



GENDER BIAS IN BENGALI TEXTBOOKS OF WEST BENGAL BOARD OF PRIMARY EDUCATION

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Abstract

Education and society are intimately related to each other. If we want to see a well-balanced society where every individual has respect to each other irrespective of caste, creed and gender, we need to design our education accordingly. What children learn in the form of textbooks go a long way in shaping their personalities and eventually shaping our society. Textbooks play a great role in how children get the concept of gender and importance of gender equality in the society. This study was undertaken for this purpose of seeing how far the textbooks were free from gender bias. For this, the researcher had selected Bengali textbooks namely Patabahar of Class-III and IV of West Bengal Board of Primary Education. Content analysis techniques was used to analyse the textbooks both from quantitative and qualitative points of view. The units of analysis included the poems, proses and illustrations. The results of this study had showed that gender bias or stereotypes existed in the textbooks.

Keywords: *Gender bias, Textbooks*

Introduction

There is a poem written by four students Pooja, Ramya, Anuj and Utkarsh of Class VII, Baroda which goes like this, “*In my textbooks I learned that only men are kings and soldiers. Till I read a book in which famous, queens ruled and fought against enemies. In my textbooks I learned that only men are doctors. When I went to a doctor, I saw that she was a woman. In my textbook, I learned that only men do farming in my country, until, on a train journey I saw women working in the fields. I have learned that I have a lot to learn by seeing*” (NCERT, 2006).

The civilization and progress of a nation depends on its education. Education is considered as an instrument of change in the society. It is education which purifies the cultural practices and also transmit the culture from one generation to another. It is education which determines what kind of society we want to make. Education plays a role how children form the concept of gender and importance of gender equality in the society. “Gender is a social construct that impacts attitudes, roles, responsibilities and behaviour patterns of boys and girls, men and women in all societies” (Srivastava, n.d.). Since it is a social construct, it is a set of roles, attributes, values and patterns of behaviour to men and women as defined by respective culture and society. Since the concept of gender is not universal but social, therefore those roles, attributes, values and patterns of behaviour change and take various forms in

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accordance with different cultures and societies of the world. The concept of gender in a society is also influenced by time, for example, treatment towards women have changed a lot in recent times compared to ancient times in India. Each culture creates its own roles, attributes and values to men and women and maintains by social institutions such as families, governments, communities, schools, churches and media.

Gender bias is defined here as an act of differentiating people as male and female on the basis of gender or gender-based functions (Mukherjee, R. 2015). On the other hand, gender equality means equality between men and women. Both men and women, are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without limitations set by stereotypes, rigid gender roles and prejudices. Gender equality means that the different behaviour, aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favoured equally. It does not mean that women and men have to become the same, but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female (UNESCO, 2000). People in the social mainstream believe that women should be encouraged to participate in traditionally 'masculine' fields such as politics, business leadership, science, mathematics, engineering, and men should be encouraged to do traditionally 'feminine' works such as childrearing, nursing and housework (Bynum, G. L., n.d.).

Review of Related Literature

Darni & Abida, 2017 found that gender biased images remain strongly present in elementary textbooks of Indonesia. The textbooks reinforce the stereotypical image that men dominate the public sphere and women the private sphere. Cooking, cleaning and decorating a house and various domestic works done by women, while men performing challenging jobs and heavy manual works. Bhattacharya, 2017 indicated that gender bias or stereotypes existed in English textbooks used in Indian schools despite the government's endeavour to establish equality and justice in matters of education as per the national policy of education.

Need and Significance of the Study

Childhood is the period in growth and development where an individual learns a lot in the society. The child acquires proficiency in language and rational thinking at this stage. The values learned by the child go a long way in shaping attitude and personality of the child. Educators have signified education as an instrument of making the child all-round developed and creating a well-balanced society. Textbook occupy an important part of education. Textbooks are the written experiences which are used by the teachers and students for achieving the aims of education. "Textbooks are one of the most important educational inputs: texts reflect basic ideas about a national culture, and ... are often a flashpoint of cultural struggle and controversy" (UNESCO 2009). Therefore, textbooks should be well-balanced and loaded with knowledge and values. Since, gender is a social construct and there are already many gender stereotypes as we see in our society, textbooks can play an important role in shaping how children develop the concept of gender and importance of gender equality in the society. Therefore, this study aims to analyse the textbooks and see whether they are gender biased or not.

Objectives of the Study

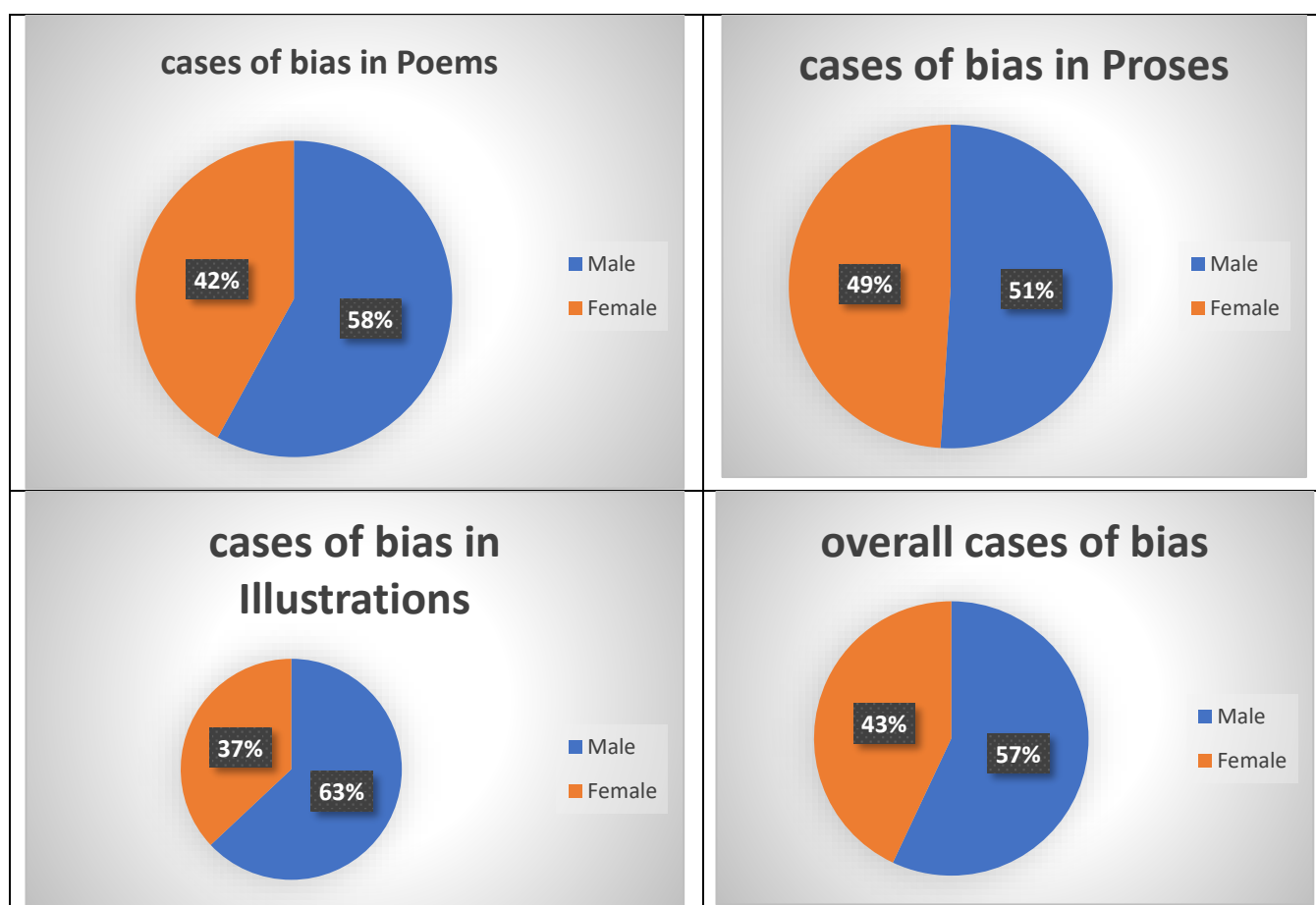
1. To find out gender bias in the textbooks from quantitative point of view.
2. To find out gender bias in the textbooks from qualitative point of view.

Methodology of the Study: This is a descriptive study. Content analysis technique has been applied in this study to find out gender bias present in the textbooks. Kerlinger, in 1986, defined content analysis as a method of studying and analysing communication in a systematic, objective and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variable (Prasad, 2008). Bengali textbooks of classes III and IV namely *Patabahar* of West Bengal Board of Primary Education have been selected randomly for conducting the study. The units of analysis included the poems, proses and the illustrations used in the textbooks. The data have been analysed with the help of coding and qualitative descriptions.

Quantitative Analysis of the Data

After examining the Class- III & IV Bengali textbooks carefully, the cases of bias in favour of the male and female are summarised in the following table.

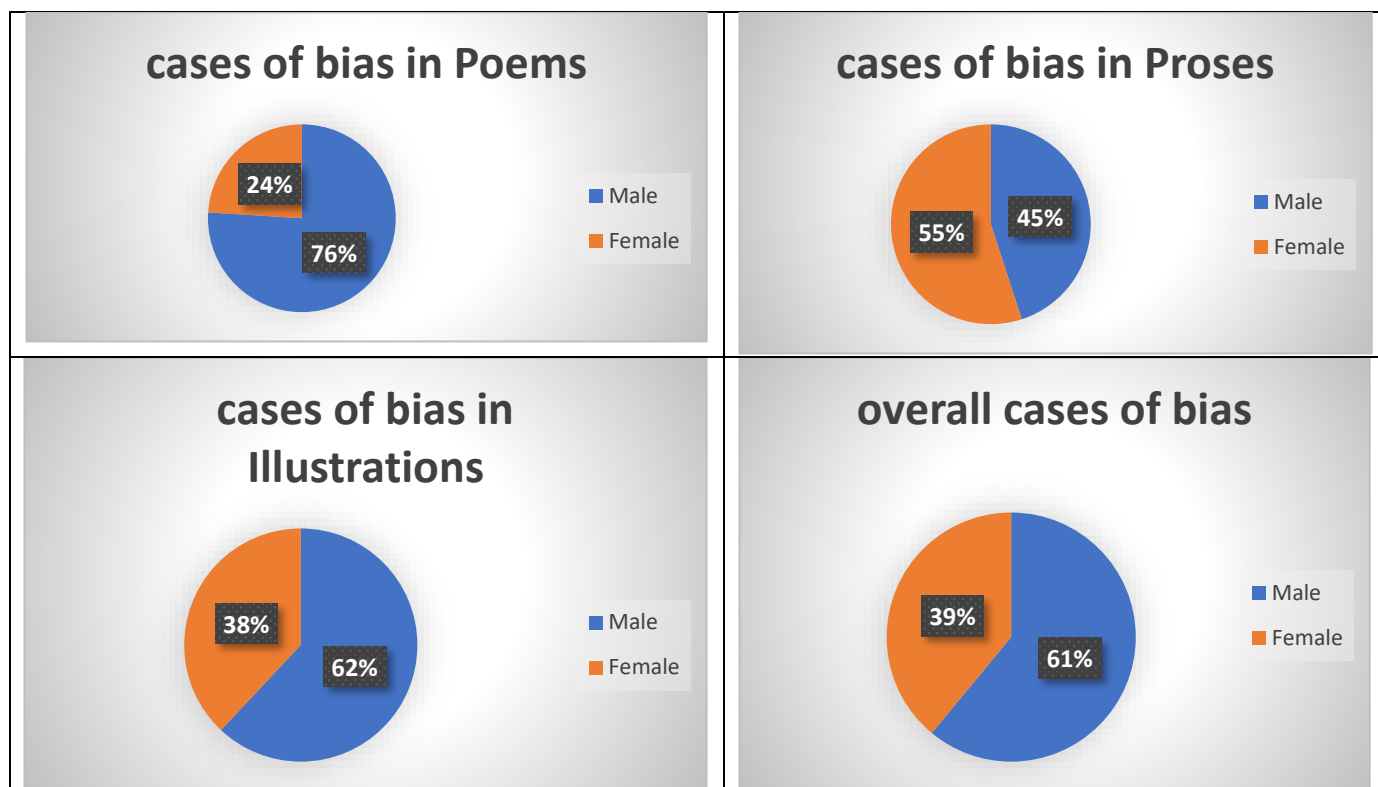
Bias (Class- III & IV together)	Percentage (Approx.) of cases of bias in Poems	Percentage (Approx.) of cases of bias in Proses	Percentage (Approx.) of cases of bias in Illustrations	Percentage (Approx.) of overall cases of bias
In favour of Male	58	51	63	57
In favour of Female	42	49	37	43



From the above analysis, it could be understood that the overall cases of gender bias in favour of male in all the texts and illustrations of the textbooks is around 57% whereas the figure of the same cases in favour of the female is around 43%. The results could thus be interpreted that the textbooks were gender biased more in favour of the male than that of the female counterparts. Going further into the analysis, it could be seen that the poems of those textbooks bore 58% gender bias in favour of the male and 42% in favour of the female. Thus, it could be interpreted that the poems of the textbooks were more gender biased in favour of the male than that of the female. The analysis of the proses of the textbooks revealed that there was 51% of gender bias in favour of the male and 49% of gender bias in favour of the female. Thus, it could be interpreted that the proses of the textbooks were almost equally gender biased in favour of both the male and female. Analysing the illustrations of the textbook, it was found that there was gender bias in favour of the male 63% and in favour of female 37%. Thus, it could be said that the illustrations of the textbook were more male dominated than the female.

Taking the analysis further, the Textbook of Class- III was carefully examined and the cases of bias in favour of the male and female are summarised in the following table.

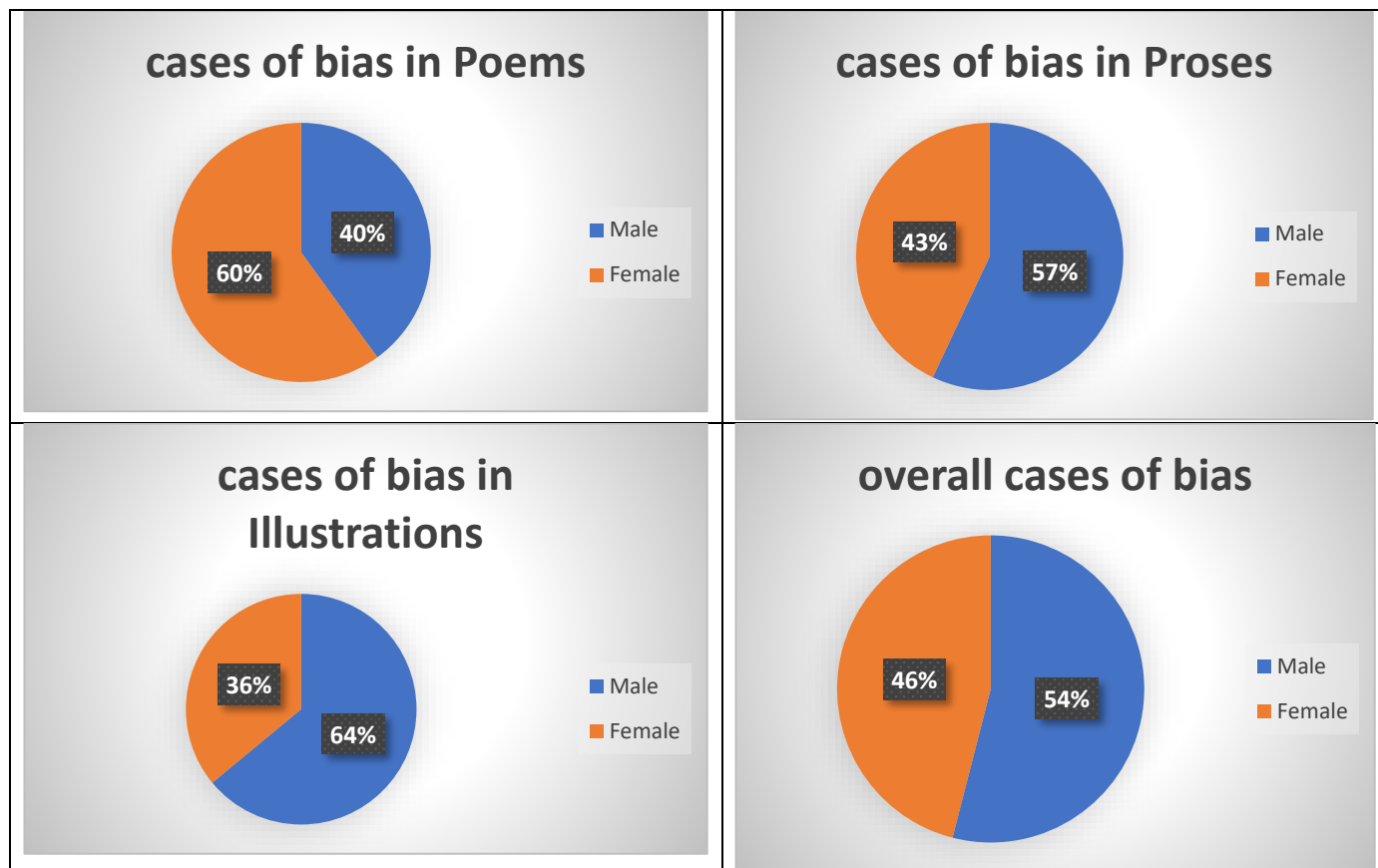
Bias (Class- III)	Percentage of cases of bias in Poems	Percentage of cases of bias in Proses	Percentage of cases of bias in Illustrations	Percentage of overall cases of bias
In favour of Male	76	45	62	61
In favour of Female	24	55	38	39



From the above analysis, it could be understood that the overall cases of gender bias in favour of male in all the texts and illustrations of the textbook was around 61% whereas the figure of the same cases in favour of the female was around 39%. The results could thus be interpreted that the textbook was more gender biased in favour of the male than that of the female counterparts. Going further into the analysis, it could be seen that the poems of the textbook bore 76% gender bias in favour of the male and 24% in favour of the female. Thus, it could be interpreted that the poems of the textbook were highly gender biased in favour of male than that of the female. The analysis of the proses of the textbook revealed that there was 55% of gender bias in favour of the female and 45% of gender bias in favour of the male. Thus, it could be interpreted that the proses of the textbook were gender biased in favour of the female than that of the male. Analysing the illustrations of the textbook, it was found that there was gender bias in favour of the male 62% and in favour of female 38%. Thus, it could be said that the illustrations of the textbook were more male dominated than the female.

Taking the analysis further, the Bengali textbook of Class- IV was carefully examined and the cases of bias in favour of the male and female are summarised in the following table.

Bias (Class- IV)	Percentage of cases of bias in Poems	Percentage of cases of bias in Proses	Percentage of cases of bias in Illustrations	Percentage of overall cases of bias
In favour of Male	40	57	64	54
In favour of Female	60	43	36	46



From the above analysis, it could be understood that the overall cases of gender bias in favour of male in all the texts and illustrations of the textbook was around 54% whereas the figure of the same cases in favour of the female is around 46%. Thus, it could be interpreted that the textbook is almost equally gender biased in favour of both the male and female with a slight inclination towards the male counterparts. Going further into the analysis, it could be seen that the poems of those textbook bore 60% gender bias in favour of the female and 40% in favour of the male. Thus, it could be interpreted that the poems of the textbook were more gender biased in favour of female than that of the male. The analysis of the proses of the textbook reveal that there was 57% of gender bias in favour of the male and 43% of gender bias in favour of the female. Thus, it could be interpreted that the proses of the textbook were gender biased more in favour of the male than that of the female. Analysing the illustrations of the textbook, it was found that there was gender bias in favour of the male 64% and in favour of female 36%. Thus, it could be said that the illustrations of the textbook were more male dominated than the female.

Qualitative Analysis of the Data

Apart from quantitative analysis of the data, qualitative analysis has been conducted in order to see the extent to which the textbooks were gender biased. The qualitative analysis of the poems, proses and illustrations are given below.

1. Representation of gender in the textbooks

Going through the texts and illustrations of the textbooks, it was found out that the represent of the male was more than the female. The proeses and poems of the textbooks were full of male characteristics such as *Jyathamosai* (Father's elder brother), *Kaka* (Father's younger brother), *Baba* (Father), *Mama* (Mather's brother), *Thakurda* (Father's father), *Chhele* (Boys), *Budo* (Old man), *Raja* (King) and *Rajputro* (Prince). The Proper Nouns or the names of the characters were also male dominated. There were obviously female characters in the textbooks such as *माँ* Maa (Mother), *Pisi* (Autny; Father's sisters), *Masi* (Aunty; Mother's sisters), *Budi* (Old lady), *Didimaa* (Mother's mother) but these were very less compared to that of the male. For example, there were three proeses, set up in classroom context, namely *Bhashar Kotha* (about Language), *Bakyer Kotha* (about Sentence) and *Borno Aar Dyonir Kotha* (about Letter and Sound) in class-III textbook where there were seven male student characters namely Debashish, Koushik, Kalyan, Swapan, Krishanu, Kingshuk and Toufique and three female student characters namely Sumita, Ratna and Meghna. Thus, it could be seen that the characters are more male dominated than the female. In another example, the opening poem of the textbook of class-IV was *Sobar Ami Chhatro* ('Male Student' of All). Unlike the words *Shishya* or *Shiksharthi* which encompass both male and female student, the word *Chatro* means only Male Student. This poem is read by both male and female students. Thus, it clearly paved the way for gender bias in the textbooks. Yet, in another example, there was another poem in class-IV textbook called *Adorsha Chele* (Ideal Boy). The meaning of the word *Chele* is boy. This poem is also read by both male and female students. It also shows how much importance is given to the male in the textbooks.

2. Gender and Adventure

Both the textbooks were full of interesting stories and poems of adventure. Some of the examples included- *Deyaler Chhobi* (Wall Picture), *Noukajatra* (Journey by Boat), *Dheuyer Taletale* (In the rhythm of waves), *Du-Chakay Duniya* (World tour in by-cycle), *Ami Sagor Pari Debo* (I will go across the ocean), *Totto-Chan Er Advenchar* (Adventure of Totto-Chan), *Boner Khobor* (About Forest), *Amazoner Jongole* (In the Jungle of Amazon), *Dokkhin Meru Obhijan* (Journey to the South Pole), *Aalo* (Light) and *Advenchar: Borshar* (Adventure: In Rainy Season). The stories or the poems depicted values such as bravery, strength, hard work, determination, will-power, hope and wonder. But, most of the characters in the above-mentioned stories or poems were male dominated rather than female. For example, in the story *Du-Chakay Duniya* (World tour in by-cycle) four friends went for a tour on by-cycle. They were all male characters. In the poem *Ami Sagor Pari Debo* (I will go across the ocean) the lines go as *Ore, voi pai je – e sei chhelei noi. Sopto sagor rajyo amar, ami bonik bir* (This is not the boy who fears. The seven seas are my kingdom, I am the brave merchant of them all). It was thus observed throughout the texts that female characters were missing in relation to adventures. It is not that only men are meant for adventures. There are numerous examples where women were seen going for adventures. It was therefore evident from the texts that there was a lot of gender bias specially in the poems and stories of adventures.

3. Gender and Occupation

The occupations that various characters of the poems, stories and illustrations of the textbooks held could be mentioned as agriculture, hunting, merchantry, wood cutting, teaching, medical doctors, fishing, house-keeping, cooking, selling, boat rowing, night guard, navy and cobbling. Majority of the occupations were done only by men and few by women. There were also very few occupations which were shown being done by both of them together. But, female characters were shown to be involved in the occupations such as house-keeping, cooking, wood-cutting, selling varieties in the streets and helping men in the agricultural works. Works that involved high status, bravery and strength were shown being done by male characters. Thus, it was seen that there existed gender bias with regard to occupations shown in the textbooks.

4. Gender and Autobiography

There were very few autobiographies for the students to read in the textbooks. Those great personalities included Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Aesop, Tetsuko Kuroyanagi, Robert Falcon Scott and Jyotindranath Mukhopadhyay (Bagha Jatin). Apart from that, there were some life experiences and references related to George Albert Duke and Pinakiranjan Chattopadhyay, Pramadaranjan Roy, Sunil Bandhyopadhyay (Jiban Sardar) and Ashwinikumar Dutta. We can see from the above-mentioned that only one autobiography of a woman is given. There are plenty of great women personalities who could be introduced to the students. Therefore, it could be seen that the textbooks were gender biased with regard to autobiographies contained in them.

5. Gender stereotypes

Apart from the above biases, there were some instances of gender stereotypes in the textbooks. Girls were seen playing with dolls while boys were seen wandering in the river banks or jungles in many stories. Female characters were portrayed as weak and male characters were portrayed as strong and brave. In the prose *Amar Maa-r Baper Bari* (My mother's house) the female characters were shown so weak that they were not able to bear the waves of the river and that's why they lied down on the boat whereas the male characters were shown strong enough to be anywhere on the boat. In addition to these, there were instances of illustrations which were quite gender biased.

Conclusion

From the above analysis and discussions, it could be concluded that overall, the Bengali textbooks were slightly gender biased in favour of the male. The poems and proeses were also slightly inclined towards the male. The illustrations used in the textbooks were highly male dominated. Class-III textbook was more biased in favour of the male compared to class-IV where near gender equality was seen. There were more representations of male characters than female characters in the textbooks. There were quite a few instances of gender stereotypes where the male was shown brave, courageous, strong and the female were shown weak, engaged in house-hold works. The textbooks lacked autobiographies of female personalities to a great extent.

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