

Conundrums of Developing and Transacting Textbook-An Overview of NCERT English Textbooks at Senior Secondary Stage

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The focus of the paper rests on the idea that change is the way of life. Change is thought to bring meaning and relevance to the systems. In the present context we talk about the change that National Curriculum Framework-2005 of school education brings in teaching and learning of English. The change has been translated in the textbooks, and it has been expected to flow and reach the learners through classroom transactions.

Why Review of Textbooks

And slowly answer'd Arthur from the barge:
The old order changeth, yielding place to new,

The above lines are quoted from Alfred Tennyson's long poem The Passing of Arthur From Idylls of the King. Sir Bedivere was saddened to see the death of the institution of The Knights of Round Table. The poem is a commentary on transience and inevitability of whatever exists in this world.. There is pre determined end to all that exists and it is rightly so for it paves way for new and more meaningful. This is the law of nature and life. Social practices, norms and even traditions evolve to accommodate the contemporaneity.

Education plays important role in defining the change in terms of adaptation or adoption of signified social, cultural and political identities. This applies to the idea of revisiting existing methods and contents of learning as well; therefore in the formal system of education it becomes mandatory to review teaching learning materials without any disregard for the past as something new emerges from the old. Education as independent of school system has continued to evolve, diversify and extend its reach and coverage since the dawn of human history. Every country develops formal system of education to express and promote its unique socio-cultural identity and also to meet the challenges of the times. There are moments in history when a new direction has to be given to an age-old process, like constitutional provisions, national policies on

education etc to answer the deep rooted question i.e of what use is the education if it does not help in making lives of the people better individually and collectively. There has always been social and political dynamism that determines the vision of education. One of the sad as well as worrying observations recently is that the system has failed to institutionalise democratic practices and values. School is still viewed in isolation of social interactions. In other words social, political and economic pragmatics remains *untouchable* within the precincts of school and in actual classroom transactions.

Curriculum and textbook developers have come a long way in developing materials which would promote inclusive education. There has been an endeavour to integrate subject areas based on multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches as can be seen in English textbooks as well.

National Curriculum Frameworks

National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) established in 1961 is an apex body in the area of school education. NCERT develops curriculum, syllabi and textbooks and other curricular material, based on the National Curriculum Frameworks (NCF).

National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) develops the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for school education and review it periodically. The frameworks are evolved and reviewed on the emerging trends in the realm of education. There has always been focus on introducing learners to contemporary and learner centric approaches of learning. The first frame work had been brought out in the year 1975. It was revised in 1988, 2000 and 2005.

National Curriculum Framework 2005 - Some features in Context of English Language Learning

The present National Curriculum Framework 2005 primarily focuses on promoting the values of equity and equality. The philosophical underpinnings of the curriculum defined education as a process of lifelong learning; therefore schools cannot be detached from social and political realities.

The teaching of English is redefined. It has been clearly stated that English has been introduced in class I as response to public demand. People feel that English opens up opportunities of learning, jobs and progress in life. Academically speaking, it has been found that young children

learn more than one language with ease provided they have relevant opportunities of learning languages. Teachers can make use of the familiar language to the child as support for learning English. Multilingualism has been considered as a resource. The additive multilingualism enhances cognitive skills of the learners. Besides this knowing more than one language is a value, learners who are multilinguals appreciate and willingly accept different view points, cultures and traditions. This spirit is highlighted in the curriculum, it is stated that English should not stand in isolation but along with Indian languages. This is emphasised also to bust the synthetic awe- bubble created around English for another social division on the basis of English.

This also implies that the principles of language learning are the same for Indian as well as English language:

- Children learn language holistically.
- First, the language learning takes place in the area of developing interpersonal communication skills. This relates to making familiar contexts, immediate surroundings as the medium of language usage and learners. There is a transition from this level to the next level of developing cognitively advanced language proficiency. Learners are expected to develop higher order thinking skills. They learn to decode unfamiliar and abstract texts.

As a follow up of National Curriculum Framework 2005, the textbooks of various subjects were developed by NCERT in phases. Four textbooks are developed for the core course which is as follows;

Hornbill and Snapshots class xi

Flamingo and Vistas class xii

These books are meant for intensive and extensive language learning.

Hornbill-About the Book

This textbook for Class XI is based on the English syllabus on the lines suggested by the National Curriculum Framework, 2005. It aims to help learners develop proficiency in English by using language as an instrument for abstract thought and knowledge acquisition.

In the Reading Skills section, the texts have been chosen to mirror the kind of serious reading in real life that a school-leaver should be capable of. The prose pieces are drawn from biographies, travelogues, science fiction, art and contemporary expository prose by writers from different parts of the world. Samples from journalistic writing have also been included. The play, placed centrally in the textbook, is

on a theme that learners will particularly identify with and is in a lighter vein. The poems relate to universal sentiments and appeal to contemporary sensibilities.

Learners at this stage bring along with them a rich resource of world-view, knowledge and cognitive strategies. Teachers should encourage them to make educated guesses at what they read and help them initially to make sense of the language of the text and subsequently become autonomous readers. The Notes after every Unit help the teacher and learners with strategies for dealing with the particular piece.

The activities suggested draw upon the learners' multilingual experiences and capacities. Comprehension is addressed at two levels: one of the texts itself and the other of how the text relates to the learners' experience. The vocabulary exercises will sensitise learners to make informed choices of words, while the points of grammar highlighted will help them notice the use of forms. The 'Things to Do' section at the end of every unit invites learners to look for other sources of information that will help them deal with learning tasks across the curriculum.

The section on Writing Skills prepares them for the kind of independent writing that a school-leaver will need to engage in for academic as well as real-life purposes. Help has been provided in a step-by-step manner to lead the learners on to make notes, summarise, draft letters and write short essays, paying attention to the form, content and the process of writing.

Snapshots-About the book

This supplementary reader, based on the English syllabus for Class XI, is prepared on the lines suggested by the National Curriculum Framework for School Education, 2005.

For young adults, awareness of personal development and growing independence begins at the higher secondary stage. It is during this period that they seek to understand themselves and the society in which they live. Literature plays an important role in moulding young minds. The choice of stories and biographical sketches in Snapshots by contemporary writers exposes learners to the various narratives of life that the literatures of the world offer.

The stories deal with a range of human predicaments: moral choices in adolescents, as in William Saroyan's 'The Summer of Beautiful White Horse'; the poignancy of personal loss and reconciliation that follows war in Marga Minco's 'The Address'; language and imperialism invading the rural setting in 'Ranga's Marriage' by Masti Vankatesha Lyengar; and professional commitment in A.J. Cronin's 'Birth', an expert from the novel *The Citadel*. We also have J.B Priestley's play, 'Mother's Day', an early comment on the acceptance of (and rebellion against) the assumed roles of men and women at home. Amitav Ghosh's 'The Ghat of the Only World', is a touching tribute to Aga Shahid Ali, a Kashmiri poet who wrote in English, while Vikram Seth's 'The Tale of Melon City' is a humorous satire set in verse.

The language of these stories allows learners to read on their own with only occasional supports from the teacher or reference to the dictionary. Learners should be encouraged to read the stories at home and the themes, narrative patterns and stylistic features including use of punctuation can be discussed in the classroom. It is hoped that this gateway to learners to imbibe language unconsciously.

Flamingo-About the Book

This textbook for Class XII English course has been developed on the basis of the recommendations made in the National Curriculum Framework-2005. It follows the design of the Class XI textbook, Hornbill, published in 2006.

The prose selections aim to provide exposure to a wide variety of genres and themes, and writing from different parts of the world. They take into account the interests of young adults while making them aware of the socio-political issues that they will confront as they step into the world outside school. The tasks that follow the units provide opportunities for the development of language skills.

Three short stories, representative of fiction from different parts of the world. – French, Swedish and British, have been included. Alphonse Daudet's *The Last Lesson* deals with the theme of language imposition and language loyalty. Selma Lagerlof's *The Rattrap*, captures the basic goodness in a human being in the face of material temptations and A.C. Barton's *Going Places* explores the theme of adolescent hero-worship and fantasizing.

Two of the non-fiction pieces are biographical and two autobiographical. Of the two biographical pieces, Indigo, an excerpt from *Louis Fischer's Life of Mahatma Gandhi* portrays Gandhi in action, helping peasants secure legal justice and the excerpt from Anees Jung's *Lost Spring* is an account of the lives of street children, a contemporary reality that youngsters need to be made sensitive to.

The autobiographical piece of William Douglas, a lawyer who was a close associate of Franklin Roosevelt, deal with his personal experience of overcoming the fear of swimming. The second autobiographical account is by Asokamitran writing in a humorous vein about his years in the Gemini Studios.

The Introduction from *The Penguin Book of Interviews* edited by Christopher Silvester has been included to introduce pupils to the subject of media writing. This is accompanied by a recent newspaper interview with Umberto Eco by Mukund Padmanabhan.

Vistas-About the Book

Vistas is a supplementary reader in English (Core course) for Class XII, based on the guidelines of the National Curriculum Framework 2005. The main objective of this book is to make extensive reading an enjoyable experience, lead students to appreciate some of the best examples of writing and understand the social milieu they live in.

An attempt has been made to attain these objectives by presenting varied themes and genres of writing. The themes range from scientific fantasy, political satire, and adventure, to ethical and moral issues and personal conflicts.

Jack Finney's 'The Third Level' is a scientific fantasy, while 'The Tiger King' by Kalki is a political satire, 'Antartica' is a travel piece with a suggestion that the young reader could take part in the expedition by logging on to www.studentsonice.com.

The three stories that follow are by Pearl S. Buck, John Updike and Colin Dexter. Buck's story sets human fellow-feeling against national loyalty: John Updike's story is about a child participating in the construction of a story by her father and raises issues regarding parental prejudices foisted on children. Dexter's story is fun-reading about how a criminal escapes jail through creating circumstances by insisting on taking an examination in the prison.

The play by Susan Hill is on the themes of disabilities while excerpts from Bama's 'Karukku' and an excerpts from 'The Land of the Red Apples', a story in Zitkala-sa's, book 'The School Days of an Indian Girl'.

Each unit has questions. The questions on the texts in the supplementary reader take the learner beyond factual comprehension to contemplating on the issues that the texts raise. Activates suggested take off from the text.

Learning Transition from Dependency to Autonomy

The school curriculum is developed with a vision of inculcating academic richness and positive mental state among children.

During a training programme the teachers were asked to recall the names of their English textbooks, and content which they found interesting or otherwise, they were unable to recall anything. They had memories of some of their teachers but were totally blank about what they have read and saw (illustrations, pictures etc) in the books. This state of amnesia in terms of textbook reading is a serious concern. It depends on how much freedom English textbook give to the readers to form their own opinion? The textbooks before 2005 developed by NCERT were self contained. There were fact based questions, and glossaries were provided for the words with text based meanings. The books were based on the modernist approach therefore the thinking revolved around the quantum of knowledge presented in the textbook. The texts were either about great personalities who have been successful thereby giving hope and enhancing the happiness quotient of the readers, and also about real life tragedies well preserved in the pages of history which have shaken the world, for which learners have no background knowledge even though if they have they were not taught to apply it for broader understanding and expansion of ideas.

The content and exercises were developed on the assumption that learners have ten years of English learning. The pedagogic inputs which emerged from these textbooks drove the learners to lean on the text and teachers' interpretation of it; ultimately leading to rote memorisation.

This had repercussions on our examination system. The testing became confined to the text and related tasks. The questions and exercises remain well within the boundary of the text.

However the narrative of education has undergone metamorphosis during the emergence of postmodern thought of education. The key word to understand is constructivism. The basic idea is that all knowledge is constructed in the minds of people; it is not discovered as modernist would claim. Issues of equal rights and justice become the preamble of education. Learning has to contextualise to social paradigm if we have to reap the dividends of education in terms of intellectual wealth and responsible citizenry.

The textbooks developed in 2005 marked a shift from teacher and classroom centric to learner centric. The textbooks are based on the philosophy of constructivism and whole language approach. The objective of the English textbooks is to give autonomy to the readers for meaning making and application of ideas but this autonomy is not meant to give rise to unhealthy individualistic tendencies among learners. They are facilitated by teachers to work in groups to reach some conclusions together as well.

Chasm Between Text and Transaction

In real practice there is a dichotomy between the content of the textbook and the methods adopted for the teaching and learning of books developed in 2005. The textbooks are based on the ideology that learners shall comprehend the text on their own because the context of the narratives exists in their immediate surroundings.

The English textbooks echo the issues of social justice, gender, environment, peace and values but the teachers by and large do not pay attention to the analytical aspect of learning, they translate the text into regional languages, and there are only read aloud sessions even at senior secondary stage, the struggle is to decode the script leaving no scope for meaning making, and critical thinking. Finding meanings of difficult words is the strategy which is employed for comprehension, hoping, meanings of unfamiliar words will create meaning of the text.

In the government as well as in large number of private schools there is reading, writing, listening and speaking deficit in terms of English language skills. There is a typical language teaching pattern that is focussed on the decoding the text at surface level and rote memorisation of related text based activities for examination. This also implies that there is excessive control of teacher and examining boards on the prescribed textbooks.

The feedback received from some of the elite private schools has revealed some interesting facts. Some of the schools have introduced classical poems and drama like *Ulysses* by *Alfred Lord Tennyson* and *Julius Caesar* by *Shakespeare* as additional reading materials along with the textbooks because learners found the books simple and easy to understand. They are of the opinion that there is no challenge in reading English text books. However there is lack of understanding about the purpose of the books. There are thematic linkages between social science and language textbooks so far as the content is concerned that is not explored hence learners have the feeling of déjà vu.

The reason why Learners in elite public schools read classical literature is that they have developed language proficiency and linguistic appreciation of the texts by reading books/materials other than the textbooks. They had begun to distinguish between reading for ideas, information, knowledge and pleasure.

The Parallel Developments of Prescribing Books

The general practice followed in schools is that up to class eighth children have English textbooks from private publishers, in classes ninth and tenth schools prescribe books developed by CBSE. And in class eleventh and twelfth NCERT textbooks are prescribed. In this case learners have only two years of learning of English from the books developed on NCF-2005.

NCF recommends that books should be based on the philosophy of constructivism which provides space to learners to engage with texts and exercises/tasks which are intended to promote critical thinking and holistic development of the language. This approach is recommended to be followed throughout the school education. NCERT English textbooks and supplementary materials are introduced at a later stage of schooling and for a short period of two years hence the results are not as expected. This has implications on the implementation of NCF and textual materials developed on it. More than this the existing practices will obstruct the way of examination reforms.

By making a case for NCF-2005 and related materials, there is no intention to impose uniformity and not to allow variety of materials for learners. Constitutionally states and union territories have the power to adapt, adopt or modify exemplar materials produced by NCERT. This addresses the needs and demands of our rainbow culture. Pedagogically too it scaffolds the learning process.

Textual Materials and Social Connotations

The major transition envisaged in school education is that learning is looked upon as life long process and society as major dynamic theme of learning. The social issues which surround the learners become the areas of debate leading to the process which would initiate reflective responses from the learners in the due course. The content of the English textbooks reaches out to what learners see and feel within their lived lives.

The process of teaching and learning entails interaction between the text and the learners. movement from familiar to unfamiliar contexts, decontextualised situations and advanced academic proficiency for deliberations. For the current textbooks the learner needs to engage with the text at multiple layers. The questions and exercises subsumes self assessment and

scaffolding for comprehending the text. However, the teachers have not manoeuvred the classroom transactions up to these targets.

Sensitivity of Issues

The issues dealt in English covers wide range of contemporary ideas. These ideas need to be dealt with sensitivity employing secular and democratic approaches. The goal is to develop the sensibilities of the learners to understand the diversity. However, a small percentage of learners living in urban areas have exposure to the burning issues. Hence teachers have to follow strategies for developing critical perspective of both urban as well as rural learners. English textbooks should be understood as window to problems, conflicts and many issues which call for humane understanding and solutions.

In the present scenario the examination system plays a significant role in determining the direction of teaching and learning as it has negated the change as suggested in the textbooks. This raises a pertinent question about the teacher proficiency and issues of their professional development. The paradigm shift in English language teaching and learning does not seem to have absorbed in the practices though the textbooks have paved the way for a constructive change.

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