discrimination except for the textbooks from class six and eight. We already know the reasons behind Class VIII, however a lack of antagonistic perspective in Class VI, which deals with ancient history probably indicates an age-

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specific criterion for imparting information to students, since the same period of ancient history when covered in class nine has ample engagement with the issue of caste and many antagonistic references as well. For instance, Jainism has been explained in Class IX textbook as arising out of opposition to Brahminical system. What is also noticeable is that there is a clear pattern in Class X, where the antagonistic references are mostly in the context of the anti-Brahminical movement, specifically the self-respect movement in Tamil Nadu.

There is low incidence of reconciliatory or obfuscating content. Most of these describe caste system in a softer light or do not provide the clearest picture behind the systemic discrimination of caste system. There are not too many reflective questions, exercises or questions for retention on the issue of caste system except for Class X.

Though some of these provide perspective on the issue, they are not sensitising in nature. They mostly point out the differentiating context of the caste system, rather than the discriminatory aspects. Strategies such as storyboards or storylines have not been used in the textbooks in any classes.

There are not many references to literary or non-conventional sources from print, art, sports or fashion, but Sangam literature is a constant reference for all caste-based extracts from ancient history.

Gender: Class VI has 11 gender references, Class VII 16, Class VIII records a jump with 39 references, Class IX has 13 references and Class X has maximum number of references to gender and related phenomena at 54. We first look at those textbooks with higher incidence of references to gender issues. We find that in Class VIII, chapters that deal with Mughal history, British rule and Nayak rule in Tamil country represent more gender-related extracts. In the Class X textbook, the gender references are mostly in the chapters on the revolt of 1857, the freedom movement of India, social and religious reform movements in India and the social transformation in Tamil Nadu. Thus, besides the chapters dealing specifically with British rule and protest against it, and Mughal history, the engagement with social issues, social reform and transformation in India and specifically in Tamil Nadu are the ones that deal with gender in various capacities.

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With respect to ancient history, which is dealt with in the Class VI textbook, most references to gender come from the chapter on the Vedic period. In Class VII, these references are distributed more evenly throughout all the chapters, which deal mostly with kingdoms from north India, south India and nationwide empires.

In addition, the chapter on Bhakti and Sufi movements also has references to gender and related issues. Interestingly, there are no references in the Class IX textbook to gender in the chapter which deals with intellectual awakening in ancient India. Most such references in this class come in the chapters on modern age, industrial revolution, French revolution and cultural heritage of Tamil Nadu. Thus, references are distributed across most chapters as is to be expected, gender being a more cross-cultural issue than caste. These references in most chapters on social movements and transformation indicate a similar intent as with caste to engage with these issues in chapter on social history and change.

The proportion of purely descriptive extracts on gender issues or gender related references is about average in all the

textbooks. Most of the references, which are not merely descriptive are either differentiating content or ones that provide proactive examples of women as historically or socially exemplary figures.

There are few antagonistic references to gender discrimination in most classes, except for Class X, which represents more of an antagonistic perspective than others. Most of these references come in the chapter on social transformation in Tamil Nadu, which illustrates the role played by female social leaders like Dr. Muthu Lakshmi and Moovalur Ramamirtham to initiate changes in the conditions of women and eradicate social evils from community in general. There are almost no reconciliatory references in these textbooks related to gender issues.

Though there are no regressive extracts in the Class X textbooks, there are certain themes in all the earlier textbooks, which come off as regressive or defensive about certain patriarchal norms and practices. Some of these references are to chastity and honour as important values for women, defending Sati as initially a voluntary practice

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and attributing female infanticide to economic burden, and not the patriarchal reasoning of privileging the male child.

Most of the questions that are descriptive, reflective, meant for building perspective or sensitisation are with reference to gender issues. There are a few questions which intend to provide an antagonistic perspective to students about gender relations in society and a few which highlight the contributions of prominent female historical personalities.

The most noticeable pattern with reference to gender in these textbooks is the rich history of gender activism that they have drawn on, but mostly from modern history. In contrast, in the text dealing with earlier periods, certain derogatory practices have been defended or regressive values upheld as already mentioned.

5.2.2 Understanding the Narrative: Civics

Caste: The subject of Civics is meagre compared with history. There are different numbers of references to caste in different classes. Class VI has three such references, Class

VII has three as well, Class VIII has six, Class IX has 17 and Class X has only one. In general, the issue of caste is not well represented across the textbooks except the one for Class IX. In this class too, most of these appear in the chapter dealing with the social scenario of Tamil Nadu – on contemporary social issues of the State, to be more precise.

There is an equal proportion of differentiating and antagonistic references in the Class IX textbook and none of them is merely descriptive. There are also no reconciliatory or obfuscating references. What is important to notice is that the antagonistic references are not just about the ill-treatment of lower castes and Dalits, but also impute the upper castes, mostly Brahmins, in this act of discrimination. For instance, in Class IX comparing the caste discrimination and untouchability to apartheid and implicating Brahmins, and other upper caste members effectively highlights the role played by this section of society in perpetuating the discriminatory practices based on caste system.

This is precisely what the otherwise sensitising textbooks of political science from NCERT were missing out, as

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observed earlier. The other classes' textbooks do not provide a similar antagonistic perspective as the Class IX textbook. There are a few reconciliatory references also in these classes mostly talking about the unity of nation despite caste differences based on an assimilatory logic.

Only Class IX textbooks have any kind of questions on caste system. Most of these are based on the basic differentiating justification of caste system and none of them appears to be either reflective or facilitate building perspectives. As in the case of History, there are no storyboards or storylines to enhance the narrative in these textbooks.

Most real engagement with the issue of caste comes from Class IX and that too in a single chapter on contemporary social issues of Tamil Nadu. Most of these references include mention of social reformers and leaders such as Periyar, Ambedkar, Phule, Vallalar, and the Buddha, thereby canonising different historical personalities through a thematic context of the continuing struggle against caste system over centuries.

Gender: Gender references are more in number than caste references throughout all the classes. The Class VI textbook has 20 references to gender and related phenomena, Class VII has 25 references, Class VIII has 26, Class IX has 14 and Class X has only one. The most references in Class VI come from the chapter specifically covering democracy, human resources and women empowerment.

Similarly, in Class VII most references are in the chapter on legislation and schemes for women and children. In Class VIII, two of the chapters on socio-economic problems and human rights as addressed by the UNO, cover issues faced by women and other gender related issues. In Class IX, the chapter on contemporary social issues of Tamil Nadu covers gender issues much like caste related ones. Thus, most of the textbooks have separate chapters dedicated to covering issues on gender and problems faced by women.

Allotting distinct space to discuss the transgender community is a distinct feature of the State textbooks with respect to Civics. Here the textbook lays out a two-page spread on the transgender community and the provisions made by the State and the government for them. This topic

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is covered in the chapter on contemporary social issues of Tamil Nadu. Very few references among all the textbooks are merely descriptive. There is a lot of differentiating content, which lay out the basic differences in gender relations without going into too much detail about issues of gender discrimination.

There are a few antagonistic references in these textbooks regarding gender discrimination. These elaborate upon ideas of how social practices lead to norms of dependence of women on men, privileging of the male child over the female, and denying rights to women by society.

The exemplary women who were referred to in the History sections have also been included as examples in the Civics section. Moreover, there are many questions on gender differences, a few of which are perspective building and sensitising with respect to gender discrimination as well. For instance, an exercise to visit a construction site and gain information about wage inequality between men and women is a sensitising project meant for building perspectives of students about the structural inequalities in gender relations.

5.3 Intent of Communication

Tamil Nadu follows the NCF–2005 guidelines for textbook preparation. The SCERT director, Dr. S. Kanappan, describes the process of revision of the school syllabus in the State, which started in 2008-09 based on the recommendations of the NCF–2005. It was decided that 70 per cent to 80 per cent of the syllabus would be retained from the national curriculum and rest will be contributed by the State.¹⁵ Though the State School Education Minister, N.R. Sivapathy, said in 2012 that the department would draft the Tamil Nadu Curricular Framework, there seems to be no apparent progress on this front (Srinivasan, 2012).

Since the *Samacheer Kalvi* or the Tamil Nadu Uniform System of School Education, follows a common syllabus and has a single textbook making body for all classes, there is no apparent communication break with respect to the intent of the communicator – the State. However since the State mostly follows the NCF–2005 recommendations, it helps to include the views and remarks of the director of the SCERT

¹⁵ Dr. S. Kannapan's views and inputs based on an interview conducted with him.

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and the textbook committee advisors on the approach to addressing systemic discrimination. One aspect common across the board was that only existing literature was used to draw content, including content for caste and gender issues, for writing these textbooks.

However, what remains a common opinion regarding the approach to be adopted when constructing a narrative on systemic discrimination is that it should be predominantly descriptive. Dr. A. Thanappan, the textbook committee reviewer for Class VII, suggests that the approach at school level should be descriptive, and any critical approach left for research level. He adds that the propagation of any views should be avoided, and that theoretical issues of caste and gender should not reflect the views of the author of these textbooks.

Moreover, since it is important how these issues are interpreted, only the content, which is well supported by evidences should be included. Similarly, Dr. N. Rajendiran, the textbook committee reviewer for classes VIII and X, also opines that textbooks at school level should provide

basic outlines on social issues and not delve too deeply into them.

However, he does suggest that textbooks contain an elaborate account of Tamil Nadu State's engagement with caste and gender based politics. This account includes the representation of the historically neglected groups, how the issues of systemic discrimination were instigated in State politics and social awareness was created on them.¹⁶

The engagement with State politics and history *vis-a-vis* social issues has also created problems for textbook writers. For instance, Rajendiran relates how, while describing the Justice Party and Self Respect Movement, the textbook committee faced stiff opposition from certain caste groups who were historically represented as perpetuating caste-based discrimination. However, as he points out, this objection is misplaced, as these references are already part of existing literature.¹⁷

¹⁶ Inputs and views represented here are based on the interviews conducted with Dr. A. Thanappan and Dr. N. Rajendiran.

¹⁷ This and other similar oppositions led the state to decide to drop the names of the textbook committee members from the textbooks in 2013. However the textbook committee members interviewed do not support

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The inputs from the textbook committee members and the SCERT director can be summed up in two basic points: 1) the content for the textbooks is mainly derived from existing literature, 2) the approach is mainly descriptive.

Nonetheless, the representation of caste and gender issues as derived from existing literature conveys the historical and social legacy of the State with respect to caste and gender based mobilisations and movements. As a State, Tamil Nadu has always been embroiled in an active politics of anti-Brahmin movements and against social practices discriminating against women, which has been deeply associated with its Dravidian identity politics.

This explains why existing literature, from which the textbooks borrow, have vibrant and detailed accounts of the self-respect movement, the politics of the Justice Party and similar organisations. In fact, in one of the textbooks there is a mention of C. Rajagopalachari's controversial move to introduce the *Kula Kalvi Thittam* in the State curriculum. The

this step as they believe that there should be transparency in these matters and the forum should be open for critical engagement.

plan, which had provisions for including the learning of ancestral occupation as part of school education, was widely condemned as being casteist.

Moreover, the consistent reference to historical personalities and ideologues who rebelled against the existing practices of systemic discrimination based on caste and gender from Tamil Nadu and other States illustrates how even a descriptive approach of representation of movements against gender and caste discrimination results in an antagonistic narrative against the practices.

What differs in this antagonistic approach is that it is less structural and less theoretical and more grounded in practical examples, as is apparent from the higher number of evidentiary references compared to structural ones.

The intent of the State authorities to draw at least 20 per cent to 30 per cent of the syllabus and content from regional history and politics, as observed earlier, is reflected in consistent references to State history and society in various chapters in general and certain chapters solely dedicated to the State.

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These references provide a consistent criticism of the Brahminical and patriarchal reasoning, precisely because the State has had a vibrant political history of rebelling against these ideologies. However, the lack of a deep theoretical foundation to these references leads to paradoxical counter references. For instance, extolling the virtues of chastity and honour for women are values that are not consistent with an otherwise thorough condemnation of patriarchal values of dependence of women over men and privileging of men over women in society.

Nonetheless, these textbooks do address issues that are novel and path breaking in many ways. For instance, there is a two-page spread on the transgender community, which is a sensitising illustration of the steps taken by the State government for their welfare. Though there is an element of self-congratulation in these projections, the approach is bipartisan and uniform for the entire State rather than promotional for a specific government.

Though the approach of the textbooks is a descriptive one, they contain antagonistic narratives, especially in sections covering modern history and politics of Tamil Nadu. This is

evident from the frequent depiction of mobilisations and movements against caste and gender throughout these textbooks.

VI. Conclusion

The previous three chapters provided a logical understanding of the structure and narrative of textbooks prescribed by three different boards, CBSE, Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. The exercise addressed the concerns of systemic discrimination based on the caste system and gender relations in society. The narrative was contextualised by looking at the intent of the state and its agencies in communicating a perspective and sensitising the frame of reference of students on the aforementioned issues. Besides the approach, observations have also been made on the strategies of communication adopted in these textbooks.

6.1 A Recap

Having made these observations, it might be time to recapitulate the initial concerns with which this study was conceptualised and then evaluate how the textbooks from the three boards perform on these criteria.

First, this study adopts a communication perspective to look at the education process. The specific components being looked at in terms of a communication model are the message, the medium and the communicator. These variables in the case of this study are assigned values as following: Medium: Upper Primary and Secondary level Textbooks, Message: Content of the Textbooks, and Communicator: Central and State Boards of Education from Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. Of these the most important component under scrutiny is the message i.e. the content of the textbooks.

Second, any well-structured communication process irrespective of the impact it has, has an aim. Treating education as a communication process, its aim ideally becomes the sensitisation of the frame of reference of students. The scope of this study is to understand how social studies textbooks deal with the representation of systemic discrimination based on caste and gender, the aim of the education process.

Third, consistent with treating education as a communication process, systemic discrimination is also

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looked at through a communication perspective. Through this view discrimination is treated as an issue of identity formation with respect to the self and the community. The frame of reference of a student, which is relatively less informed and more pliable to newer ideas and perspectives, remains open to various parallel socialisation processes. Among these there are those which reinforce the discriminatory logic by communicating narratives that support a hierarchical structure of social relations where both groups internalise this logic whether they belong to the privileged or the discriminated sections. These communication processes belong in the social and political domain in the public and private arenas of an individual's life and therefore education has the mammoth task to not only counter these logics but also consistently attack them in order to enable students to reject them and strengthen their beliefs in equality, justice and other democratic ideals.

Fourth, textbooks as forms of mass media then have the responsibility to cater to a huge target audience of school going students and provide them with a consistent counter narrative against discriminatory logic. This study therefore

conducts an interpretive content analysis which uses quantifiable approach to categorise references and interpret them in the context of the aims of the state in terms of their approach to addressing caste and gender based discrimination. At the same time the study also attempts to understand various strategies of communication that are followed by different education boards and textbook authorities so that textbooks become the main source of reliance for the student when choosing from among the various social communication processes at her disposal.

Fifth, this study works with two focal points of evaluation. Firstly, it aims to interrogate the approach of various education bodies when it comes to the strategies of designing textbook content specifically on issues of caste and gender based discrimination. Secondly, and more extensively it aims to look at the content and narrative of these textbooks and understand how and with what intent they approach the issues of caste and gender and whether they are able to sensitise the students on caste and gender discrimination.

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6.2 Strategies of Textbook Design

In terms of strategy, NCERT textbooks show the most engagement with the task of evolving innovative approaches for communication. This engagement is reflected more in the subject of political science than history. This is because the complete transformation of the subject from civics to political science has opened up a lot of space for textbook makers to innovate in all aspects of the textbook design, be it content, strategies or syllabus. The books may be lengthier as a result but the inclusion of various new communicative tools such as storyboards, pictorial depictions, cartoons and storylines among others have increased the promise of the textbooks to engage with students in a more communicative capacity than merely instructional one. As Yogendra Yadav and Suhas Palshikhar mention in the foreword to the class nine political science textbook:

“It does not merely inform the students. It encourages them to think on their own. It interacts with them through questions, moves them with stories and pictures and tickles them with cartoons.” (v-vi)

This aim is also complemented by reflective questions and exercises which attempt to sensitise students to the

subjective and objective aspects of discrimination and marginalisation. However, as already observed, this engagement with systemic discrimination through various strategies is reflected more in case of gender than caste.

It is well known how NCERT textbooks were attacked in the past for their inclusion of political satire based cartoons. The 'Ambedkar cartoon row' and the subsequent S.K. Thorat Panel report are examples of the kind of limitations that textbook makers in India face when dealing with politicised issues like caste among others.

On the one hand, it is witnessed that caste is a highly politicised issue, which leads to political parties and interest groups seizing any opportunity to position themselves as aggressive to the point of appearing as bullies. This stunts any discourse on the various aspects of its representation in the public domain. On the other hand, gender as an issue does not seem to even figure in mainstream political discourse, cutting out any possibility of initiating a vibrant debate in the public domain, leaving it to be wholly

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addressed in the academic and policy arena with exercises of gender reviews.¹⁸

However, such an engagement with different strategies of communication and reflection is found lacking not only in the textbooks from the Tamil Nadu board and the secondary level textbook from Uttar Pradesh, but also in NCERT History textbooks. Even with the involvement of NCERT in the upper primary level textbook committees of UP, the same level of utilisation of techniques of storyboards and storylines is found missing. However, almost all the textbooks have used reflective questions at different points to address the issues of caste and gender based systemic discrimination. The other comment important for the communication strategy is the structural and organisational policy on textbook making. As we have observed, textbooks from UP are made or prescribed by different agencies of the State at upper primary level and

¹⁸ Some such examples are organisations such as Nirantar and the recently launched exercise by NCERT itself in 2014. Dr. Bijaya Kumar Malik from DESS faculty, NCERT also stressed upon the lack of review work on caste as opposed to gender which has much more such work done.

secondary level. This break in the communication process of social studies among other subjects is bound to have a negative impact on students who may find it difficult to come to terms with a sudden change in approach in textbook design and content.

This break may lead to the creation of 'noise' in the communication process. The different approaches could lead to confusion in absorbing the right message, especially on the critical issue of caste and gender discrimination. Secondly, students may not be able to come to terms with a more sombre and monochromatic layout of textbooks at secondary level when compared to a creative and more colourful one at the upper primary level.

The TN textbooks could do well by incorporating more interactive communicative strategies. These textbooks have used a lot of historical and contemporary examples from Tamil Nadu society and politics. An experimentation with how these stories are told could better communicate the central point of these stories. This will be particularly relevant to caste and gender based issues to ensure that that

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they do not end up as boring historical accounts but become engaging exercises that students can relate to and retain.

What is important to note is that NCERT textbooks have also incorporated communications which address teachers as well as parents at the beginning of most of its textbooks. This way the council has attempted to reach all the stages of intervention in the socialisation process of a student into the educational process by elaborating upon the method and mode of using the textbooks. This communication with the teachers, termed the Teaching-Learner Material in the position papers and the NCF-2005, aims to equip the mediators, i.e. the teachers, with an understanding of how the textbooks work. This move, as already mentioned at the beginning of the report, may prove helpful in reducing the element of noise which may be introduced by the inadequate handling of the text by the teachers. The incorporation of such teaching learner material and communication to parents as well is found missing in case of UP and TN.

The question of whether these textbooks can be the predominant medium of communication for students can be answered differently for the respective boards. The

NCERT textbooks have, despite severe limitations, attempted to innovate the communicative strategies not only with respect to students but also their parents and teachers. This was to reduce the possibility of noise arising from the mediator's handling of the medium and to make the communication more effective and interactive. Such an effort seems to be missing in the State board textbooks of TN and UP. Irrespective of the impact of these strategies on the students, it is important to persist with them to increase the relevance of the medium of textbooks in a child's socialisation process, which is an important element of how he or she develops a frame of reference with respect to issues of caste and gender based discrimination.

6.3 Content, Approach and Perspective

The aim of the textbook content analysis was to understand how well equipped the textbooks were promoting democratic ideals in society and to understand the factors that influence the thinking behind the writing of textbooks.

There were two types of engagement with the issue: objective and subjective. Objective engagement refers to a descriptive or differentiating approach. Such an approach

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when evaluated with regards to its ability to provide a counter logic to a discriminatory narrative, only provides basic knowledge and information on the subject. This knowledge treats social issues in objective details and fails to provide any real sensitising perspective with emotional subjectivity on the issue of systemic discrimination.

Compared with highly charged prejudicial narratives received from various sources in formal and informal interactions in society, this narrative is not likely to make any lasting impression on a student's frame of reference, who might treat these details as mere lessons to retain for examination purpose and then disregard them. Often these details may also be represented in a reconciliatory or an obfuscating manner, which might either play down the discriminatory aspects of caste and gender based discriminations by providing examples of reconciliation between the different social categories for a common cause or obfuscate the structural or historical logic behind these issues in order to avoid engaging with the subject.

The subjective engagement refers to antagonistic approach to the narrative. When it comes to evolving a narrative that

can communicate an emotional subjectivity on the issue of systemic discrimination, antagonistic approach provides immense possibility. The antagonism could be directed against the very logic of systemic discrimination or against the groups that have perpetuated this logic or both. In any case, the end result should be that a hierarchical or unequal social order must be seen as a destructive and damaging force that manifests in the form of systemic discrimination rather than being perceived as part of cultural heritage of an ancient society in the form of a continuing social order or a system of values and norms.

With reference to caste, an antagonistic narrative would expose the Brahminical source of the caste system and how privileged sections, i.e. the upper castes benefit by structurally and emotionally debilitating the oppressed sections i.e. the lower castes and the untouchables. With reference to gender, the same approach would indict the patriarchal system for perpetuating relations of domination and subordination on the basis of which gender relations were founded or constructed.

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In an antagonistic narrative that carries an emotional subjectivity in representing systemic discrimination there are two aspects, as has been observed in this study. There could be either an illustration of how the oppressed sections in a power dynamic suffer the repercussions of systemic discrimination through an intense and emotive narrative. Or there could be an indictment of the privileged sections for their role in discriminating against the oppressed categories by structurally and ideologically fuelling the logic and practices of systemic discrimination. In other cases the two aspects could feature in the same narrative as well. Such an emotionally charged narrative needs to maintain a distance from society whereby even the present configurations of hierarchical relations can be openly critiqued or critically engaged with, without a fear of backlash or counter-reactions. This distance from one's own past and present is important when dealing with systemic discrimination.

This will enable the researcher to sincerely engage with the history and politics of society and provide a structurally and historically sound perspective. Such an approach will enable them to identify these social categories in their own realities

and accordingly choose the narrative about the various social identities that they would accept and the ones they would reject along with their underlying logics. Within this approach there is also space for providing an account of proactive examples of personalities who have fought against the systemic discrimination to either openly resist the oppression and domination or carve a niche of their own defying their own social location as coming from a marginalised or dominated group.

From this perspective the textbooks from UP provide an example of an objective engagement. As the intent of the State, as observed from the UP curriculum framework 2013 and the National Policy Education 1986 which the secondary level textbooks follow, clearly indicates, there is no real will displayed to engage with systemic discrimination. This intent is followed up in the textbooks which mostly approach systemic discrimination in a differentiating or descriptive capacity and not antagonistically.

The overall lack of space allocated to social sciences at the upper primary level also translated as a lack of space in to

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issues of caste and gender based discrimination in both the subjects of history and civics. Whereas at the secondary level, the add and stir approach already mentioned both with respect to caste and gender, within the chapters as incidental references or multi page spreads do not provide a very sensitising perspective on these issues.

The lack of historical or sociological references to the common people, something which NCERT textbooks have made a point of including, is another shortcoming of these textbooks. Except for a short chapter on disability, the UP textbooks have not shown any real innovation in their engagement with the content, chapterisation or approach in addressing issues of systemic discrimination.

The textbooks both from NCERT and the TN SCERT provide examples of engaging with systemic discrimination subjectively. However there is a difference in the overall approach, perspective and representation of the two. NCERT textbooks have undergone massive change following the recommendations of the NCF-2005.

This is reflected in the transformation of the subject of Civics into Political Science as well as in the introduction of newer themes such as clothing, literature, print and sports in History. All these newer avenues to explore history and politics have given ample space for providing sensitising perspective on issues of systemic discrimination including marginalisation, oppression, and humiliation.

Most of the chapters on these new themes in history and the entire subject of political science account for the maximum antagonistic references in all the textbooks. These references are not only sensitising but also perspective building. They also use reflective questions and exercises to help students gain empathetic perspectives on the condition of those who suffer the brunt of discriminatory practices.

What is important to notice, however, is that even with more antagonistic references and a predominantly antagonistic narrative, textbooks from both the subjects do not quite measure up to the intent of communication as spelled out in the position papers on issues of systemic discrimination and challenging the “Brahminical-gendered content” of the textbooks. As already observed, even

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though the issues of lower castes, especially Dalits and women have been narrated in a fairly emotional and subjective capacity, there is not enough indictment of the Brahminical and patriarchal authorities in these textbooks. When building a counter narrative to the prejudicial ones it is important to also build a sustained attack on those forces in society which continue to benefit from and propagate these beliefs in society. In order to challenge or reject their narratives about social identities, students must have access to reasonable critique of the Brahminical-patriarchal forces and must develop a distance from the past and the present of society that they seek to represent.

This distance is something which TN textbooks have been able to achieve. These textbooks have tried to engage with the State's history and politics, including accounts of the large-scale movements and mobilisations against caste system and discriminatory and exploitative practices against women.

The usage of politics of the Justice Party and the Self-Respect Movement as examples from modern history and citation of Sangam literature for distancing the ancient

Tamil society from practices of caste system and discriminatory practices against women, show how Tamil politics is heavily mobilised against these practices.

Even from contemporary times the illustration of the steps taken for the transgender community reflects the pride that the State takes in its progressive politics and history. Since these movements have openly condemned the Brahminical - patriarchal forces for their discriminatory logic, the descriptive approach by depicting their history and politics end up portraying these issues in an antagonistic perspective in these textbooks.

However, what NCERT textbooks lacked in terms of indictment of the discriminatory categories in society, the TN textbooks lack in a theoretical approach to these issues. A heavy reliance on real life examples to illustrate history and politics has not been complemented by theoretical and structural understanding of these issues. Therefore, these textbooks tend to lapse into regressive narratives such as valuing norms of chastity and honour for women. Nevertheless this active engagement with the State's own history and politics is what sets these textbooks apart from

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the UP textbooks which have completely abandoned any engagement with their own history and politics.

One of the reasons for this difference is the way caste and gender politics has developed in the two States. Tamil Nadu politics with its heritage of the Dravidian movement, which developed even before India gained independence, has been fundamentally based on the anti-Brahmin sentiment. As Mohan Ram says about Periyar who founded the movement:

“[H]e founded the Dravidian movement to fight Aryan ‘domination’ which to him was synonymous with Brahmin domination and Brahminism. His anti-Brahmin movement had elements of Jyotiba Phule’s *satyashodhak* movement in Maharashtra and also a secessionist content. Even after Independence, Naicker’s movement continued to represent the strong Tamil reaction to Brahminism as also the assertion of the Tamil identity vis-à-vis the rest of India.” (217)

The two leading parties of the State, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and the All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) have long staked their claim to the heritage of this movement (Ram, 1979: 377) and

therefore their politics continues to be influenced by its foundations.

It is not surprising then that with such a long history of anti-Brahminical movement, politics in Tamil Nadu has developed a safe distance from the social reality of caste. This enables the TN textbooks to condemn openly the Brahminical foundation of caste discrimination even though there are incidents of protest from the dominant sections against their depiction of participation in the discriminatory practices.

In UP, however, despite the more recent electoral success of non-upper caste-based mobilisation, there seems to be little change on the social and more importantly at grass root levels. As Santosh Mehrotra comments:

“Thus, while UP’s mobilisers of the Dalits have focused exclusively on capturing power, the gains to the lowest castes have been entirely of a symbolic nature” (4261).

Moreover, even this success was only through giving up an antagonistic anti- upper caste stance and engineering social coalitions between the lower and the upper castes.

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Therefore, even with non-upper caste parties at the helm of affairs for almost a decade now, a widespread agitational politics has not materialised in the State against the Brahminical hegemony or caste system. Thus a descriptive approach to issues of systemic discrimination is not contrary to the present political situation in the State with reference to the issue of caste.

On the issue of gender, Tamil Nadu politics differs not only from UP but most other Indian States. The Dravidian movement led by Periyar was accompanied by similar movements against social evils and discriminatory practices targeting women. The *Tani Tamizh Iyakkam* literally translated as “separate Tamil movement” although manifested in the form of linguistic separatism in the State, meant a whole lot more for women who participated in it (Ramaswamy, 1998: 61). As Vijaya Ramaswamy notes:

“For women however the *Tani Tamizh Iyakkam* represented an even more crucial avenue for self-expression. It provided them a powerful vehicle of protest against patriarchal practices and institutions.”
(63)

Although E.V. Ramaswamy was “the nucleus of all those forces seeking social justice or gender equality” (Ibid: 64) the movement was characterised by active participation of many exemplary women as well, such as Moothatti Moovalur Ramamritham, Malarmugaththammai, Pattammal, Dharmambal and Neelambikai Ammaiyar among others (Ibid: 61,62). Thus these movements, which represented the Dravidian cause of separate Tamil identity, not only protested against Brahminism but also created the space for an active critique of patriarchal structure and gender inequality. Not surprisingly, the antagonistic nature of the movement for gender equality also reflects in the textbooks.

At a national level NCERT textbooks deal with national history and politics. As a nation India established formal equality and outlawed discriminatory practices based on caste, gender and other criteria. But neither has this formal equality translated into substantive ground reality, nor has the very basis of these discriminations i.e. the caste system and gender bias been outlawed.

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As mentioned in the beginning of the study, even today people admit to practising untouchability and identify themselves with their respective castes. There has been no active caste-based mobilisation at a national scale either. Similarly there is a very conspicuous absence of gender-based mobilisation or political movement on a national level. As Maitrayee Chaudhuri suggests:

“In independent India scholars have expressed both dismay and bafflement over the disappearance of the women’s question from the public sphere.”(xvii)

Despite interventions by women-centric movements in different parts of India at different times, such as Tamil Nadu, or in Bihar in 1960s, from which, as Ilina Sen describes, “a powerful critique of patriarchy emerged” (193), there is an absence of a pan-Indian women’s movement that powerfully critiqued and challenged Indian norms of patriarchy, male domination and gender inequality. The national textbooks do provide an antagonistic perspective on caste and gender issues but paradoxically they do not consistently critique the responsible groups or situate the ideologies in their practical context. This is probably a logical outcome of working on a national canvas, which

does not provide an overarching account of history or politics.

6.4 Hypothesis Verification and a Note on Policy

The way the nation or any constituent State approaches the issues of systemic discrimination through its textbooks directly depends upon how politics has played out with respect to these issues in their respective political arenas. A State with a long history of caste and gender politics and with a continuing legacy of that same politics such as TN, achieves a considerable distance from the past and present of its social reality. It is then able to approach its discriminatory past and objectively engage with its logic and categories with a subjective sensitisation.

A State with a more recent or no history at all of politicisation of any issue of systemic discrimination such as UP and with an absence of politics that supports this politicisation, having not achieved this distance is unable to engage with discrimination in a subjective capacity and therefore acquires a predominantly descriptive approach.

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A nation such as India, which is a far too vast and complex a unit, and hasn't formally outlawed the very basis of the systemic discrimination, even though having outlawed its manifestations in the form of discriminatory practices is more likely to engage with these manifestations and not the categories responsible for their propagation.

However, returning to the central concern of this study – identifying the necessary preconditions of an adequate counter logic to the various parallel social narratives that reinforce prejudicial values and systemic discrimination – it is important to understand that even with the engagement with social reality a theoretical perspective is nevertheless necessary.

With these objective values there also needs to be an organising principle. As the Position Paper on Aims of Education suggests:

“The idea that objectivity, which is a necessary constituent of knowledge, can be achieved only if knowledge is free from emotions (care, concern, and love) must be abandoned.”(Section 3)

The narrative in social studies must incorporate an emotional quotient as well. This suggestion specially applies to the representation of systemic discrimination in textbooks. Discrimination is an emotionally charged subject, which involves issues of humiliation, stereotyping, respect and dignity. Any sensitisation to any practice of systemic discrimination must take care that it communicates an emotional subjectivity to the students, so that their frames of reference are built with ideas of basic human experiences irrespective of social location¹⁹.

An approach solely based on practical examples from politics, but without considerable structural understanding cannot produce an extensively sensitising perspective. In other words while such a perspective may help the future adults to reject discriminatory logic by not only identifying discriminatory practices but also their sources in the arena,

¹⁹ According to Dr. MVSV Prasad from the DESS faculty, NCERT students in more affluent areas of highly urbanised cities find it difficult to relate to the narratives of discrimination, which are included in social science textbooks at school level since in their urban milieu they are unlikely to have witnessed such practices from a first-hand experience. (Based on an interview with Dr. Prasad)

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it may not help them to principally apply the same logic across all domains of their social lives.

This is a problem that arises when dealing with systemic discrimination. Such perceptions are transmitted to people largely within the private domain through informal communication processes with family and peer groups. A principled critique of discriminatory logic helps people to apply the same ideas in and outside of their homes. To reject systemic discrimination based on caste and gender an integrated approach is required so that prejudicial narratives are rejected from all walks of life.

Therefore, when deciding on the approach to issues of systemic discrimination, a theoretical, structural understanding should be combined with an antagonistic approach that not only subjectively sensitises students to the damaging outcomes of systemic discrimination but also manages a distance from the social reality. This will be able to identify and, subsequently correct the thinking processes of social categories that were or that continue to be responsible for the perpetuation of discriminatory logic and practices.

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