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**Schooling Nationalism: Gender, Violence and Language Education****Francis D'souza***Research Scholar, Dept. of English, Kuvempu University, Shankarghatta, (Karnataka) India***Abstract**

When National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986 was brought out many news papers put forward their concern over the 'nationalist discourse' found in its "core curriculum" elements. Raising questions over accommodating freedom struggle many pointed out on the role of revolutionaries in the textbooks. The secondary school English textbooks of Karnataka revised in 2002 prescribed many lessons on freedom struggle stating that they have followed NPE 1986. Those lessons have portrayed the role of women in the freedom movement with sensational details. Role of women in these textbooks has been restricted only to their contribution in combating against colonialism.

With textual instances this paper examines the English lessons on freedom struggle and the meaning of sacrificial violence carried in them. It also studies how lessons on freedom movement along with English lessons prescribed on Indian myths overtly or covertly intertwines Indian nationalism with 'Hindu nationalism'.

**Key Words:** nationalism, ideology, gender, curriculum, sensitization

**Introduction**

Since 2002 in English textbooks prescribed in Karnataka, many lessons center on freedom struggle. They predominantly focus on martyrs, revolutionaries who relied on violent methods against the freedom fighters who resisted colonialism through non-violence and negotiations. These lessons project nationalism by narrating the stories of loyalty, the zeal of patriotism, nobility and self-sacrifice "that will inspire emulation and bind present generations to the glorious dead" (Teltumbde 7).

In this essay, standard VIII, IX and X second language English textbooks of Karnataka prescribed between the years 2002 to 2004 are taken for study. At first the paper will attempt to examine how these lessons are prescribed comforting National

Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE) 2000. Then it will study the English learning contents which are prescribed on women freedom fighters. Then the essay analyses the depiction of violence and use of passive vocabulary in the lesson "Little Martyr" in comparison with the lesson "The Runner". At the end of the essay, implications of the lessons on freedom struggle will be studied from the perspective of Indian nationalism intertwining with Hindu nationalism.

In standard VIII, IX and X English textbooks prescribed between the years 2002-2004 out of 36 lessons (including both Prose and Supplementary Reading section) five lessons have been prescribed on Indian epics or on myths of Sanskrit texts, and five lessons and two poems have been prescribed

on the Indian freedom struggle and on the theme of nationalism. In this essay only the lessons on freedom struggle will be analyzed they are, “Rani of Jhansi” (standard VIII), “The Queen of Ullal” “The Little Martyr”, “The Runner” (standard IX) and “The Women Who did Us Proud” (standard X). These English lessons center on freedom struggle of India and promote Indian nationalism from the great memories. <sup>i</sup>

Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) Report 2005 mentions that many textbooks prescribed between the years 2002 to 2004 in Karnataka were found distorted. So there are high chances that the textbook writers of English have also followed the guidelines of NCFSE 2000 in communalizing the English textbooks. NCFSE 2000 which was prepared during the Bharatiya Janatha Party (BJP) rule sustained the predominance of the ‘nation’ in its curriculum framing. The NCFSE 2000 acted as a junction to link ‘national’ with ‘Hindu’. <sup>ii</sup> So the Indian nationalism in the prescribed lessons has been intertwined with Hindu nationalism.

CABE Report 2005 points out:

The report refers to the public furore over the ideological biases of the books revised in 2002 on the lines of NCF-2000. The DSERT (Karnataka) refused to respond to public queries concerning the books. Only after the arrival of B. K Chandrashekhar as Education Minister, were moves made to institute a Textbook Committee to rewrite the books, which were prepared by July 2004 (46).

It is to be observed that the Textbook Committee appointed by B.K. Chandrashekhar to rewrite the distorted

textbooks corrected the distortions in other textbooks especially in social science textbooks but it did not correct the English textbooks. <sup>iii</sup> In 2004, as no *saffron* tilts were reported in the English textbooks of secondary school of Karnataka this essay attempts to re-examine this fact.

### **Women in Freedom Struggle**

Teaching gender sensitivity in the early ages of the children helps in creating a balanced community which is based on gender equity. In this direction NPE 1986 in its “core curriculum” emphasized on “equality of sexes” (5; sec. 3.4). In these English textbooks though some lessons have been prescribed on women, depiction of their role do not match with the intention of teaching gender sensitivity.

The number of lessons prescribed in English textbooks representing women is very less. Except the lesson “Kalpana the Star” all other lessons prescribed on women are focused on freedom movement. In standard VIII English Reader prescribed in 2002, out of 12 lessons only one lesson entitled “Rani of Jhansi” has been prescribed representing women. The lesson focuses on how Rani Lakshmi Bai fought like a man to save her kingdom. In standard IX English Reader prescribed in 2003 out of 13 lessons only one lesson entitled “The Queen of Ullal” has been prescribed to represent women. Again one more queen who is associated with war against Portuguese has been preferred. In standard X English Reader prescribed in 2004 out of 11 lessons two lessons entitled “Women Who did Us Proud” (a collection of great women freedom fighters) and “Kalpana the Star” (a famous astronaut) have been prescribed representing women.

### Rani of Jhansi

The story Rani Lakshmi Bai begins with the details of her childhood life. She marries Gangadhara Rao the king of Jhansi. A baby boy was born to them but the child dies after three months. They adopt a five year child Ananda Rao who later was named Damodar. Gangadhara Rao dies two days after adoption of the child. Taking this opportunity Governor General Lord Dalhousie takes over Jhansi under Doctrine of Lapse. Then the lesson shifts towards the causes of Sipoy Mutiny and its spread throughout India and to Jhansi. Then it is explained how she prepares to wage war against the British. The war breaks out; in nearly two pages the lesson explains how Lakshmi Bai fought the war with her fellow soldiers. In the war she dies when an unknown soldier hits her.

When the lesson "Rani of Jhansi" was prescribed in standard VIII English Reader (in 2002) another lesson was also prescribed on Rani Lakshmi Bai in standard X Hindi 2004 (54-56), and the content on contributions of Rani Lakshmi Bai in Indian history of freedom struggle was prescribed in standard X History textbook in 2004 (28). So by 2004 in secondary school the lesson on Rani of Jhansi was prescribed in three different textbooks. More over when textbooks got revised in 2012, again the lesson on Rani Lakshmi Bai was prescribed in standard VIII Hindi textbook (65-67) and as a part of Indian history in standard X (2014).

The English content of the lesson on "Rani of Jhansi" appears like a learning content of lesson in freedom struggle in Indian History.

As in History textbook (in social science) due to the restriction of pages some events and persons related to Indian freedom struggle cannot be explained in detail. So lessons of language seem to compensate such a lacuna. In the English textbooks the lessons of freedom struggle are chosen from the sensational events, accounts of war and details of violence to appeal to the emotions of the students. The details of 'Moderates mode' or Gandhian model of participation in the freedom struggle have not appeared in English textbooks of secondary school of Karnataka whose way of fighting with British was through negotiation, non-cooperation, *satyagraha*, non-violence and through using constitutional mechanisms.

### The Queen of Ullal

"The Queen of Ulla" is a second lesson prescribed in standard IX (Supplementary Reader) on freedom struggle. The lesson is on Rani Abbakka who ruled "Ullal a small state to the south of Mangalore" (140). Ullal was a subordinate state to the Portuguese in Goa. According to the agreement, Ullal had to pay tribute to Portuguese and had to trade with Portuguese alone. Rani Abbakka at first stopped trading with Portuguese then paying tribute. When Portuguese came to know about this they sent an envoy to remind Rani Abbakka to pay tribute and continue trading with Portugal alone. Rani Abbakka denied it. Consequently Portuguese attacked trade ships of Ullal. Abbakka attacked Mangalore and drove away the Portuguese. After some times when for the second time the Portuguese waged war against Ullal, Rani Abbakka with the help of rulers of Keladi and Calicut fought the war. She won the war with the allied forces.

During the rule of Abbakka as India was a princely state and was not considered Indian Nation or Indian Union, some sentences in the lesson give the meaning that India then was an independent nation. For example, in the reply of Abbakka to Portuguese envoy it is mentioned: "We are an independent country. You can never dictate to us...get back from my country" (142). To students, the word 'country' used in the lesson gives the meaning 'India' or 'Indian union'. Likewise at the end of the lesson after Rani Abbakka defeats Portuguese in the war it is stated, "Thus Abbakka kept the Indian flag flying high". The above quoted sentences in the lesson retrospectively attempt to reconstruct events to suit the present day notion of the 'Indian nation'.

It is to be observed that one lesson each is prescribed in standard VIII and standard IX on women and they are "The Rani of Jhansi" (standard VIII) and "Queen of Ullal" (standard IX). Both women in the textbook are used to promote nationalism. Other than this no lesson is prescribed representing the real issues of women. The next lesson which is to be analyzed is again on women who are associated with India's freedom struggle.

### **The Women Who Did Us Proud**

This lesson prescribed for standard X is about nine women who participated in freedom struggle. The events or the contributions of the nine women to the freedom struggle have been explained briefly below.

1. Gives information about Preetilata Waddedar a woman activist's storming the armory at Chitagong.

2. Explains an incident of Aruna Asaf Ali unfurling the tricolour at Gowali Tank Maidan in Bombay a heavily cordoned off area.
3. It is about an incident that happened in the life of Kashibai. Once the District collector an Englishman asked for the car of Kashibai, and she rejected it flatly. Then the District Collector cancelled its registration. Kashibai parked the car plastered cow dung cakes on it.
4. It is about Shakunthala who loves Shankar Kurtakoti a freedom fighter on whose head British announced a reward of Rs 2000. Though Shankar Kurtakoti discourages her for his life was in peril she prefers to live even as a widow of the freedom fighter.
5. Explains about Padmavati Bai Burli, who was poor woman having two children. Despite of her poverty she used to carry food to the undergrounded freedom fighters. She gets caught and was imprisoned for three years.
6. Mentions Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya a freedom fighter, poet and artist.
7. Introduces Sarojini; she being the disciple of Gandhi translated the whole philosophy of non-violence into reality.
8. Mentions Laxmi Swaminathan a commander of Rani of Jhansi Regiment of Indian national Army.
9. Explains the daring act of Vimala Gulwadi and Hema Shinolikar. The girls go to a District court before the judge and occupy his seat holding tricolor. As the judge enters they start shouting slogans and ask him to go back.

It is a good collection of women's contribution to Indian freedom struggle. But

such a collection of women so far has not prescribed regarding the issues of women other than freedom struggle. The prescribed lessons on women who are associated with freedom struggle give the meaning that the best contribution of women in India has come from freedom movement. The different roles played by women and their issues in the past and in the present do not find a mentioning in the English lessons.

### **‘Sacrificial Violence’ of “The Little Martyr”**

The lesson entitled “The Little Martyr” of standard IX English Reader gives an account of thirteen year old boy Narayan Mahadev Doni from Hubli, Karnataka. During Quit India Movement one morning Mahadev Doni prepares himself for a procession which was organized in Hubli. He was left in front of the procession and he becomes the centre of attraction. As a huge procession was going on shouting slogans against British, suddenly sound of firing in air disturbs the procession. People ran to save their lives but Mahadev Doni continues shouting slogans. A bullet pierces the heart of Mahadev Doni and he falls in blood. He breathes his last in the hospital uttering “*Swaraj*” (4).

In the beginning of lesson one and a half pages (three paragraphs) of the lesson give details about the oppression of British over Indians and Indians reactions to it. The language used to describe British and Indian reactions to British is full of ‘passive vocabulary’.<sup>iv</sup> The language used to describe British for instance: “...despotic rule of British...arrogant British...gobbled up everything...power hungry British...push

the oppressors from the holy land... ruthlessly tortured in jails...inhumanly hanged...” and so on (1). Most of these use passive vocabulary and students seldom make out their meaning.

Certainly colonialism most times was not a pleasant experience to Indians. But to combat against the oppressions of British Indians did not solely rely on Extremists and Revolutionaries. The quoted language in the lesson indicates such aggressive nationalism. Very harsh adjectives, adverbs and verbs employed to describe British and their deeds just serves to make the students aggressive but fails in informing what actually British did to Indians. As GOI 1994 observes one of the major failures of language textbooks is using of “stylized diction” and employing artificial and sophisticated style which distances knowledge from the life of the child (8).

Similarly the language used for Indian retorting is as follows: “...India rose against...like a tormented sea...Indians were boiling with rage...failed to read the volcanic minds of the Indians...the whole of India was aflame... sleeping giant had now been awakened...heroic Indians ...fought untiringly...” (1). It continues in the next page: “Every drop of blood of Indians that fell on this holy soil, inspired thousands to lay down their lives at the feet of the shackled Mother India” (2).

The rhetoric and passive vocabulary used in the beginning of the lesson to describe Indians reaction to British proves hollow and superficial at the end of the lesson. In the lesson it can be observed, when the procession was going on “there was firing of



bullets in air” (4). Then as the lesson states: “People ran helter skelter....The elders in the procession smelt danger and ran for their lives. There was total chaos. But little Narayan kept shouting...British, Quit India....” (4). Simile, metaphor, synecdoche and other figures of speech used to describe Indians prove worth less at the end. A close reading of the lesson also gives the meaning that little Narayan was the only true patriot who remained till the end of the procession.

The men and women associated with violence during freedom struggle are consciously chosen because as it is pointed out: “The tomb of those who died violently is a myth in store. Both the myth and the tomb relate the story of past violence and give it meaning. They exonerate those who fall under their mythic influence from moral responsibility for collective violence. They edify and unify the mourners” (Baillie and Gill 228).

Many events in the lessons of freedom struggle reemphasize the fact that “nationalism is a story of sacrificial and redemptive violence” (Teltumbde 8). The way the death of Narayan is explained is pathetic: “...a bullet pierced his chest. The flames ended in smoke. Wounded in bleeding, bathed in blood, Narayan fell...the boy was lying in a pool of blood....” (4). It is mentioned in the lesson that the source of information for the lesson is “*Samyukta Karnataka*” a Kannada daily dated 16<sup>th</sup> August, 1942 (4). The lesson has retained the same tone and language of the news paper which is aimed at communicating to the general readers of the news paper in 1942.

Robert MacNeil states: “... We all understand what we hear on the radio or see on TV, giving us a passive vocabulary, but that doesn't mean that we use that vocabulary actively in writing or speaking.”(qtd. in grammar.about.com). In the anxiety of creating sensation in the class the textbook writers have never taken any care for presenting a sophisticated language in the lesson.

### **Patriotism in “The Runner”**

Though the lesson entitled “The Runner” (standard X) is not based on Indian freedom struggle it gives details about a patriot called Philippides of Greece. When Persian’s army arrived on the soil of Greece to fight, Greece wanted a swift runner to give message to Spartans. Without the Spartans help the Greece could never win the war. Philippides agrees to “run for Greece”, and runs 150 miles in 48 hours. As he reaches Sparta the Spartans say that they cannot join Greece until they finish their celebrations. Philippides runs back to Greece without taking any rest to convey the message. Greece announces the war in which Philippides also participates. Greece wins the war. Philippides runs again to Athens (about 22 and odd miles) he gives the message of victory of Greece and breaths his last. For this reason Philippides has been considered the first Marathon runner.

Though the lesson “Runner” is taken from non-Indian context conveys the theme of patriotism without giving the details of violence. Philipidde’s struggle and spirit of sacrifice catches the attention of the readers. But it is very interesting to note that this lesson was not intended to impart patriotism.

The three questions in the pre-reading task suggest that this lesson was prescribed to cover the area of sports: “1. What are the Olympic Games? 2. What is the origin of the Marathon Race? 3. Who was the first marathon Runner?” (145). But in the lesson, only the last paragraph mentions about the origin of Marathon race connecting to the story of Philippides.

### Observations and Implications of Lessons on Freedom Struggle

1. More lessons on women are focused on freedom struggle than the required.
2. Repeated examples of sacrificial violence and glorifying Extremists and Revolutionaries, gives the impression that the writers of the textbooks intended to promote extreme nationalism.
3. As a part of extreme nationalism the lessons most times prefer glaring and sensational examples to appeal to the emotions of students.
4. The repeated emphasis on emotions and promotion of extreme nationalistic sentiments inspires emulation.
5. The lessons of freedom struggle are also a part of communal discourse of history textbooks. Such communalized lessons in history textbooks discuss only about Hindus suffering under non Hindu rulers and animosity and war between Hindus and non Hindus.
6. Women representation in the English textbooks is restricted only their contribution to freedom struggle.
7. Uses of more passive vocabulary in the lessons have the high chances of hampering language learning. And most vocabulary and syntax in these lessons usually are found in history textbooks.
8. The lessons adhere to NCFSE 2000 than to NPE 1986 in its ideology.

### Hindu Nationalism

The lessons of freedom struggle teach nationalism like religion. Indian nationalism has two dimensions: it is a ‘religion’ and it is intertwined with Hinduism. Nationalism and religion are analogous, “Nationalisms are not ‘like’ religions –they are religions (Frank Write qtd. in Teltumbde 1). The early approach of this argument can be traced in Durkheim’s “Elementary Forms of Religious Life” (Durkheim 215-6).<sup>v</sup>

According to Hayes nationalism assembles “a deep and compelling emotion” that is “essentially religious” (Hayes 95, 104). Nationalism as religion keeps faith in an external power and shows and sustains fearfulness and reverence and ceremonial rites, centered on the flag. The gods of nationalism “the patron or personification of [the] fatherland...” (ref). Its theology is a “speculative theology or mythology” which depict “the eternal past...and everlasting future”. One of the most important characteristics of the religion is to unify (the same religious people), similarly nationalism “re-enshrines the earlier tribal mission of a chosen people” with its “tribal selfishness and vainglory” (Hayes 95, 104, and 124-5).

In the lessons on nationalism, the spirit of nationalism (as an external power) is used as a unifying power to unite. The stories of mythology in the English textbooks are used to sustain the desired unity.<sup>vi</sup> More over the lessons on Indian myths and freedom struggle focus on violence as religion\nationalism consider it as a sacred

act. The victims in the lessons of myths projected evils and victims in the lessons of freedom struggle are divinized.

Rudolf Otto elucidates, the sense of sacred “attracts and repulses”. Because violence and the sacred are linked violence attracts and repulses (Otto 3). As the ‘sacred’ is transformed as human violence, the sense of the sacred terror, fear, awe, reverence, elation and ecstasy is grounded in violence. So the victim of nationalistic violence becomes both bringer of peace and causer of violence. In this scenario however, the peace comes through violence (Teltumbde 2). Similarly in the lessons of the Indian epics also when the hero (*shishhta*) kills the villain (*dushta*) peace gets restored.

The lessons on Indian myths and epics, over the years have supplied myths and symbols deliberately forming a shared memory and shared destiny in order to unite the people forgetting the pluralistic nature of India. The events and stories in the lessons appeal to the popular emotions. “The stories, symbolism and ceremony of the nation the rituals and the myths are of very considerable importance for they engage the deepest popular emotions and aspirations. Myths tell the story; rituals re-enact it” (Teltumbde 8). The pursuit is not towards unifying a culturally heterogeneous group, housed within already existent specific political boundaries.

### Conclusion

Thus the brief analysis on English textbooks makes it clear that the nationalism projected in its learning contents is of primordial type. The primordial type of nationalism prefers

its identities like religion, race, culture, language, ethnicity etc. The nationalism implied in the lessons is not based on territoriality, economic factors, accepting plurality and so on for its constitution. They chiefly center on religion and ethnicity based on a hegemonic culture. More lessons on Indian freedom struggle and (Hindu) myths reinforce the hegemonic culture which is required to strengthen Hindu nationalism.

Teaching gender sensitivity finds no space in the above analyzed English textbooks. The representation of women at the quantitative level is very low. Women are chosen in the English textbooks on the basis of their involvement in war against the colonizers. Such lessons give only serrogative pleasure to the readers and fail in sensitizing the learners about the gender issues. The details of violence give the impression that Indian freedom struggle is a story of sacrificial and redemptive violence and liberty was achieved only through violence.

The analysis of the English textbooks gives the knowledge that, they are ideologically inflicted and teaching language is not its chief objective. The lessons clustered around Indian nationalism and Sanskrit texts prescribed in the English textbooks incline towards right-wing Hindu ideology. The myths, symbols and the language the lessons furnish create an aesthetic realm of exclusive nationalism. In such an exercise there are strong chances that the pluralistic nature of Indian nationalism and identity gets faded away from the minds of the children.

**Notes:**

<sup>i</sup> The two poems entitled “A Nation’s Strength” (standard VIII) and “The Patriot” (standard IX) are not taken for analysis in this paper.

<sup>ii</sup> See for more discussion CABE Report 2005 and Saline Advani’s “Schooling National Imagination: Education, English, and the Indian Modern” (48-49).

<sup>iii</sup> See CABE Report 2005 (46-49) and Annexure I for more details.

<sup>iv</sup> "A passive vocabulary ...includes the words stored in verbal memory that people partially 'understand,' but not well enough for active use. These are words that people meet less often and they may be low frequency words in the language as a whole..." (David Corson quoted in grammar.about.com).

<sup>v</sup> Durkheim 1995: 215-6, 221ff, 429. For more discussion on this see Carlton Hayes work “Essays on Nationalism to ‘nationalism as religion’.1926, Rene Girald “Violence and the Sacred” (John Hopkins University Press, 1979), Smith 2003: 4-5, 15, 26,40-42.

<sup>vi</sup> The lessons prescribed on Indian myths and Sanskrit texts in the same English textbooks are: “The Legend of Narmada” and “Riksha Bila” in standard VIII, “Duryodhana Disgraced” and “Kannada” in standard IX and “Bhimasena the Blessed” in standard X. In addition to that the lessons entitled “Mother and the Motherland” (on Shankaracharya ) and “Secret of Happiness” (on a Hindu Joint family) in standard IX and “Swami Vivekananda” in standard X support the discourse of Hindu nationalism.

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