

Gender Discrimination in History Textbooks at Elementary Level

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ABSTRACT

Gender is a concept that describes how society determines what roles men and women perform in society. Gender refers to the socio-culturally determined disparities between feminine and masculine. Gender discrimination is one of the most prevalent educational and social challenges in the present era. Religion, language, culture, tradition, education, the economy, and every other aspect of human existence all have an impact on it. Textbooks are one of the most important sources of information. Through its usage, children are pushed to think critically and imaginatively. Textbooks are crucial in promoting gender equality. The purpose of this research is to study gender discrimination in history textbooks at the elementary level. The current study used a documentary research method with a content analysis technique, which was followed by a qualitative approach. It was found that gender discrimination in text, and images was noticed. Male characters frequently appear in textbooks. Male characters are over-represented in textbooks. The presence of females in textbooks has been acknowledged to a lesser extent and gender is depicted unequally in textbooks.

Keywords: Gender representation, History textbook, Element Level, West Bengal.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of inequality between men and women has always been widely discussed in society. Textbooks play a very important role in education since it is generally through textbooks that learners get acquainted with the target language culture and values. Textbooks are the most potent

instruments that help in building up desirable attitudes in children (Sumalatha & Ramakrishnaiah, 2004) ^[10]. Today, the textbook remains a central tool of instruction in social studies in most of the schools of India. (Sumalatha & Ramakrishnaiah, 2004) ^[10]. Textbooks worldwide are vital means of mass media in society. Teachers and pupils view textbooks as sources of authority (Kobia, 2009) ^[7]. Textbooks occupy a unique place in the instruction of the pupil (Kobia, 2009) ^[7]. Textbooks are the most potent instruments, which help in building up desirable attitudes in children (Sumalatha, 2004) ^[11]. Textbooks remain one of the versatile agents of socialization in society. Textbooks are the sources of information in teaching and at the same time play the role of image forming (Kobia, 2009) ^[7]. Sabir (2008) ^[6] textbooks are one of the first places and one of the most formal artifacts that demonstrate what educational “norms” are intended to be transmitted in the classroom. The textbook clearly can be a powerful tool for influencing ways in which both children and adults think about core human rights concepts and values, the image of women/girls, and the concept of gender equality. According to Mkuchu (2004) ^[12] textbooks shape attitudes by transmitting a society’s culture. Gender images and roles are crucial parts of any culture; therefore, the way female and male genders are portrayed in textbooks contribute to the type of images that learners develop of male and female in society.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Sahin and Acikalin (2021) found that women have been overlooked in the professional workforce. Females were demonstrated as having a restricted number of vocations that were often submissive to males.

Bhattacharya (2017) revealed that gender discrimination or stereotypes persist in English textbooks used in Indian schools, despite the government's efforts to achieve equity and justice in educational topics as per the national education policy.

Zakka and Bin Ahmad Zanzali (2015) found that there is a gender bias in favor of more male characters with prejudice against female characters in the two textbooks, particularly in the primary 5 mathematics textbook than in the primary 6 mathematics textbook.

Roohani and Zerei (2013) findings stated that the Iranian pre-university English textbook was male-oriented and gender-biased in terms of names, nouns, firstness, and visuals connected with them, despite significant attempts to prevent gender orientations.

Foroutan (2012) showed that, while the male gender's dominance maintains throughout the textbooks, the strength of the dominance changes according to the language's learning stages.

Chick (2006) revealed that female representation in textbook content and illustrations increases across grade levels, and male representation increases at an even greater rate. Since the range of pages on which males are represented is significantly higher than the range for females, it is apparent that overall textbook content continues to be male-dominated.

It has been evident from the literature review that various studies have been conducted on gender bias in textbooks. However, it identified that gender bias in history textbooks has not been researched, and largely not at the elementary level. So, based on the review of related studies and literature it can be said that research on gender bias in history textbooks is very

important in West Bengal at the elementary level.

Statement of the problem:

The problem has been stated as “*Gender Discrimination in History Textbooks at Elementary Level.*”

Rationale of the study:

✚ When we study history, we learn how we got where we are, and why we live the way we do. It is the study of us humans and our place in an ever-changing world. Without it, we would not understand all our triumphs and failures, and we would continually repeat patterns without building forward to something better.

✚ The textbooks are vital learning resources. Textbooks are an essential component of education and will always be so. Textbooks are useful instruments for acquiring knowledge, and they do so use language.

✚ Textbooks are crucial in promoting gender equality. Textbooks are one of the most important sources of knowledge in the. Through its usage, children are pushed to think critically and imaginatively. Educators and students around the country rely on it as a vital teaching and learning resource.

From the above-mentioned aspects, the study was justified.

Objectives:

- To study gender discrimination in the History textbooks of class VII under the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education.
- To offer suggestions for a composed gender-friendly textbook.

Methodology of the study:

○ **Method and Approach:** The current investigation used a documentary research method, which was followed by a qualitative approach. For the fulfillment of the study's objective (obj-

- 1) of documentary analysis, the content analysis technique was used.
- **Sources of Data:** Data for the current study's content analysis were gathered from the West Bengal Board of Primary Education's history of class vii.
 - **Procedure of Content Analysis:** The following steps were used in this study to conduct content analysis:
 - The textbooks were first chosen.
 - Second, these textbooks were extensively inspected and investigated in depth, and the whole material of textbooks on gender representation in the books was collected.
 - Separate the material of the textbook into distinct dimensions. Thus, coding has been completed.
 - The interpretation is then completed, providing a coherent description, and the conclusion is reached.

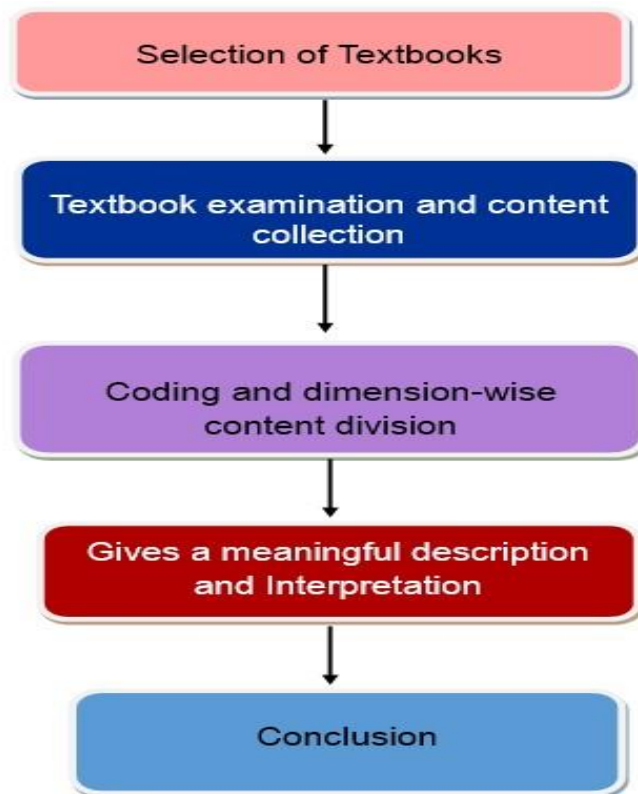


Figure: Steps of content analysis

Data Presentation, Analysis, and Interpretation:

- Title of the Textbook - Atit O Aityaja
- Class - 7th
- Subject - History
- Language – Bengali

- Members of the board for introducing textbook

No. of Males-14
No. of Females-5

Tabular presentation of Gender distribution in Textbook formulation board ----

Board Members	No f Male	No of Female
Chairman	1	0
Administrator	1	0
Members	2	0
Planning and editing supervision	0	1
Assist in manuscript construction and plan of editing	7	4
Book decoration	3	0
Total = 19	14	5

Unit-wise analysis of history textbooks (Atit O Aityaja) from a gender perspective is presented below-

1. Unit-I: Concept of History

Unit Description:

Chapter pages are numbered 1-6. The chapter deals with the historical elements of the early Middle Ages.

Content Analysis:

- Historical masculine adjectives such as 'emperor,' and 'king' are used in this chapter.
- The chapter mentions some male characters by name such as, 'Ikhtiyar Uddin Bakhtiyar Khalji' 'Shahjahan.' No female characters are mentioned in this chapter.
- The chapter mentions most of the information related to the historical text, statute historical region.

Picture analysis:

There are no male or female pictures in the chapter, an architectural photograph is noted which is on the opposite page of the chapter. So, the chapter can be said to be gender-neutral in terms of imagery.

Exercise Analysis:

- The chapter does not show gender bias as such but it does exist, however much it is mentioned, the male characters are emphasized and the female characters are not mentioned.

2. Unit-II: Some Streams of Indian Political History

Unit description:

- This chapter spans from page 7 to page 24.
- This chapter discusses the rulers of Bengal and their reigns.
- This chapter deals with the reigns of Bengali kings and their periods such as the reigns of 'Shashanka,' the reigns of 'Pal', and 'Sen' kings. The rise of regional powers and the Chola kings are described in this chapter.

- The chapter deals with the emergence of Islam and the reigns of Islamic rulers.

Content Analysis:

- No female characters in the chapter. Rivers names are mentioned like 'Ganga,' 'Padma,' 'Godavari,' and 'Kaveri' etc. They can be called whatever we call rivers or rivers. Using some feminine adjectives in this chapter even though there are no female characters.
- The chapter mentions more than seven or eight male characters. Several male character-identifying adjectives are used, such as 'Raja,' 'Khalifa' etc. Also, this chapter mentions religion only mentions gods but no goddesses.

Picture analysis:

The chapter has three figures and two maps. None of the images used in this chapter reflect a female figure. However, this chapter cannot be said to use an entirely male character image, this chapter has the heart of a coin bearing a male figure.

Exercise Analysis:

- Since no female character is mentioned in the chapter, no female character or her name is mentioned in this chapter question paper.

3. Unit-III: Some Streams of Socio, Economics, and Culture of India

Unit description:

- This chapter spans from page 7 to page 24.
- Feudal system of India is discussed in this chapter
- Also, social culture of India is also presented in this chapter.

Content Analysis:

- The male predominance of society at that time is highlighted and a patriarchal society is described. This chapter discusses the Nalanda and Vikramsila University system and mentions the role of teachers in these universities. The

chapter mentions several men such as 'Atish Dipankar' and "Sandhyakar Nandi" etc.

- While discussing the religion of the Pala period, the chapter mentions the names of gods as well as some of the goddesses viz 'Ganga,' 'Yamuna,' and 'Martika'.

Picture analysis:

- The chapter uses a triangle to describe feudalism, with the male character Chitta within the triangle. Also painting a Tibetan Buddhist gumph portrait of Dipankar Shriyan was found.
- At one place in the chapter, there are many images of deities, two of which are of male deities and two of female deities. A picture of Uma Maheshwar was found among the pictures.
- This chapter also displayed various pictures of Nalanda and Vikramshila University.

Exercise Analysis:

- None of the questions in this chapter refer to women.

4. Unit-IV: Delhi Sultanate (Turkish Afghan rule)

Unit description:

- This chapter spans from page 43 to page 68.
- This chapter covers the Sultanate period in India.

Content Analysis:

- The chapter discusses in detail the Sultanate Razia during the Sultanate period. It is shown that a patriarchal society has never agreed to live under a woman. However, Sultana Razia did not give up but overcame all obstacles to maintain her dominance over society.
- In the chapter Ghiyasuddin Balban, Alauddin Khalji, Muhammad bin Tughluq, the reigns of all these kings are described. This chapter also discusses the reigns of the Hussain Shahi and Ilyas Shahi dynasties.

Picture analysis:

- An image of Sri Chaitanya is depicted in this chapter and, a picture of the first battle of Panipat and two maps are contained in this chapter.

Exercise Analysis:

- As this chapter contains references to female characters, references to female characters are found in the questions and exercises of this chapter.

5. Unit-V: Mughal Empire

Unit description:

- This chapter spans from page 69 to page 90.
- This chapter discusses the Mughal Empire in detail and the reign of the Mughal emperors has been discussed in detail.

Content Analysis:

- The chapter uses some adjectives related to men such as Raja, Badsha. Also, some adjectives related to women are used like Meye, Stri. There is very little practice of women in the chapter

Picture analysis:

- All the images shown in this chapter are male characters.

Exercise Analysis:

- There is no mention of women in the practice questions of this chapter.

6. Unit-VI: City, Merchant, and Trade

Unit description:

- This chapter spans from page 91 to page 112.
- This chapter deals with trade and commerce during the Sultanate and Mughal periods and discusses how the men of that time conducted trade and commerce.

Content Analysis:

- The chapter used masculine adjectives such as Dalal, Banik. No feminine adjectives are used.

Picture analysis:

- There are no pictures of female characters in this chapter, all the pictures are male pictures.

Exercise Analysis:

- There is no mention of any female character in the questionnaire of the said chapter.

7. Unit-VII: Lifestyle and Culture

Unit description:

- This chapter spans from page 113 to page 158.
- This chapter describes the lifestyle of the Sultanate period and the culture of that time.

Content Analysis:

- Men and women are said to work together and remove the veil from the society of the time. The chapter deals with Bhaktiism and Sufism and mentions the saints of Bhaktiism as well as Mirabai in detail. This chapter also mentions the gods like Mansamangal, Chandimangal, etc.

Picture analysis:

- The chapter features pictures of 14 male characters and two female characters

Exercise Analysis:

- A limited number of questions in the chapter's questionnaire mention women's names.

8. Unit-VIII: Crisis of the Mughal Empire

Unit description:

- This chapter spans from page 159 to page 166.
- Among the previous chapters, the chapter also has no description of the female characters, only male valor, and where the conflict between the two forces is highlighted.

Content Analysis:

- The chapter is written with an emphasis on male centrality.

Picture analysis:

- There is only one picture in the chapter depicting Shivaji's attack on the palace.

Exercise Analysis:

- There are no questions related to women in the exercises of this chapter, the questions are all about men.

9. Unit-IX: Today's Indian Government, Democracy, and Autonomy

Unit description:

- This chapter spans from page 167 to page 172
- India's democracy and system of government and autonomy are discussed in this chapter.

Content Analysis:

- Nothing related to gender and gender bias can be found in this chapter so this chapter can be said to be completely gender neutral.

Picture analysis:

- There is only one picture in the chapter which is a picture of a male character.

Exercise Analysis:

- No gender bias was observed in the answers to the practice questions in this chapter.

Suggestions for a Composed Gender-Friendly Textbook

- ☑ By sensitizing teachers and students about the importance of gender equality.
- ☑ Syllabus should be made inclusive, which can promote gender equality.
- ☑ Seminars, conferences, and workshops must be conducted to teach students about the importance of gender equality.
- ☑ By ensuring equal roles for both genders, preventing males from becoming superior to women.

- ☑ Construct a detailed checklist for editors to use to identify gender bias in textbooks.
- ☑ By arranging regular gender training programs for writers, content creators, designers, and illustrators.
- ☑ Teachers should evaluate textbooks, read books, and articles to understand gender issues.
- ☑ Arranging regular in-service training for school teachers on selecting books free of bias is essential.
- ☑ Further research on textbook representation and gender-related problems is anticipated.

Findings of the study:

Overall, the textbooks tend to over-emphasize male characters, female characters are not equally highlighted. The entire content mentioned in the textbook is written with a male character as the dominant character. Few chapters present men and women equally but most chapters do not present men and women equally. A gender bias has been observed in the images used in textbooks.

CONCLUSION

At the end of the research, it can be concluded that the male centrality of the entire textbook does not portray female characters in such a way that is, any image of how the position of female characters was from the social system of that time. If the textbook shows the position of women in the social system of that period, the students learn about it. It is very important to mention men as well as women to maintain gender equality in textbooks. Neutrality will create an ideal attitude among students and help build a cohesive society. It can be said that gender bias is not only present in textbooks but also in our social system today observed in various cases.

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