Textbook as an Injustice: Analysis of Textbooks used in Teaching at Primary Schools of Lakshadweep

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ABSTRACT Primary school students of Lakshadweep learn things about an unfamiliar socio-cultural milieu by neglecting their own socio-cultural environment. The complexities in the content would in fact badly influence the effective learning process and this kind of socially and culturally irrelevant learning process would give them a threat of a stigmatized and inferior cultural identity. This paper unveils the pedagogical injustice by analyzing the content of the textbooks used for teaching at primary level in Lakshadweep. This paper argues that culturally unfamiliar content in the textbooks and its teaching would lead to a ‘cultural conflict’ in the minds of primary school students, eventually leading to a ‘culture shock’. This ‘shock’ leads to the ‘devaluation’ of the culture in which they are born and brought up.

Keyword:

Introduction Since independence, school education in Lakshadweep has been shadowing the Kerala State Education Board. The syllabus prescribed in all level of school in Lakshadweep is Kerala SCERT and NCERT. The SCERT Kerala textbook is based on Kerala Curriculum Framework (KCF). The curriculum constructors of Kerala enrich their curriculum by incorporating information regarding the history, language, environment, literature, politics, organizations, movements, social reformers of the state of Kerala. The SCERT textbook for primary school students of Lakshadweep has been an impediment for effective learning as it contradicts between their socio-cultural environment and the school environment. Students learn things about an unfamiliar socio-cultural milieu by neglecting their own socio-cultural environment. The complexities in the content would, in fact, badly influence the effective learning process and this kind of socially and culturally irrelevant learning process would give them a threat of pejorative cultural identity. This paper argues that culturally unfamiliar and irrelevant content in the textbooks and its teaching would lead to a ‘cultural conflict’ in the minds of primary school students eventually leading to a ‘culture shock’. This essentially leads to the ‘devaluation’ of the culture in which they are born and brought up.

Students of primary schools in Lakshadweep are facing a conflict since from their early years of schooling due to a socially supported but enforced migration to an official culture. This cultural migration results alienation among the school going children in Lakshadweep in their education. The curriculum and text books for teaching in Lakshadweep are imported from Kerala’s State Council for Educational Research and Training. Since from 1998, as the first school established in Lakshadweep, this curricular import continues. Unstill today Lakshadweep administration continues this curricular import. The imported curriculum and textbooks contains cultural contents which often are unfamiliar or strange for the children of Lakshadweep. Then how this practice continues without much resistance? The reason is acculturation of the teachers in Lakshadweep during their education and training to become teachers in teacher educational institutions in Kerala. These teachers do not find anything weird in this ‘import’ as their history as a school student and their training to become a teacher is shaped by the education in Kerala and hence their acquaintance with the cultural life of Kerala. Hence the curriculum and text book from Kerala and the cultural back drop passed through it is the official knowledge that dominates the education system of Lakshadweep. This causes the expulsion of culturally relevant knowledge not only from the classrooms of Lakshadweep but also from the psyche of school students. Hence there is an organized attempt to normalize this cultural contradiction and thereby impose this culturally unfamiliar education as official. As Michael Apple (2000) observes, official knowledge is bureaucratically adopted legitimate knowledge for the purpose of imparting education through officially constructed curriculum. Officially sponsored curriculum at primary level is not addressing the socio-cultural aspect of Lakshadweep as it is particularly constructed for Kerala state. The embedding knowledge in this curriculum may explicitly addresses the socio-cultural aspects of Kerala. But when it is imposed on a society which has extremely different socio-cultural background like Lakshadweep, it becomes violence on the children. Michael Apple (2000) discusses the question of whose knowledge is most worth and whose knowledge is socially legitimate in schools. Schooling without teaching
relevant knowledge in the classroom is undemocratic and this process is a mere ritual activity as Peter McLaren (1986) called in his famous book ‘Schooling as a ritual performance’.

School has been an unfamiliar environment for the children till the age of six and their home and its environment has itself been their world. When they began to go school, all the things they see in school entirely strange to them; classroom, peers, teachers, textbook etc. Gradually they began to adjust with the new environment and a sense of belongingness will experience as they mingle with peers and teachers. But, for the children of Lakshadweep, will experience alienation when they are exposed to a new curriculum and textbook as it obviously carries unfamiliar and culturally unconnected content for them. This cultural disconnect remains as an important issue to be addressed in Lakshadweep since its inception of formal education. The cultural conflict developed through this disconnect makes the students of Lakshadweep feel that their own culture is not something worth learning. The fetishisation of a foreign culture through the curriculum and textbooks has serious impacts on the way one perceives one's own culture. Such attacks on native culture need to be encountered with the idea of culture as a resource for knowledge. Culturally relevant education provides a learning environment in which students learn relevant knowledge through collective action grounded in cultural understanding, experiences, and ways of knowing the world (Ladson-Billings 1992).

In schools, the cultural conflict being faced by primary school students of Lakshadweep can be resolved by considering the native culture as a source of content and ideas for development of the textbook. Construction of a culturally relevant text book itself will not be sufficient to resolve the issue. An important step, of course not the only step, to be taken to resolve the cultural conflict of the school going children in Lakswadweep is o consider the native culture as a source of content and ideas for development of the textbook. This alone will not resvle the issue. The content in the text book drawn from the native culture has to be taught in a culturally relevant manner. Tillman (2010) views that culturally relevant teaching is a pedagogical approach that utilizes students' culture as an integral part of the instructional process. If the teaching at primary schools maintains the culture which is embedded in the textbook without addressing students' own culture, teachers cannot facilitate academic success and gradually this backwardness retain in their higher classes. Textbook and its content should satisfy students' culture and ensure a sense of belongingness otherwise they may distract from learning environment. World that students see in the textbook and world that they see in their physical environment should be integrated for the culturally responsive teaching learning environment.

Gay (2010) opined that the first characteristic of culturally responsive pedagogy is that it is validating and affirming to students because it acknowledges the legitimacy of their own culture and how it shapes their dispositions, values, and approaches to learning. Culturally responsive pedagogy is validating because, "It builds bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences as well as between academic abstractions and lived sociocultural realities" (Gay, 2010). Thus, culturally relevant pedagogy provides a bridge between home environment and school environment, this kind of pedagogy is a way for schools to acknowledge the home community culture of the students, and through sensitivity to cultural nuances integrate these cultural experiences, values, and understandings into the teaching and learning environment.

Differences in language of home and language of school have been a complex phenomenon for primary school students in Lakshadweep. The gap between both is one of the significant constrains behind the academic achievement. The mother tongue of these students is Jasari. Till the age of six they are not being instructed through the Malayalam or English, rather they are never been exposed to any form of Malayalam till this time. When these children reach school, they are compelled to acquire the language through which teachers are giving instructions to them. The people of Lakshadweep have a unique culture, along with their mother tongue, their culture also being neglected in school environment in the form of syllabus and textbook. Textual content and its teaching should address students’ own culture and mother tongue respectively for effective learning. Local information and knowledge in the textbooks for primary classes helps the students to relate the content with their social surrounding. There is neither a single chapter in these text books that deals with legends, myths, folk tales, rituals of Lakshadweep, nor is about the plants, natural landscape of islands which has been a part of life of these students. Historically and geographically, Lakshadweep has its unique culture and she has a rich history which is untold to her students yet. In the society parents maintained their cultural values and pass these values to their children. The negligence of cultural beliefs and values in text book and teaching for imposing another culture through
textbook and teaching, the educational impact may be devastating. If there is a platform to construct curriculum for primary schools in Lakshadweep, basic information about Lakshadweep can be incorporated in the syllabus at primary classes.

To incorporate the cultural, socio-political, historical and geographical information to the textbook, there should be a pool of resources. This pool of resources encompasses subject experts, teachers, stakeholders, eminent personalities of arts and literature etc. This pool of resources can bolster the construction of appropriate curriculum for all levels of schools in Lakshadweep, especially for primary school students. It is well known that children have a natural desire to learn and make sense of the world around them. Learning in the early years must hence be directed by the child’s interests and priorities, and should be contextualized by her experiences rather than being structured formally. An enabling environment for children would be one that is rich in stimulation and experiences, that allow children to explore and freely express by themselves, and one that is embedded in social relations that give them a sense of warmth, security and trust (NCF 2005. P-65,66).

Procedure: Content analysis

The SCERT Kerala textbook for primary school students of Lakshadweep has taken for the content analysis. The content in the textbook of Malayalam and Environmental Science for the class II to IV are being analysed. Words, names, proverbs, pictures, images, arts, stories, myths, legends were being critically analysed with special focus on cultural elements embedded in it. The contradicting elements in the textbook unveil the gap between students’ culture and culture in the textbook.

In the early age of schooling students have to learn things by integrating their experience in their socio-cultural aspect, but in the cases of primary school students in Lakshadweep, they are not able to relate the things they learned in the classroom with their socio-cultural environment. The third unit of SCERT Kerala textbook for 4th std is titled as Mahimam, this unit begins with a poem about Onam festival (p.37), the poem recalls the anxiousness of people during the Onam festival in the past days (p.37). The fifth unit in the same textbook has a description about Onam festival entitled as Orumayude Onam in which Onam is described as Onam nammude deshiya ulsavamanu (Onam is our national festival) p.48. It is pedagogically injustice to teach the fourth std students of Lakshadweep as Onam is their national festival. The very next chapter in the same unit is Pathayam, this chapter begins with a common proverb in Malayalam language, ‘pathayam perum chakki kuthum, amma vekkum, unni unnum’ (p.38). Pathayam, refers to a typical container made up of woods which used to store grains, rice etc in the past days in Kerala. The image of Pathayam, Chakki (p.38) etc are not in the imagination of a fourth std student in Lakshadweep, hence the proper learning may not be happened. The next one is a poem in the same unit, titled as Omanayude Onam (p.43). This poem describes the time when the Onam festival approaches to the homes of Kerala and each line beautifully depicts the feelings of Onam festival (p.43). The poet uses such images like Pookenam, Onathappan, Onasadya etc to portray the festival and to evoke a feeling of Onakalam (p.43-44). Onam is an annual festival has been celebrated by people of Kerala state (Malayalies). The myth of Mahabali, an ancient king who had ruled Kerala peacefully for long, Onam is a commemoration of Mahabali and it is also deeply rooted into the culture of Kerala. The fourth std school students in Lakshadweep are being taught by teacher that the Onam is their local celebration even if the students neither knows the myth of Mahabali nor they celebrated the festival anymore. For the fourth std school students of Lakshadweep, the far-fetched and unfamiliar words, images, feelings etc in the poems and the stories might have results a distance to the culture in the textbook and gradually this cultural gap leads to an uninterested feeling of learning among the students.

The fourth chapter in the SCERT Kerala Textbook of Environmental Science (EVS) for 4th STD students is about birds’ world. The first activity in this chapter is to name the birds, four pictures of birds are given and students have to write the names in the boxes which are given below in each picture (p.41). These birds are Parrot, Myna, Woodpecker and Kingfisher (p.41). The second and third birds in the pictures are Myna and Woodpecker respectively (p.41); these birds are not habituating in Lakshadweep, hence the fourth std students of Lakshadweep may not get the corresponding names to these two birds. The first and fourth birds in the pictures are Parrot and Kingfisher (p.41), these two birds are habituating there in Lakshadweep, hence, the fourth std students of Lakshadweep can easily write the names of these birds to the corresponding boxes given below. There might have a conflict between familiarity and unfamiliarity in the mind of these students and this conflict may lead the students to ‘like’ and ‘dislike’ the content of textbook. The picture of Great hornbill (mala muzhakkiveyambal) is given in the SCERT Kerala Textbook of Environmental Science for class 4 (p.41). Great hornbill is the state bird of Kerala and certainly, this bird is
familiar among the fourth std students of Kerala state but the fourth std students of Lakshadweep may not have seen such bird in their real life. The Sooty tern (*Karifettu*), the state bird of Lakshadweep (en.wikipedia) and other birds which are habituating in Lakshadweep are not there in the pictures of birds in the chapter and hence proper learning may not happen as the idea of birds in the textbook and in the minds of students contradict each other in a complex manner.

The fifth chapter of SCERT Kerala textbook of EVS for class 4 is titled as *Kalakalude Naadu*. This chapter discusses the traditional arts forms of Kerala, which have been a part and parcel of its cultural environment (p.52, 53). *Katha Kali, Thiruvathira, Chakarykoothu, Margam kali, Koodiyattam, theyyam, Kumatti, Mohaniyattam and Padayani* are the main art forms discussed in the chapter (p.52,53). Each art form has its own cultural significance in Kerala and it tells various stories by performing in the stage or among the people itself. Students are asked to collect the details of arts forms of Kerala in the first activity (p.57). In the second task, it is to explain how the art forms of Kerala reflect culture of Kerala (p.57). How do the fourth std students of Lakshadweep collect the details of art forms of Kerala from a different socio-cultural milieu? And how do the students know the cultural significance of these art forms? Here the textbook itself become a 'block' of learning where the culture of students and arts forms in the textbook contradicts each other.

As everywhere, Lakshadweep has its own arts forms, these arts forms have been being performed in various occasions and events in Lakshadweep. *Kaatu Vili, Bandiya, Ulakkamuttu, Parijakali, Dolipaatu* etc are some of arts forms in Lakshadweep. All these arts forms have been transmitted through generation to generation. As the details and cultural significance of these arts forms are not being documented or achieved anywhere, it is being treated as an inferior subject to be included in the textbook. Teaching the cultural significance of arts forms of Kerala by neglecting arts forms of Lakshadweep is injustice both ethically and pedagogically.

The textbook of SCERT Kerala for 2nd standard students contains 4 chapters, the very first chapter titled as *EnteKeralam*. The second chapter is *Kutti Pura*, third chapter is *Nadine Rakshicha Veera Bahundra* forth and last chapter is *EtuThetinShikshailla*. The first chapter *EnteKeralam* is poem about Kerala landscape, which depicts the beauty and nature by using such images like *puzha, thod, kaad, kaayal, vayal* etc (P.7-12). All these images are unfamiliar and unseen by the primary school students of Lakshadweep, this unfamiliarity obstruct them to relate the content with their existing knowledge. The activities in this chapter are also intended for the second standard school students of Kerala state. For example, the first activity is a question; it asks the students that, what are the things that make a place beautiful (P.8). Students can write six answers by reading two indicative answers/hints. These two indicative answers/hints are ‘puzha’ and ‘thod’ (P.7). These hints may distract the students from finding answers to the question since the beauty and calmness of *puzha* (river) never comes to their mind as it is not familiar to the second standard students of Lakshadweep. The river (*puzha*) is unfamiliar to them because it is not there in their islands, instead the image of sandy beach, bluish lagoon, coral reef etc, may evoke a picture of a beautiful place in their mind. The second indicator/hints ‘thod’ (P.7) may bring a different image to them as it means an abandoned and dirty tiny pond in Lakshadweep. They may think that, how a dirty small pond can beautify a place (to them, an island). These are some examples of byzantine complexities being faced by the primary school students of Lakshadweep. These complexities would in fact badly influence the effective learning process and this kind of socio-culturally irrelevant learning process would of course lead to a ‘cultural shock’ in the learning process of primary school students in Lakshadweep.

Since Lakshadweep has neither an education board or a curriculum committee as its own, there is an urgent need for a high power education committee, comprising of educational experts, eminent pedagogues, stakeholders, teachers, social leaders etc for framing an appropriate and relevant curriculum for its schools. The Secondary Education Commission (1952) recommended that a high powered committee be set up in every State for selecting textbooks and for laying down appropriate criteria, emphasizing that “No single textbook should be prescribed for any subject of study, but a reasonable number which satisfy the standards laid down, should be recommended, leaving the choice to the schools concerned” (p 83). To ensure relevance and responsiveness in the teaching at primary school level in Lakshadweep, the content in the textbook should address students’ culture, for this a relevant syllabus and curriculum need to be constructed. Framing a relevant curriculum for a relevant textbook will ensure justice in teaching and teaching a relevant content will ensure justice in learning.
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