Children's Perception of Sarkar

A Critique of Civics Textbooks

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Publisher's Note

Eklavya began its work in social studies for middle schools (classes 6-8) in the early 1980s. The task before our social science group was manifold – conceptualising an alternative curriculum, developing textbooks, training teachers to implement the new approach in a selected number of schools and devising a suitable system of public examination at the end of class 8.

An objective of the group was rethinking the civics curriculum. A strategy was evolved to enlarge the scope of civics by including more themes from social and economic life. We felt that this would connect the textbooks with the world around. Traditional topics like the structures of the government at the local, state and central levels were retained, but the approach used to present these topics was now different. We included case studies to add depth to the narratives, pruned out some sub-topics and tried to present the structure in a more logical, realistic and concretised sequence.

This approach was successful in the context of discussing structures of the local government such as the panchayats and municipal councils, but it appeared to hit a block when dealing with higher levels of government. Children found it difficult to relate to discussions on the structures of the central and state governments. Everyday knowledge was not enough. Children faced obstacles in comprehending how these structures operated at the wider levels.

What was the nature of these obstacles? How did children make sense of the information that reached them through the media? What was it that remained obscure? It was evident to us that the teaching of the structures of the central and state governments of the country had to be problematised and analysed.

It is in this context that we came to the idea that we need to do a general study of what children learn from the traditional texts in civics. It was a happy and fruitful coincidence that Alex M. George joined the group at this juncture to explore this problem in greater detail. The findings of the study conducted by him are presented in this book. These findings have important implications for curriculum design and approach at the school level. We hope that this publication will enable scholars, educators and teachers to join the discourse of making curriculum appropriate for children.

—Arvind Sardana
Eklavya

Foreword

…[D]emocracy has had to exist in circumstances that conventional political theories identify as being…unpropitious: amidst a poor, illiterate and staggeringly diverse citizenry… Introduced initially by a mincingly legalistic nationalist elite as a form of government, [it] has been extended and deepened to become a principle of society, transforming the possibilities available to Indians. *They have embraced it, learning about it not from textbooks but by extemporary practice* [emphasis added].

—Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India,* Penguin, New Delhi, 1997, pp. 9-10, written on the occasion of fifty years of Indian independence.

Civics education programmes are planned throughout the territory to teach people about their future political system and make them aware of freedom, democracy, justice and peace as the basic conditions of progress and for their general well-being.… *Democracy cannot be built overnight but rather through prolonged experience of the system. Thus the new nation is not rushing to achieve independence* [emphasis added].

—Xanana Gusman, in *Frontline,* March 2001, as his nation, East Timor, was about to get its freedom.

These voices show two opposing concerns about the usefulness of education to a political society. One of them is a reflection on the experience of democracy in a country for about fifty years and the other is from a newly emerging nation. Given such

concerns, where do we locate the value of political education in our country, which has largely been imparted under the category of civics? Textbooks are a site where one could look for answers. Hence this study which attempts to explore what textbooks talk about. At the same time, it draws elements from children's everyday life and their own political understanding. When one synthesises these twin aspects, one is able to come up with a critique of the ideals of *Sarkar* in the civics curriculum.

The questions explored in this study are not new. People working in the field of school education have been familiar with them for quite some time, among them the social science group of Eklavya. It was common knowledge among such people that there are lacunae in the content of the textbooks and also in teaching methods. Hence my task was only to unearth and reveal these lacunae in some detail and to place before people evidence to substantiate what they were intuitively aware of.

Sometimes we use the term "textbookish" to dismiss what is given in the textbooks. Nevertheless, textbooks are often thought or seen to be the result of the grand narratives which are portrayed in curriculum frameworks. But textbooks are rarely evaluated to find out if they have been successful in transacting the grand narratives of the curriculum documents. In order to attempt an evaluation of this kind, this study juxtaposes three different aspects of the problem: 1) the ideals of the curriculum; 2) the content of the textbooks; and 3) the notions that children have about the concepts dealt with in these textbooks, notions that they have picked up from their social world. As we shall see, this juxtaposition throws up glaring gaps among these three aspects.

The book is organised in the following manner. Chapter 1 provides the background of the study and explains why it was undertaken in the given fashion. Chapter 2, which is central to the book, unravels the extent of or deficiencies in children's knowledge of the concepts explained in the textbooks. In this chapter, we try to provide a certain synthesis of the common notions of *Sarkar*

shared by children. The final chapter broadens the discussion on textbooks, children and curriculum, etc., in order to contribute to the ways in which alternative thinking about teaching of politics and *Sarkar* could be visualised. The chapter foregrounds the need to rethink the ways in which textbooks should integrate or contest the dominant social perceptions about political institutions, so that a critical thinking about these institutions comes to the surface.

I would like to say something about the use of the term *"Sarkar"* in this book. The decision to use the term was deliberate. I noticed right in the beginning that whenever I tried to discuss this topic with my friends in the academia, they would immediately ask me to clarify my definition of the state. "If your research is an attempt to explain how children think of the state or of the government," they would say, "you should be clear about what you mean by the state, etc." Since I had little knowledge of the metanarrative of the state or of the government and, at the same time, did not have much interest in impressing my academic friends, I decided to avoid the issue altogether by using the term *Sarkar.* In ordinary usage, *Sarkar* probably means both the state and the government. And in a way perhaps this fluidity of the term reflects popular knowledge of the state and the government – which is a concern in this study – as opposed to the "given" textbook definitions. This knowledge is best reflected when children say, "*Aage sarkar*," i.e. the *Sarkar* which is up, ahead. As we shall see below, *Sarkar* to these children is not merely the institutions of the government at the village, district, state and central levels, it is also the hierarchy of those associated with political parties and those who hold power.

—Alex M. George

Acknowledgements

When I wrote the report on which this book is based, I was still a member of Eklavya. As such, it was perhaps unnecessary at that time to list the names of those other members of Eklavya who held my hand and guided me at various stages of the research. However, now, when I'm no longer with Eklavya, I cannot avoid the task of thanking them and, generally, of acknowledging my debts.

Let me begin by saying that this study would not have taken the shape that it did and, finally, could not have been completed without the constant guidance and encouragement by Arvind Sardana. There is not a single idea or sentence in the report which has not been commented on and corrected by him. I consider myself lucky to have had him around. I am also extremely grateful to Ravi Bhai for rewriting all my poorly scribbled transcriptions in Hindi with his well known Ravi font and Dinesh Patel for joining me in doing the interviews. The report had three avatars, all of which were patiently corrected and commented on by the social science group of Eklavya, most of all by Amman Madan. Anu Gupta, who was not a part of that group, was equally helpful. Other members of Eklavya at Dewas would ask me at every monthly meeting, "*Tumhari Sarkar ka kya hua?*" And they made sure that the study did not become a project endlessly going on!

I would also like to thank Sara Joseph, R. K. Gupta, Geeta Nambissan, Farida Khan and Sarada Balagopalan for their comments and suggestions during various stages of the study. Finally, the report has taken the shape of this book due to the skills of the Eklavya publication team.

—Alex M. George

1
Introduction

Background

Civics, as it is taught in the school curriculum, creates interest among researchers for various reasons. The content of the subject is often seen as a medium for the sustenance of the state. The state attempts to explain and perpetuate itself with the help of civics in the school.

Eklavya redefined the content in its curricular innovations to broaden the definition of civics by including economic institutions and policies. Eklavya was able to meaningfully discuss economic concepts in the curriculum. The experience showed that children are able to associate with many economic processes analysed in the texts. However, the attempt to redefine and teach political institutions and systems faced severe challenges.[1] This was so because the major political institutions that control economic institutions and policies remain at some distance from children's

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1 Eklavya's civics curriculum includes the following chapters on political institutions: "Local Self-government in Urban and Rural Areas", "District Administration", "Court and Justice", "State Government", and "Central Government". The content and the treatment of the first three chapters differ from the usual textbooks and are capable of linking with local institutions and their functions. These institutions of government are treated in such a manner that the tension between the ideal and the real is visible. But the last two chapters are not able to provide such a linkage.

perception. For instance, the class 7 civics textbook contains a chapter on "Contract System in Beedi Making" and another on "State Government". The former elaborates how the *Sarkar*[2] has instituted various policies to benefit *beedi* makers, while the latter explains how the institutions of the Sarkar evolved, what their functions are and so on. While children are able to relate to the policies of the government in the context of *beedi* workers, they have difficulty in visualising the structure and principles of the Sarkar in the abstract form.[3]

This study focuses on the problems that emerge in the context of institutions that are at some distance from children's own experiences. However, any attempt to reformulate the content of the civics curriculum by toning down the emphasis on political institutions and ideas is generally viewed with reservation here, because 1) these ideas are sacrosanct and central to civics in the traditional curriculum, and 2) these topics provide familiarity with crucial institutions that affect an individual's life.

Civics under Critical Eyes

We may broadly classify the studies that evaluate the content of civics as 1) those that use the perspective of the sociology of education, and 2) those done by the proponents of citizenship

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2   In the rest of this book, the term *Sarkar* and its derivative *Sarkari* will appear without italics.

3   All through this study the word Sarkar will be used with its multiple meanings. The term Sarkar used in its colloquial, everyday sense denotes different things in different contexts. It would mean "structures of government, some group of people or an individual associated with the government, or an abstract idea", varying from one context to another. For example, in statements such as "then the Sarkar was formed", "that person is from the Sarkar", "that is a Sarkari office", various shades of meanings are attached to this term. In these statements of everyday life, the Sarkar would thus refer to individuals such as MLA, MP, Chief Minister or structures/ groups of individuals such as Council of Ministers.
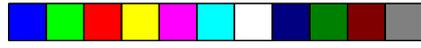
education/political socialisation. It is necessary to demarcate the present study from both these paradigms.

Sociology of Education

One method that is dominantly used to evaluate the civics curriculum is to analyse "how certain knowledge areas are identified as valuable and gain a place in the curriculum". This includes analysing how a particular selection of content in the curriculum enables the state and the society to perpetuate themselves.

While analysing a text, those who use the methodological tools of the sociology of education observe how the dominant narrative of the textbooks contains biases of a particular section of society. These biases are often classified into male/urban/middle class categories.[4] Occasionally, an author moves beyond the parameters defining the textbook and analyses how the transaction of the text in the classroom perpetuates the biases. Krishna Kumar points out the limiting character of these studies as follows:

> The method assumes that bias has to do with the presence or absence of certain characters or characteristics. The possibility of bias being embedded in the structure of relationships portrayed in a text, as well as in isolated features, eludes this popular method.[5]

While looking at the classroom transaction, the author shows how knowledge gets "selected and represented". He argues that the whole process of making the text, implementing it and its transaction in the classroom attempts to scuttle the process of social change:

> ...Education, under the prevailing curricular and instructional norms, can serve to assist the students who come from so-called "backward" backgrounds to internalise symbols of "backward"

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4   A. Madan, "*Nagarik Shastr Ki Pustakon Mein Nagarikon Ki Chhavi*", *Sandarbh*, No. 5, 1995, p. 88.

5   Krishna Kumar, *Social Character of Learning*, Sage, New Delhi, 1989, pp. 16-17.

> behaviour... What we ought to be worried about is not the fate of the tiny minority of "backward" students who become "middle class", but of the vast numbers of students who are eliminated by the school system with the help of external or covert instruments.[6]

Some other scholars evaluate the civics curriculum on the basis of its "colonial lineage".[7] They observe how the colonial masters introduced the subject and why the modern state with its new paradigms wishes to perpetuate the values of the colonial masters.

Such studies have shown what care needs to be taken when alternatives are visualised. They point out how the text may not achieve its goal because the interaction of the society with the text can redefine the meanings in the text.

Citizenship Education/Political Socialisation

Studies in this category postulate a one-to-one relationship between the subject matter and the child, called the "future citizen". They expect the curriculum to "create better" citizens for the future. Thus, the very definition of the curriculum specifies that it communicate value-loaded messages to the child. Scholars using the perspective of citizenship education have mainly two paradigms to evaluate the content of civics textbooks: 1) the text's ability to communicate the ideas of citizenship and nationalism, and 2) its ability to impart certain attitudes and values linked to a particular political ideology.

Studies done from the perspective of political socialisation were pursued till the early 1970s, mainly in the US. They sought to observe the process by which a person is affiliated to a political party or develops "political" attitudes. Important writers in this stream of scholarship include Herbert H. Hyman, Fred I.

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6   Ibid., p. 76.

7   For example, see M. Jain, "Evolution of Civics and Citizen in India", paper presented at South Asian Conference on Education, New Delhi, November, 1999.

Greenstein, and Almond and Verba.[8] Let us look at Hyman's work as representing the arguments put forth by this stream:

> Political behaviour is complex and many different aspects could be examined as outgrowths of socialization. It seems logical to distinguish at least two major realms for sheer involvement or participation in politics and, granted the involvement, the types of political goals or policies sought.[9]

> ...the studies may be classified into four types depending on whether the indicators of political participation are: choice of ego-ideals, media behaviour, level of political knowledge, or responses to direct questions on political involvement and interest.[10]

All these studies argue why the civics textbooks ought to be in the forefront to address issues relating to children's knowledge of "politics".[11] Critics of this stream point out that studies on political socialisation were initiated to verify the impact of the civics education on children. They argue that the state was interested in funding such studies because many young people were attracted to the radical politics of the left. At the same time, a section of the people had begun to admire the system of authoritarian rule. All these factors were felt to be a threat to the perpetuation of the existing form of the state.

Today, the discipline of political socialisation itself has become outdated. To what extent this change is associated with the

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8 See Herbert H. Hyman, *Political Socialization*, Macmillan, New York, 1972; Fred I. Greenstein, *Children and Politics*, Yale University Press, London, 1960; and Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture*: *Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*, Little Brown and Company, Boston, 1963.

9 Hyman, ibid., p. 18.

10 Ibid., p. 21.

11 Uma Varshney, *Education for Political Socialization*, Meenakshi Prakashan, Meerut, 1983, p. 136.

withdrawal of the state from its "welfare" functions is unclear.[12] It is necessary to note here that the definitions of concept areas like citizenship and political socialisation have become very thin. Both these concept areas have been used interchangeably to explain how a person internalises the norms and values of the political system.[13]

Moving specifically to the Indian context, let us analyse various debates and discussions that have emerged to "place" the subject of citizenship within a certain framework. The key perspective with which the proponents of this view look at the civics textbooks is that of producing good citizens. Varshney observes:

> It is true that free India has been spared the trauma of a violent political revolution or civil war. But the functioning of political institutions is far from satisfactory. Whenever people's behaviour in their public dealings leaves much to be desired, or when they indulge in civic strife, or cut a queue, it is said that the "educational system has failed". In other words, the complaint is that schools and colleges are not producing good citizens.[14]

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12 Some people argue that with the withdrawal of the welfare state from the public space, the discipline of civics, and thus of political socialisation, becomes irrelevant. However, there could be other reasons for this irrelevance. A significant study dealing with the changes in curriculum perspectives of the education system in the US is available in Gary Wehlage and E. M. Anderson, *Social Studies Curriculum in Perspective: A Conceptual Analysis*, Prentice-Hall, New Jersey, 1972. Using a current example from the Indian context for the "shift in concerns", one can note how Environment Education/Consciousness is being pushed by various groups into the curriculum or school programmes. There have been many such initiatives by education/media groups like Centre for Science and Environment, New Delhi, Uttarkhand Seva Nidhi, Almora, and Centre for Environmental Education, Ahamedabad, etc.

13 See Robert L. Ebel (ed.), *Citizenship and Political Socialization*, Encyclopaedia of Educational Research, Macmillan, London, 1969, p. 129.

14 Uma Varshney, op. cit., p. 6.
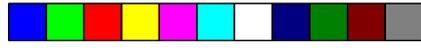
Varshney uses the U.P. state curriculum to analyse how effective it has been in imparting the values associated with civics. She evaluates civics and non-civics students for their 1) political knowledge, 2) political interest/participation, 3) political efficacy/cynicism, 4) civic sense, and 5) democratic behaviour.[15] Her aim is to establish the "marked" difference between civics and non-civics students and propagate its introduction in the curriculum.

While analysing the significance of political knowledge, Varshney foregrounds Almond's and Verba's ideas on civic culture:

> To impart political knowledge is only a part of education for citizenship. Nevertheless, it is an important factor. "We may assume that if people follow political and governmental affairs, they are in some sense involved in the process by which decisions are made. To be sure, it is a minimal degree of involvement. The civic culture, as we use the term, includes a sense of obligation to participate in political input activities as well as a sense of competence to participate."[16]

The understanding of citizenship is a crucial area that needs to be evaluated at this stage. Using the NCERT documents on citizenship education would be useful here. Varshney explicates the NCERT perspective from an earlier document:

> "Good citizen emerges not from an abundance of factual knowledge alone but from an understanding of actual experiences in the everyday life of the community." Even if for certain well-defined and well-planned activities, and in relevant school programmes only, the school should acquire the character of a micro-political system. Fear of a clash of opinions or the expression of disagreement cannot be grounds for eschewing elections, voting and debate at the school stage. "The democratisation of attitudes" can only be achieved in educational institutions where a democratic atmosphere prevails. "Democratic" again describes

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15 Ibid., p. 41.

16 Ibid., p. 65. (Sentences within quotation marks are quoted by Varshney from Almond and Verba, *The Civic Culture*, op. cit.)

an educational institution where each individual member can participate in the decision-making process.[17]

The National Curriculum for Primary and Secondary Education – A Framework (1986) contains a summary of the definition of good citizenship. It includes a long list of terms like "protection of India's composite culture and preservation of its cultural heritage; a sense of patriotism; India's freedom struggle; promotion of national social integration; cultivation of values enshrined in the Constitution; protection of the environment; the impact of scientific advancement and technological development; contemporary social and economic issues and problems; and creating awareness of the fundamental rights and duties of the citizen."[18]

In spirit, the documents have not moved away from a narrow definition that associates civics with values. Yet, it would be useful to take a closer look at the attempts by the NCERT to define the various knowledge and skill areas in the subject. For children of class 6 to class 8, the following areas are marked out:

> **a) Knowledge:** i. The objective should be to provide *information* regarding the constitutional obligations of the state as well as the citizen's duties towards the rule of law. ii. To help students *comprehend* the utterances of the leaders, government and political parties as well as passages from the writings and speeches of Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, B. R. Ambedkar, Rajendra Prasad, Maulana Azad, Sardar Patel, Subhash Bose, S. Radhakrishnan, Zakir Husain and other eminent persons.

> **b) Critical thinking:** An important objective should be to develop habits of *analysis* and *reasoning* in the matter of public affairs. *Critical thinking*, as against unthinking acceptance, will have to be developed through examples of analysis and reasoning as may

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17 Varshney, ibid., pp. 145-46.

18 See J. Veera Raghavan, "Good Citizen", in S. R. Gupta and U. W. Schottli (ed.), *Citizenship Education: Rights, Duties, Responsibilities*, Roli Books, New Delhi, 1987, p. 96.
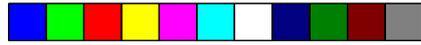
be found in the speeches of many of our national leaders.

c) Skills and habits: These skills and habits are more or less the same as in the lower primary stage and are strengthened with continuous practice.[19]

d) Attitudes and values: In this area, too, there is continuity from the lower primary stage, but with a higher sense of responsibility and wider involvement in community affairs. At this stage, it is important to develop tolerance towards differences of opinions, views and attitudes. Overcoming communal, linguistic and caste prejudices should be an important objective leading to a proper understanding of the concept of national integration.[20]

For the higher secondary stage, the NCERT advocates that the concepts *should be broadened*. However, ideas and topics are repeated in the middle school and high school curriculum. The assumption is that children develop "skills", "attitudes", "values", "critical thinking", etc., by learning the same topics at both these levels. The content area includes the following aspects:

At this stage, young people should know enough about constitutional rights, duties and proceedings as well as about such institutions as Parliament, state legislatures, judiciary and the executive branches of the government, elections and party system, municipal and local bodies. One of the objectives should be to encourage young people to participate meaningfully in the

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19 See S. K. Mitra, "Citizenship for the Society of the Future", in S. R. Gupta and U. W. Schottli, ibid. (The emphasis is in the original.) For this age group, "Habits of waiting one's turn, of impulse-control even when provoked, of decency and decorum, orderliness, punctuality and cleanliness, of kindness towards suffering human beings, animals and birds, of caring for the young, of preserving trees and plants, of protecting the environment, etc., have to be inculcated."

20 Ibid., p. 92. The lofty idea of making children understand "an actual experience in everyday life of communities" is the central idea missing from the textbooks. There is absolutely no space in the textbooks to discuss such elements.

democratic processes in civic life or in other areas, including educational institutions and places of work.[21]

We may note that the emphasis here is on political institutions and procedures. What remains unclear is how exactly the curriculum's attempt to explicate on these institutions and procedures would lead to the creation of better citizens with the right values and attitudes. These ideas on institutions are repeated from the primary to the high school syllabus. And the values to be inculcated while learning about institutions remain the same.

Mitra's paper takes up the question of how well children are able to understand the ideas relating to political institutions. However, it does not deal with how the transaction of desired ideals/values is possible through the education system. In this context, it would be useful to take note of the criticisms that have emerged within the study of political socialisation.

Those analysing the civics textbooks from the perspective of citizenship/political socialisation do not recognise that the textbooks have "...a tendency to be biased towards stability and continuity rather than conflict and change and a lack of attention to actual processes of socialisation, which not only would yield a more adequate explanation of dependent variables but also are necessary if we are to establish the link between early learning and later attitudes and behaviour." Similarly, they tend to look at the transfer of information as a one-way process and thus "largely ignore human motivation, the attitudinal context in which a socialisation stimulus is perceived and interpreted, and a wide array of individual characteristics that influences people's willingness and capacity to respond to socialisation."[22]

We can see from this discussion how the documents on civics education deify certain elements in their curriculum. The

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21 Quoted in S. K. Mitra, ibid.

22 D. C. Schwartz and S. K. Schwartz, *New Directions in the Study of Political Socialization*, The Free Press, New York, p. 6.

significance of the present study lies in that it seeks to analyse what children understand from the present textbooks with regard to political institutions, irrespective of the lofty ideals and values these documents attempt to impart through their content.

Methodology and Sample Selection

This study emerged within the perspective of those who are interested in analysing the role of textbooks in imparting knowledge and developing images related to political institutions. First, the concepts from the textbooks for classes 7, 9 and 10 were carefully examined.[23]

Broadly, while analysing the textbook discussion on political institutions, two striking elements emerged.

Complexity of the Structures

The textbooks focus on various institutions at the local, state and union levels while explaining the political system. These are described in a legalistic framework, with the emphasis on the rules and processes by which they are formed. A mere description of the structures of political institutions appears to be a simple and rather mechanical task. However, this description conceals many crucial ideas, an understanding of which is necessary to comprehend their functioning. These ideas include: the notion of democracy, the need for governance or laws, the hierarchical structures/systems that cover various political territory units, the relationship an individual or a political party has with these structures/systems, and so on.

23 The textbooks we have examined here are: D. S. Muley, A. C. Sharma and Supta Das, *How We Govern Ourselves: A Textbook of Civics for Class VII*, NCERT, New Delhi, 1988, reprint 1998; and Sudipta Kaviraj, *Indian Constitution and Government: A Textbook in Civics for Class IX & X*, NCERT, New Delhi, 1998. We have selected for analysis the NCERT textbooks, as this is the institution which is put forward as a model. This institution also defines the dominant paradigm in school education.
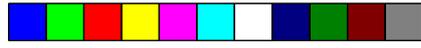
Instead of providing an explanation of and details regarding such fundamental concepts, the textbooks attempt to simplify the rules and procedures that lead to the formation and functioning of the structures. There are also overlaps in the functioning of these structures, such as those between the executive and the legislative arms of the government. Such complexities themselves can make the concepts in the textbooks difficult for children to comprehend.

Functioning of the Structures in Real Life

In real life, what people (including children) learn and observe is the working of power and authority. Formal systems and structures are just a small part of this. Very often, much clarity about these theoretical structures is not necessary to understand the political behaviour of people. They "get things done" in their own way. This folk knowledge of real politics is often contrary to the objectives of the structures, as defined in the textbooks. Hence, received notions about the structures or their functioning are often confusing, ambiguous and alien.

Many concepts have been repeated in the textbooks from one class to another. They figure in the textbook for class 7 and then again in the textbooks for high school. Such concepts include: the formation of the government at the state and centre levels; the functioning and powers of the legislature, executive and judiciary; the process of the writing of the Constitution and descriptions of certain sections of the same.

This study, however, does not cover all the concepts taught at these levels. Concepts that are crucial and relatively simple, and which we thought children would be able to handle, were selected for discussion. After the pilot rounds, the key areas identified were: 1) formation of the government, 2) duties of the government and the ways in which its programmes get implemented, 3) the notion of laws and aspects related to the processes of lawmaking, and 4) division of the government into three organs and how they are separate from one another. Besides, some areas were thought to be a prerequisite for understanding other concepts;

without clarifying these, it was difficult to talk about structures of the government. These areas were: 1) territorial regions under which different structures of the political system or administrative structures operate, 2) certain terms used in the context of different structures, and 3) political parties.

The method we adopted was group discussion. There was a list of open-ended questions to lead the discussion. Using this method, we could explore each concept area in some depth, and move from one concept area to another based on children's explanations. As the objective was to glean the images children have about the Sarkar, we felt it was necessary to explore their understanding in stages. Group discussion was preferred over individual interview, as we felt that children would feel more comfortable in the company of their friends. This would also create a situation where children would challenge or add to the ideas described by others.

Children from the "best" schools of both rural and urban areas of Dewas district were chosen for discussion. To discount the effect of poor teaching, it was necessary to select the "best" schools in the area as well as the "best" students within them. This categorisation of schools or students as the "best" is based on the "popular" view, which is in turn based mainly on the examination results of the schools/children. At an earlier round, when we had discussions with children of the "weaker" and "average" groups, we noted that they found it difficult to recollect various elements from the textbook. They were often quiet throughout the discussion, and we could not enter into a conversation using the text as a plank. We decided to take up the "best" students, as we wanted to evaluate how well the textbooks have been able to communicate their ideas to children.

Another element that we felt necessary to consider while selecting the sample was the social context and exposure to political institutions and processes. Thus, both the rural and the urban settings were selected. There are differences, between these settings, in the social environment and in children's exposure

and relation to different aspects of political institutions. The distance that exists for rural children from the various centres of power or administrative structures was thought to play a role in what they were able to associate with the image of the Sarkar. The presence of the government is more visible in the urban centres. Does this presence and proximity of offices, officials, and *netas* help urban children in their understanding of the Sarkar? Does the knowledge of and participation in local political processes enable rural children to clarify their ideas? It was with these ideas in mind that we chose both rural and urban samples. The urban sample, however, represents a town (district headquarters); which means that we have not covered the metropolitan setting.

The table below indicates the range we covered and the number of groups in each category. The number of students in each group discussion was in the range of three to five. The discussion in each group lasted for 20 to 40 minutes. The number of groups is not uniform in each category because it depended on the availability of children and convenience of the schools from the list we had prepared for each category.

Table 1: The Sample

Setting	Class 7	High School	Total
Rural	7 groups; 35 children	4 groups; 20 children	11 groups; 55 children
Urban	3 groups; 9 children	6 groups; 21 children	9 groups; 30 children
Total	10 groups; 44 children	10 groups; 41 children	20 groups; 85 children

The study analyses a small set of concepts and children's experiences with and perceptions of "constitution and government". The latter has always been a part of the received curricular wisdom and forms the core of the civics curriculum. How do children respond to this component of the textbook? What meanings do they construct of this element of the Sarkar?

These questions are central for this study. This is, therefore, not a comprehensive study of all the concepts in the textbook. We have taken up a small subset of key areas and issues and examined children's experiences associated with them. Thus, this is an investigation of the general trend that appears to be emerging from children's responses, with the chosen concept areas serving as illustrative examples. It does not take into consideration the wider perspectives and areas of interest noted in the studies on citizenship education and political socialisation.

A question that we face here is whether children at the middle school level are mature enough to handle concepts like democracy and the need for law, etc. Very often, studies in political socialisation and people interested in the child's worldview observe that children do have a sense of how "authority" and "power" function. They analyse these experiences of children in the context of other institutions such as schools, peer groups, family, the media, etc. Can this understanding of power and authority in other institutions of society be used to develop an understanding of *political* power and authority? We seek some answers to this question in the last part of the study.
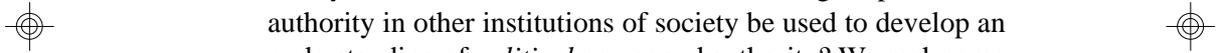
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Discussions with Children

In the following part of the study, we present our discussions with children on three aspects of the Sarkar: 1) formation of the Sarkar and its textbook narration, 2) functions of the Sarkar and how textbooks explain them, and 3) the structure of the Sarkar and the three organs that are part of it.

Formation of the Sarkar: Actual Events and Textbook Knowledge

Discussions on the formation of the Sarkar were conducted to contextualise the knowledge from textbooks and explore children's own ideas. The discussions took place in 1999. Three consecutive elections had taken place before our discussions, i.e. two elections leading to the formation of the union government and one election for the state legislative assembly. Thus, children involved in the study appeared to be in an advantageous position to handle the discussions.

Elections

We began by discussing some basic questions, such as: 1) Who is eligible to vote? 2) What is the name of the child's constituency? 3) Who were the candidates in the constituency? 4) To which political parties did various candidates belong? and 5) Who won the election?

Most of the groups of children were comfortable discussing these elements. This was possible because elections were understood as a "current local event".[24] Often, the familiarity with political parties enabled children to talk about such ideas.

Most of the children were aware of the plurality of political parties in the country. However, rural middle school children were at some disadvantage, although they, too, were familiar with the two political parties that are prominent in Madhya Pradesh.

After the preliminary conversation, questions of a second level were asked: 1) Where do the elected candidates gather after the elections (Vidhan Sabha, Rajya Sabha, Lok Sabha)? 2) Name a few other constituencies in the state as well as in other states where elections have taken place.

When the question of neighbouring constituencies was posed, urban groups cited big cities like Indore and Bhopal. The rural groups first identified neighbouring constituencies within the district and then moved to the big cities. Even though all groups of students had the image that there were many constituencies, the way the urban groups actually visualised the idea was ambiguous. They did not clearly understand that a constituency named after a town or city may also include several villages. However, all the groups knew the crucial idea that there were "many" constituencies and that several candidates had won the elections.

Various problems emerged as we moved beyond the preliminary stage of discussion. One common misconception, even among high school students, related to the use of the exact term for Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha or Vidhan Sabha. While discussing the actual elections, even when children identified the results of the election

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24 The fact that it was an election year was of great significance. Having seen the actual event, children could recollect their experience on the questions posed above. Our experience during the previous year, when there was no election to the state legislative assembly, confirms this. In this context, see Rashmi Paliwal, "*Jo Gaurishankar Ko Samajh Mein Na Aaye*", *Sandarbh*, No. 7, 1995.

correctly, the names of the legislative houses were mixed up, as can be seen from the example below:

> Q: An election was held recently. Which one was it?
>
> A: —[25]
>
> Q: Why was there an election?
>
> A: For the Rajya Sabha.
>
> Q: For the Rajya Sabha?
>
> A: —
>
> Q: What happened in the election?
>
> A: From Dewas...the BJP won from Dewas.[26]

Sometimes children mixed up the terms Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha. In the following example, they were not able to specify whether it was an election to the Vidhan Sabha, in spite of their familiarity with the names of the Chief Minister and the Prime Minister. Later, the terms Rajya Sabha and Vidhan Sabha were interchanged:

> Q: Recently an election took place. Which one was it?
>
> A: —
>
> Q: Was it an election for the Lok Sabha or Vidhan Sabha?
>
> A: Lok Sabha.
>
> Q: An election was held last year too. Which one was it?
>
> A: —
>
> Q: Okay. What happened after the election? Did we have a Chief Minister or a Prime Minister?
>
> A: —
>
> (The question is repeated)

---

25 "—" marks silence.

26 This is an excerpt from a larger discussion with children of an urban high school. The full text of this and all other discussions quoted below is available with Eklavya.

A: Chief Minister.

Q: Who is the Chief Minister?

A: Digvijay Singh.

Q: And the Prime Minister?

A: Atal Behari Vajpayee.

Q: Where do you have a Prime Minister? In the Lok Sabha or Vidhan Sabha?

A: In the Lok Sabha.

Q: Okay, the Prime Minister is at the centre, so where is the Chief Minister?

A: In the Rajya Sabha.[27]

We had been using the terms Chief Minister and Prime Minister to make linkages to the legislative houses. What was not clear was whether children could also make such linkages for identifying the MLA or MP with the Chief Minister or Prime Minister. The misconceptions of children in this context can be summarised as follows.

Most significantly, this confusion tells us that children have very little information about the Rajya Sabha. Children often substituted the term Rajya Sabha while referring to the Vidhan Sabha. This confusion was partly due to the fact that the term used in Hindi to refer to the state is "*rajya*". Children then added the term "*sabha*" to it and thought they had the word for the state-level legislative body.

Children do not necessarily see the relationship between the houses and the representatives.[28] They are also not sure about the existence of numerous states where these institutions physically exist.

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27 Discussion with children from an urban high school.

28 This became clearer as we discussed the process of lawmaking. Here they did not necessarily identify the role of representatives as part of a context.

Children involved in the discussion could recollect terms and notions connected to the state legislative houses, but they could not relate them with the idea of elected representatives and Chief Minister and Prime Minister. Although they knew that there are different states in the country, they could not conceive of a Vidhan Sabha in every state.[29] This indicates that clarity regarding these terms does not improve as students move from class 7 to classes 9 and 10. However, what helped the students in these discussions was using the names of representatives and Chief Ministers:

Q: Who is Laloo Prasad – the Prime Minister or Chief Minister?

A: Chief Minister.

Q: Where else do we have Chief Ministers?

A: Madhya Pradesh has Digvijay Singh.

Q: Madhya Pradesh has Digvijay Singh. And then...?

A: Delhi also has.

Q: How many states are there in India? You had mentioned U.P., Bihar, M.P....

A: Orissa, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh.

Q: Why are they called states?... Why were different states formed?

A: —

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29 We would not have expected an answer to this question from a middle school group, especially from a rural background, but here the discussion was with an urban high school group. A study of three middle schools had revealed that most children with rural background do not have any clear notion of the existence of numerous states in the country. On the other hand, most of the urban groups are familiar with it. Rural middle school children found it difficult to visualise that people in different states can have different cultural systems. Even though we noticed in our discussion that some children with rural background too do not face such a problem, this idea needs to be addressed with larger groups. In the present case, the failure was in linking the state with the legislative houses.

Q: Who would you find in them?

A: —

Q: Who would be there... Prime Minister or Chief Minister or nothing?

A: Don't know.

Q: Would there be Vidhan Sabhas in all these states?

A: Don't know.

Q: Would there be a legislative assembly in Orissa, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh?

A: Don't know.

Q: Only in M.P.?

A: No, Delhi too.

Q: Yes. Delhi, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh have... And what about other places?

A1: (Very casually) Maybe.

A2: Maybe – not sure?[30]

We shall note at a later stage (while discussing lawmaking) what effect such confusion can have in explaining the role of the different houses.

Broadly, children know that some individuals are representatives and belong to political parties, but they are not sure about their connection with the houses. It is precisely here that the role of textbooks becomes significant. The description of the formation of the houses in the textbooks should have been helpful in explaining how the local events and individuals contribute to the making of the Sarkar. We shall try to show how this crucial idea is missed out in the textbooks when they explain the process of formation of the government.

Analysis of the Text

The process of formation of the Sarkar, as described in the textbook for class 7, is as follows:

30 Discussion with children from an urban high school.
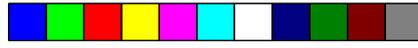
> We have seen that most members are elected on party tickets. The political party which has the support of the majority of members in the Lok Sabha is asked by the President to form the government. In the coming chapters we shall study how the Prime Minister and his ministers form the government.[31]

Even though the passage above states that "most members are elected on party tickets", the textbook gives a very weak explanation of the election process. (We have not reproduced the entire passage because of limitations of space.) In this context, it is important to remember that the students were able to respond to our questions with some ease because it was an election year.

One may assume that the following passage is what they refer to as "*In the coming chapters*". Other than this, we do not find any discussion on the formation of the government at the centre. The process is referred to again in the chapter called "Who Executes Laws". This chapter primarily discusses the election of the President and Vice-President, giving a long list of their powers. Thus, it may be difficult for children to notice and for teachers to clearly emphasise the information given about the process of formation of the government. Even in this passage, the emphasis seems to be on other concepts and for some reason the specific question of how the Prime Minister is chosen is overlooked:

> The President exercises all these powers on the advice of the Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers. On the advice of the Prime Minister, the President appoints other ministers. There are three categories of ministers – the Cabinet Ministers, the Ministers of State and the Deputy Ministers. All important decisions are taken by the Cabinet Ministers. The decisions of the Cabinet are binding on all other ministers. The Cabinet usually meets once a week.[32]

Here one is struck by the similarity with Article 75 of the

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31 See D. S. Muley, A. C. Sharma and Supta Das, *How We Govern Ourselves: A Textbook of Civics for Class VII*, NCERT, New Delhi, 1988; reprint 1998, p. 26.

32 Ibid., p. 35.

Constitution, which says: "The Prime Minister shall be appointed by the President and the other Ministers shall be appointed by the President on the advice of the Prime Minister."[33]

The description of the appointment of the Chief Minister in the NCERT textbook is quoted below. What is clearly visible here is the "power" (or the lack of it) associated with the Governor. And in some ways, the notion of majority gets a passing reference. Another remark made in this passage is about coalition governments. However, if children do not understand the process of formation of the government in situations where a party has a majority, one can only wonder what sense they would make of a coalition government. Thus, like in most parts of the textbook, there are too many ideas clubbed together without adequate elaboration:

> The Governor acts on the aid and advice of the Chief Minister. The Governor is not free to choose anybody as the Chief Minister. He appoints the leader of the party enjoying the majority as the Chief Minister. If there is no single party having a majority then two or more parties join together and elect a leader. Such a joint government is called a coalition government. The leader thus chosen is appointed as Chief Minister by the Governor. Once the Chief Minister is appointed, he advises the Governor on the appointment of other Ministers.[34]

The textbook for high school classes devotes a complete chapter to various types of elections in the world and even introduces the idea of direct and indirect elections. The relevant passage in this textbook is quoted below:

> Prime Minister is chosen indirectly, but her/his party is directly elected by the people. The Prime Minister is the leader of the party that has the support of the majority of the members in the Lok Sabha. Alternatively, she/he may be a consensusly agreed leader of a combination of parties.[35]

33 The Constitution of India (as on 01 June 1996), New Delhi, 1996.

34 See Muley et al, op. cit., pp. 39-40.

35 Sudipta Kaviraj, *Indian Constitution and Government: A Textbook in Civics for Class IX & X*, NCERT, New Delhi, 1998, p. 40.

The appointment of the Chief Minister is explained in the following passage:

> The Chief Minister and the Council of Ministers are appointed by the Governor. The Governor normally appoints the leader of the majority party or combination of political parties as the Chief Minister. On the advice of the Chief Minister, other members of the Council are appointed.[36]

As we can see, this text is terse and devoid of any explanations and fails to link the concepts with concrete images. It does not appear to be the kind of text that would help children understand the process of elections and formation of the Sarkar. If children have really understood that process, they should be able to use their knowledge to adequately explain actual events or imaginary situations. As we have partly shown above and will show again in the pages below, this is not what happens when we talk to the children using these textbooks.

"Majority" and "Leader of the Party"

The study examined whether children could apply their textbook knowledge of the notion of majority to actual and imaginary situations.[37] It was observed that most groups that could describe actual events failed to do so when asked to analyse imaginary situations. They failed to elaborate on the two key ideas of

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36   Ibid., p. 46.

37   Our pre-framed question contained the names of three imaginary parties and the number of seats won by each of them in an election. There was also a fourth group of "others". All the three parties had around one-third of the seats and the "others" were an insignificant fraction. A similar table was formed to describe the actual situation of the Madhya Pradesh state legislature after 1998 elections. After studying the table, the children had to describe the formation of government. The imaginary situation was purposively designed without a single majority party so that the understanding of central ideas could be evaluated. The parties and the number of seats won by them in the imaginary election were as follows: Vikas Party/110; Vilas Party/116; Viplav Party/105; Others/9; Total/340.

"majority" and "leader of the majority party". Their explanations of actual incidents were gathered from their experiences and not from the text, and it was often their understanding of political parties that enabled them to give descriptions of actual situations. Let us now look at some discussions with children in this context.

The following group was the sole example (among 20 groups) where the students said that the majority needs to be proved in the house. Support from other parties was felt necessary to form the government. Students in this group argued that the party that had the largest number of seats would be "invited" to form the government and would then try to prove its majority with the support of others. This information is not given in the textbook. The children knew that a "minimum number of seats" – like 75 percent or one-third or half – is necessary, but no agreement on the exact proportion was reached in the group:

> (We give the pre-framed question and explain it in detail.) Suppose this is the situation (showing the card). This is an imaginary table. There are three political parties. People from these parties have been elected.

> Q: Who will form the government?

> A: Vilas party.

> Q: Why?

> A1: It has more seats.

> A2: The one that has more seats would be invited to form the government.

> Q: And...?

> A2: It will prove its support.

> Q: How?

> A2: It will get support from other parties.

> Q: If other parties don't give support?

> A: Then this 116 group will make it. It will ask the support of the second group and if they too don't give...
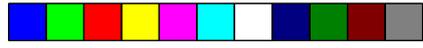
Q: Why does it need support?

A: It cannot make it without support.

Q: Why?

A: There is a fixed number of seats.

Q: How much is that?

A: One-third.

Q: What could be one-third of 340... for 300 it is 100... then this is above 113. So, can they make it? (The children did the calculation along with us.)

A2: Then you need 75 percent.

Q: Is it so?... Do you need 75 percent?

A3: More than half.

Q: Which one is it: more than half, one-third or 75 percent?

A: Please repeat the question.

Q: There are 340 members and three political parties with 110, 116 and 105 and some other seats too. Now, who should form the government?

A: Two parties together would form. Among the three parties, two parties would support one another.

Q: If two parties do not come together?

A: The third would attempt. Else, there would be another election.

Q: Why?

A: —

Q: What would be more than half of this?

A1: 340.

A2: None has anything near 170.

Q: First let us clarify. He said 75 percent and others said one-third, more than half.

A: Two-thirds.

Q: What would be two-thirds of 340?

A: —

Q: How many seats are necessary to form the government?

A: More than half.[38]

Children shifted from one answer to another, making "wild guesses". In their explanations, even the largest party was looking for support from other parties. Some students seemed to have the notion that "*samarthan*" (support) was very important or else fresh elections would be held. This was an instance of children using their own experiences from recently held elections. Many children were comfortable in thinking that the largest political party in the house has a majority or manages to get it.

A popular representation of the process of the formation of the government is to be seen in the following conversation:

(The pre-framed question on the formation of the government is read.)

Q: Now, who would form the government?

A: Sir, in this who is supporting each other?

Q: (We were surprised at this question.) Wow!

A: Who is giving support?

Q: Why do you need support?

A: If two people want to make the Sarkar together...

Q: If two are separate...?

A: This 116 group is the majority party.

Q: Why?

A: Because they have more candidates who have won.

Q: Why should two groups come together?

A: If they wish to join, they will.

Q: If not...?

A: Are they separate?

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38 Discussion with children from an urban high school.
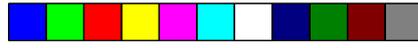
Q: Yes.

A: Then this Vikas Party.

Q: Why?

A1: They have more candidates.

A2: They have more.

Q: Does more candidates mean a majority?

A1: Yes.

A2: No sir. More candidates have won. 116 people and then there is the rest – 110, 105. Now... 105, 110, then 116. The largest is 116. The one that gets the most, the largest, one would be chosen among them. The one who has the largest number would become the majority party's leader. He would make the Cabinet. They would be under him. He would divide different regions [departments] among them. He would take care of those under him.[39]

During this conversation, it was surprising that a child asked a question about who was providing support. It was for the first time during various discussions that anybody had raised such a question. While discussing the passages from the textbook earlier, they had said that the leader of the majority party becomes the Chief Minister, and here was a child asking "who is providing support". If he was sure of the textbook's explanation, then was it some incident that influenced his response? In fact, it was in anticipation of some such response, where children would say that no single party had a clear majority, that we had framed the question.

But, after a few sentences, we found that it was not the "majority" that, for this child, was essential to form the government but the non-textbook image that he had in his mind. (*At the end of the discussion, this child told us that he was a regular newspaper reader.*) In the daily, everyday world governments are said to be formed with support. Hence the necessity of support. The child responded in a very casual manner

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39 Discussion with children of class 7 from an urban high school.

when we asked him why support was necessary and what would happen if it were not available. He followed the usual pattern of answers according to which the largest party can form the government.

In the conversation with the following group of urban students, two different views emerged on the mode of deciding who is to be the Chief Minister: 1) The majority party decides who is to become the Chief Minister through an election carried out among the elected representatives themselves. 2) The Parliament decides who is to form the government in the state. The latter explanation probably lay in the fact that this group seemed to view the government as a hierarchy that included the formation of various houses. The following extract too indicates that even after a correct recollection of the textbook passages was given, the understanding was not deep and, hence, the students did not question each other's explanations even when there were contradictions between them:

Q: Recently, some elections were held.

A: The time of the previous government was over. So it... we can say that after every five years the government will change.

Q: What happened? What was the result?

A: The Congress won the majority of seats.

Q: How much?

A: We don't know.

Q: How did you get to know about the result?

A: Exit poll.

Q: Did you see it? What happens?

A: Various people were called and discussions were held.

Q: How was the government formed?

A: Like...?

Q: Who is the Chief Minister?

A: ...in M.P.?
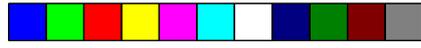
Q: Yes.

A: Digvijay Singh.

Q: Who made him?

A: Members of the Congress party decided who is to be the Chief Minister.

Q: Like...?

A: Members who had won the seats elected him.

Q: They sat together and elected Digvijay Singh?

A: Yes, sir.

Q: (From the card the seat position of the parties is explained.) How was it decided that the Congress has to make the government?

A: It was decided by the Prime Minister in Delhi that he has to be the Chief Minister. They decided in the Parliament.

Q: For the Vidhan Sabha, what is to happen is decided by the Parliament?

A: Main orders will come from there only.

Q: What happens in the Vidhan Sabha?

A: ...After the elections?

Q: Yes, after the elections.

A: Main division takes place... this ministry will go to whom... like education minister... who...

Q: Who takes the decisions?

A1: The Chief Minister.

A2: They are all in the Cabinet, isn't it? Education minister, transport minister, finance minister, rail minister, all this is decided by the Prime Minister. And he divides the duties.[40]

Here are some important observations regarding these discussions on the formation of the Sarkar.

The concept of "majority" comes up in other contexts as well,

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40 Discussion with children from an urban high school.

such as the passing of a bill into a law. In both these contexts, children generally identified the idea of majority with groups that were the "largest", not with groups that were either more than half or two-thirds of the total number of members. While many high school children did attempt to grapple with such notions, most middle school children did not bother to probe beyond the idea of the largest group having the majority. Thus, children not only fail to recall such legalistic explanations, they have no notion why such a system is adopted at all. There is an absence of an explanation in the text of why a majority is so crucial for democracy. This is what perhaps leads them to consider such numbers as mere information.

Similarly, the idea of the "leader of the majority party" is not clear to children. In analysing actual events, they would identify the name of the present Chief Minister but did not always think of him as the person chosen as the leader of the party after an election. The process of appointing the Chief Minister or the Prime Minister by the Governor or the President, as given in conventional textbooks, remains "textbookish". The actual process of such appointments (as seen in the media) is regarded as not being related to it.

Often among the high school groups, the idea of coalition and the role of the leaders of political parties seemed to be the key elements in a description of the formation of the Sarkar. This shows that events during the previous year had had some influence on these groups. But since such narratives get no space in the curriculum, children were not able to apply textbook "rules" to specific situations. In such situations, it was their notions about political parties that had helped them to make sense of the events. Unfortunately, the textbook description of the formation of the government is without any ideas relating it to politics. Thus, even these children were at a loss beyond the memorised phrase that "the leader of the majority party forms the government".

Given the emphasis on rules, elements of the realpolitik are overlooked. Textbooks do not bring in ideas from actual situations

or critically look at and discuss possible deviations. Talking about concepts in abstract terms does not provide sufficient clarity to children. It is not possible to build concrete images of a concept like the formation of the Sarkar without talking about events and political parties associated with the process. When we answered children's questions at the end of the discussion, we saw that high school children could rationalise these ideas because they had some knowledge of the actual events. These events were very useful in describing the process.

Functions of the Sarkar: Welfare Agent or Lawmaker?

The functions of the government in the context of its three organs are summarised in the textbooks as follows: making of laws, implementation of laws, and distribution of justice when the laws are violated.

The textbooks describe the functions of the Sarkar within the framework of the three organs and explain the powers and functions of the functionaries at the top of the hierarchy. However, the interaction of a citizen with the state is mostly mediated through functionaries at the lower levels of the administration. Thus, it is likely that children, too, are familiar with the roles of these functionaries. Some of these functionaries are the teacher, the Patwari, the government doctors, the police, the Tehsildar, and the postman, etc. Many of these functionaries also carry out the welfare functions of the Sarkar. Yet, the textbooks are almost silent about the activities of these personnel as part of the Sarkar. This is not to argue that textbooks are completely silent about the welfare activities of the state. One finds ample mention of them in the textbooks for classes 6 and 8 where they describe the need to "uplift" rural society from its "economic and social backwardness". They elaborate the initiatives taken by the state to eradicate "illiteracy", "over-population" and other "social evils". But there is little mention of the welfare role of the Sarkar while discussing the functions of the institutions of the Sarkar.

From the textbooks, the role of the Sarkar seems to be only that of a lawmaker and its other roles are neglected.[41]

Functions

The study explored whether the textbook images of lawmaking are similar to what children, or even adults, observe in everyday life. Do children, in general, associate the Sarkar and its institutions only with lawmaking or do they also associate them with the function of "providing welfare activities and services"?

In this context, discussions with children on the functions of representatives/ministers/legislative houses/the Sarkar (using any of these terms) become useful. When the problem was posed in an open-ended manner, the response of the children was invariably related to the welfare activities alone, or included very broad ideas, as seen in the following conversation:

Q: Why is the Sarkar formed?

A1: For the sake of the country...

A2: The Sarkar has duties to the people.

Q: What duties?

A: To take care of the people.

Q: How?

A: To protect them.[42]

When children were asked to elaborate ideas such as "to take care" (*dhekbhal karna*), they moved on to define them as welfare activities. Most of the responses from children were like the responses we see in the following conversation:

Q: Forget the ministers. What do these MLAs, those who have won the election, do?

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41 Most critiques on the perspectives of the civics textbooks we had mentioned in Chapter 1 make use of these ideas to portray how the textbooks are biased against particular sections of the society.

42 Discussion with children from a rural high school.
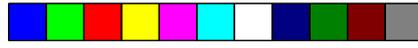
> A: Their duty... they have to develop the region from where they have won the election.
>
> Q: Do they do anything else?
>
> A: Build roads and so on...[43]

We wanted to confirm if lawmaking was "missed" by children because they did not immediately "recollect" the information in the textbook. The pre-framed question was designed precisely to serve this need. The list contained five ideas from which children had to select the most important responsibility of their representatives and provide explanations for their choice.[44] It was observed that children usually selected one of the first two welfare activities. When a few groups did select lawmaking, they explained laws as a necessary procedure to implement specific welfare activities.

It is not surprising that it is precisely this idea of a welfare role that has caught the imagination of the people regarding the functions of the Sarkar. Ironically, this was the reason put forward by the MLAs of Andhra Pradesh for not attending the sittings of the legislative house. They, too, considered themselves "welfare providers" rather than lawmakers:

> In the State Assembly, there are a dozen members like him who have not yet opened their mouths... Assembly records show that the only time they spoke was when they took the oath as MLAs in December 1994. Since then, the assembly has had 14 sessions lasting 191 days. Even the advent of television coverage of the assembly proceedings has failed to enthuse these members.
>
> The legislators dismiss charges that they are not taking their role seriously. "*Why should I speak in the house when I know how to take care of my people*," argues Moola Reddy.

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43 Discussion with children from a rural high school.

44 The list included the following ideas: 1) Making roads and providing water facilities. 2) Complaining about the problems in their region in the house. 3) Asking questions in the house. 4) Representing the views of their political party in the house. 5) Participating in the discussions related to lawmaking in the house.

... M. Vijaypal Reddy vowed after winning the Narayankhed seat that he would win it a second time. That is a tall order since nobody has won the seat in consecutive elections. "*So, I keep a low profile in Hyderabad, stay away from the Assembly and concentrate on developing my backward constituency.*"

... Others are brash enough to admit that attending the Assembly session is a waste of time. "*Quite often issues raised in the house are irrelevant,*" says Y. T. Prabhakar Reddy.[45]

Identifying Laws and Lawmakers

In such a situation, the problem that remains unresolved is: How and what element of law do children understand? Whom do they visualise as lawmakers? On some occasions, when this question was specifically put across, they identified the Sarkar, Vidhan Sabha or Lok Sabha as the lawmaking bodies. Identifying lawmakers using these collective terms is justified. However, in this context children did not seem to visualise the role of representatives clearly. Except for the class 7 children of a rural school and one urban and one rural high school group, all other groups in these categories identified lawmaking as taking place in a legislative house or used some collective terms, such as the Sarkar. *It was significant that some groups differentiated the Sarkar itself from the legislative houses and representatives.*

The explanation given by the rural class 7 children varied from one group to another. We noted that in order to explain the process of lawmaking, children spoke about the role of the Parliament

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45 A. K. Menon, "Mum's the Word", *India Today*, 07 September 1998 (emphasis in the original). It is true that the legislators rarely take pride in saying they are lawmakers. Rather, they list down the welfare activities taken up by them. A casual look at the advertisements produced by Directorate of Information and Public Relation of any government would inform us that this is true about the governments as well. For example, look at *The Hindu* of 15 August 2001, which carries advertisements of Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana, U.P., Jharkhand, and Orissa governments. The advertisements proclaim the success of these governments in improving the lot of the people during the previous year.

more often than that of the Vidhan Sabha. Some groups had a hierarchical notion of lawmaking. They began from the local administration, moving to the upper levels: Collector $\Rightarrow$ Chief Minister $\Rightarrow$ Lok Sabha $\Rightarrow$ Rajya Sabha $\Rightarrow$ and the President along with the Cabinet. At the end, the President was supposed to make the final decision. One group that spoke in this manner thought of the Cabinet in terms of the textbook image of the traditional panchayat body consisting of "five members". It was in consultation with these "five members" that laws were made. The terms in this conversation were arranged using the common sense idea of hierarchy.

Another group associated the role of lawmaking with the Chief Justice and Parliament but was unable to explain how exactly laws were made. In another rural class 7 group, a section argued that law was equivalent to the Constitution, which could not be changed. The role of the "political party" was emphasised in another conversation. A boy first said that a bill is discussed within the party itself before it goes to the house. Students also felt that the opinion of the "people" was collected before putting forward a bill. Here the role of the ruling party and the opposition, as well as the decisive role of the majority, went unexplained.

One reason for the difficulty in explaining the process of lawmaking could be unfamiliarity with actual laws. Identifying laws or bills may not be an easy task even for adults. In almost every group, children were asked to give examples of laws. Often they would resort to imaginary examples such as "Do not spit on the road," "Do not cut trees," etc. A few groups identified laws from their textbooks, such as "One can vote at the age of 18" or ideas from the Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles, like "There shall be no child labour," without making distinctions between them.

A few groups mentioned a bill that was being discussed in the Parliament during those days, i.e. the bill asking for 33 percent reservation for women. Most often, children, even at high school level, could not explain in what context or where this reservation

was to be executed. Overall, images of law were very, very weak. Children's identification of actual bills/laws did not go beyond that of the women's reservation bill. Another actual law that was identified was one about the Lokayukt. The class 10 group that mentioned it was also able to explain what this law implied.

Some groups associated laws with welfare activities. One could argue that this was so because children had the money bill in mind, though this argument would be a bit far-fetched. Yet, it is important to remember that children associate the Sarkar mostly with welfare activities and this dominant notion must have been guiding this particular explanation.

Another strong image of law emerges from the understanding of crime. Law is often visualised in this particular context. Here the role of the police or the experiences children have had about rules and punishments seem to provide them with this construction of the idea of law.

The rural class 7 groups did not identify any actual bills/laws. They mostly used their imagination, and their ideas of "violation of laws" seemed to be guiding them. One of them even said that the purpose of making laws is to stop crime. The best discussion we had went as follows:

Q: OK. On what things do they make laws?

A: One is on tax matters.

Q: Yes, that is the budget. (It was discussed earlier.)

A: —

Q: Think for a while. You know it?

A: —

Q: Who casts the votes?

A: Those above the age of 18.

Q: Would there be a law regarding it?

A: Yes. Those mentally retarded and criminals and bankrupt

cannot cast their votes.

Q: They are not allowed to vote...?

A: And foreigners, those who are not Indians, they too cannot vote.

Q: Yes, this is the law. Can you think of more laws like this?

A: —

Q: Can they make some new laws?

A: Yes, they can be made.

Q: Can be made? By whom?

A: Earlier... like... now the Prime Minister made a law. Earlier, ministers could not be punished. Now they have made a new law. Everybody should be equal before the law.

Q: In what way?

A: Like... now Laloo Yadav had done big *ghotala* (fraud). Earlier, he could not have been punished.

Q: Earlier there was no punishment...?

A: Yes. Now a law has been made.

Q: And are there other laws?

A: —

Q: Now something about reservation was going on... 33 percent is necessary...

A: Women's.

Q: Suppose one has to make some law like this. Then what happens? How does it happen? Can you explain?

A: —[46]

Children do not have enough information about actual laws, and even when these are named, they cannot explain them. They do not differentiate between the customs or rules they obey and the laws. One dominant feature associated with the law is in the

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46 Discussion with children from a rural high school.

context of its violation. Further, using collective terms like the Sarkar or naming legislative houses does not mean that they can see the role played by their representatives.

Analysis of the Text

We shall now take a closer look at the textbook passages on lawmaking. This exercise is limited to an analysis of the textbook for class 7 for reasons of space. The following section comes under the sub-heading "Functions" in Chapter 7 titled "Our Parliament in Action":

> The Parliament makes laws for the whole country. It is the supreme lawmaking body in the country. Every year, its first session begins with an address by the President. There are two types of bills – Money Bills and bills other than Money Bills. Any bill relating to income and expenditure is called a Money Bill. A Money Bill cannot be introduced in the Rajya Sabha. It must first be introduced in the Lok Sabha. After it is passed in the Lok Sabha, the Money Bill is sent to the Rajya Sabha. The bills that are not Money Bills can be introduced in either House of the Parliament. Every bill introduced in the Parliament has to go through three readings. In the first reading, copies of the bill are given to the members. The minister or any member who introduces the bill gives a general speech explaining the purposes of the bill. In the second reading, a general clause-by-clause discussion on the bill takes place. The members who support the bill argue why the bill is important and necessary. The members who oppose it criticise the bill. At this stage changes in the bill may be suggested by the members. Some of these changes may be accepted by the House. In the third reading, the bill as a whole is finally discussed and put to vote. If the majority of members are in its favour, the bill is passed. This procedure is followed in both the Houses. When both the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha have passed the bill, it is sent to the President for his signature. Generally, bills are passed in the Parliament by a simple majority. That means, if 100 members are present in the house and 51 members are in favour and 49 are against, the bill is said to have been passed by a simple majority. You have earlier read that changes or amendments can be made in the Constitution. To pass these changes a special majority is necessary. For example, for some changes a two-thirds majority of the Parliament is required.

...Thus, we see that the Parliament performs very important functions. Firstly, it makes laws on a variety of subjects.[47]

The passage moves on to summarise other functions of the Parliament. It is a long paragraph giving a very brief abstract of the entire lawmaking process. It makes little attempt to differentiate the three terms – "bill", "law" and "amendment". The only distinction it makes is that between "other bills" and "money bills". Considering the fact that it is a textbook for class 7 children and that it is for the first time that they come across such terms, one would have expected at least some examples of the laws and amendments in this chapter.

Further, the textbook's explanation of the three stages is such that it appears to be a very "neat and clean" process. Actually, several aspects of the process go unexplained. The "clause-by-clause discussion" is one of them. One can make sense of these words only when it is understood why this discussion is important and what difference it would make if some clauses are altered.

Similarly, the textbook uses the term "three readings", which would not be clear to children. It leaves out any possible reasons for opposing bills and laws and does not explain why there can be a difference of opinion or debate. It overlooks debates in the Parliament and the determining role played by the interest/ ideology of political parties in such situations.

One should note that the passage attempts to explain what a simple majority is but, again, that is done without linking it to the notion of political parties. The idea of a simple majority is not used any more in any form in the exercises or questions. The notion of a "special majority" is also left unexplained. The passage appears to be precise, but it does not make clear why or how the concept of majority becomes significant in a democratic system. This seems to be a serious shortcoming, because the rule of the majority is a crucial element in the functioning of a democratic state.

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47 Muley et al, op. cit., pp. 29-30.

The passage also refers to an "already studied" procedure for amending the Constitution. The only description of it is as follows:

> ...But it is not unchangeable. In fact, in the Constitution itself a procedure is laid down by which changes can be brought about. Such changes are called amendments. These amendments are made to remove the difficulties that arise from time to time. For example, new states of Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh and Goa were created. Delhi was made the National Capital Territory. These required suitable changes in the Constitution.[48]

Here the expectation is that a child will understand what amendments mean and why the need for them would arise. However, it would be difficult to make sense of the idea that the creation of new states is a measure to "remove problems that arise from time to time". It is expected that children will associate such an idea with the process of lawmaking. Considering that this is the only passage explaining constitutional amendments, this expectation is unreasonable. What also goes unexplained is how amendments are related to democracy or why a change in the Constitution demands a special majority.

At another point in the text attempt is made to show the linkage between democracy, election, law, and role of the citizens:

> In such elections the representatives are elected by the people. The elected representatives make the laws for the benefit of the people. These laws govern the people. And the people obey these laws. *This is democracy*. In democracy, the government is formed by the representatives of the people. If the people are not satisfied with the working of the government, they do not vote it to power in the next elections. Our Constitution *sets up* such a government in India.[49]

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48 Ibid., pp. 10-11. This paragraph occurs in the third chapter of the textbook entitled "Chief Features of the Constitution". The chapter comes before the idea of lawmaking is introduced in the textbook.

49 Ibid., p. 10 (emphasis added). This passage and the one quoted earlier are from the same chapter on the Constitution. Thus, the emphasis in the textbook is on showing how a document, viz. the Constitution, was able to provide the system.

One may completely disagree with the definition of democracy in this passage at a theoretical level, which we shall overlook in this analysis. However, it is important to note that the emphasis is on explaining the role of the Constitution in *making or sustaining* democracy. Democracy is defined with the help of elections and lawmaking. The role of the people in this context is to "elect" their representatives *who are the lawmakers*. Thus, the working of the government does not go beyond the notion of lawmaking. And yet, the text does not explain the idea of law in detail in the chapters on the Parliament. Instead, what it usually talks about is the Union, the State and the Concurrent Lists.

As such, there is the absence of an explanation in the textbook on the role of the representatives and on why laws are significant. In almost every chapter, the Constitution is quoted and its role in "providing" structures is heavily emphasised. However, the role of the citizens and other elements of the society and state are neglected.[50]

About the state legislature, the textbook argues as follows:

> In earlier chapters you have read how bills are passed. All bills that are passed by the State legislatures are required to receive the assent of the Governor. The Governor has the power to keep any bill for the consideration of the President. Sometimes, the Governor can himself pass some orders. These orders are called ordinances.[51]

This explanation assumes that children have understood the *three-readings* step in the Parliament and *expects that this knowledge should be applied* in the context of the Vidhan Sabha. The textbook quickly moves on to explain the role of the Governor

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50 The high school textbook has a more complex explanation. Nevertheless, here too one can note the parallel between the Constitution and the textbook passages. For example, while describing the money bill Kaviraj uses almost the same language as in the Articles 109 and 110 of the Constitution.

51 Muley et al., op. cit., p. 39.

and ordinances. Why this role is important or what the relation between law and ordinances is goes unexplained.

On the whole, what one needs to understand is that passages in the textbook are not organised to explain a specific idea. Only a careful reading and attempts to see the linkages, as we have done here, can make sense of what the authors want to convey.

Process of Lawmaking

Broadly, the following ideas were covered as we explored how children have understood the process of lawmaking:

- The collective process of lawmaking.
- The process of debate.
- The procedure of passing bills, especially the role of the majority.
- The role of political parties.

Most groups of children failed to talk about the notion of the majority with any clear understanding. Only a few groups were able to explain the process of debates. It was usually our leading questions that made them imagine a house and the possible arguments involved in the passing of bills. When the imaginary situation was not used, children would say "the bill has to be passed" in the house, without referring to the members of the house. About amending the laws, they thought it was done by some other institutions or authority.[52] This shows that the idea that lawmaking is a function of the legislative house is not entirely clear to them.

Looking at a few instances in this context would be useful. In the beginning of the following discussion, children tried to recall

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52 The following statement was used for discussions regarding lawmaking: "According to The Child Marriage Restriction Act the bridegroom should be at least 21 years of age and the bride should be at least 18 years of age. It is a criminal offence for a boy to get married before the age of 21 and for a girl to marry before the age of 18 years."

the information in the textbook on the process of lawmaking:

Q: Now tell us how laws are made.

A1: Law, that...

A2: (To one another as they try to recollect the text) The bill is passed, that section. How is the bill passed?

A1: Sir, first they have a constitutional election. Then all those MLAs, like Tukkojirao Pawar from here, they each get a vote. Then they read their copies of the bill. Who knows what they do? Nobody told us that. In the third round, everybody comes together and places the proposal and, following the rules, they make laws.[53]

They clearly say, "We don't know what happens in these sessions." This is indicative of the detached and impersonal fashion in which the textbook deals with the topic. What the textbooks present is a schematised format of the actual process.

The following discussion with an urban group shows the way children visualise how a bill would be necessary to do a welfare project. Almost like the explanation in the textbook, their description of the process was impersonal, although they did add to it notions such as the "opposition". The guiding principle, while talking of the "opposition", did not emerge in relation to ideologies but as lack of enough information. When asked to elaborate on ideas like the majority, they seemed to fumble:

Q: What is a bill?

A1: Bill, meaning, in a sense, we want to make a request. Like repairing this road, which has big potholes. And a dam must also be constructed in the middle. (*This child uses the word dam to mean a bridge*.) Meaning, make it easy. And there is more advantage in making it with a double lane.

Q: Would there be a bill for it?

A2: Yes.

A3: Like there are different parties. They want to discuss with the

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53 Discussion with class 7 children from an urban school.

Prime Minister and parties and ministers... What they can do about it, what they have to do, what they will do.

A2: (Prompting) The Cabinet.

A1: What happens in it? All this in the Parliament... They keep it in the house.

A2: Make a bill like this.

A3: Then they give it to the head of the Parliament. They will discuss all these matters with the opposition parties and so give their views about it and try to convince everyone.

A2: The positive points in it, they are majority-wise. Then they will pass it. It will be done.

A3: After that it goes to the President. After it is signed, it becomes law.

A2: And that law is enforced by the executive.

Q: So then, would there be a bill to make a road?

A1: The bill would be there.

A2: The law would be there.

A3: If you request. If you make a request and you need that very badly, then there would be a bill. Otherwise... That is, if it's not so...[54]

One element that seemed to confuse many groups is the houses through which a law has to pass. When asked to describe the process, children visualised it to be taking place in the Parliament and seldom referred to the Vidhan Sabha, as can be seen in the following instance where a child attempted to explain the process through which the reservation bill could be passed. It is clear that the child did not seem to make a distinction between the Vidhan Sabha and Rajya Sabha:

Q: That means... OK. Are laws made in the state legislature too?

A: If the state legislature agrees that this law should be made, then it will go to the Lok Sabha, and if the Lok Sabha passes it and if the people of the Lok Sabha want it, that it should be

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54 Discussion with children from an urban high school.
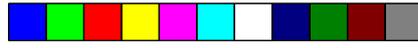
there, then this law will go to the President.

Q: So in the beginning people from the legislative assembly would say we need this law and a bill would be made...?

A: The President and the Chief Minister. Only through the consent of the President a bill... Or it's not a bill until it comes from the legislative assembly to the Lok Sabha and from the Lok Sabha to the President.

Q: Let us slow down... just explain. Suppose this is a bill for reservation for women, then what would happen?

A: At first with the Chief Minister, through the Chief Minister something could be done in the legislative assembly.

Q: OK. Something could have happened in the Vidhan Sabha. Then...?

A: —

Q: Then what would happen?

A: This is in the Vidhan Sabha. If people in the Vidhan Sabha agree that there should be reservation for women, then there would be voting. Then it would go to the Lok Sabha. If the Lok Sabha agrees on it, then it would go to the President. The President has to sign it. If he does not agree, then he would send it back. To the Vidhan Sabha. If he feels there are some errors in it, he would send it to the Vidhan Sabha. Then those people who are in the Vidhan Sabha, they will feel there are problems in it. That is why the President has returned it to us. If there are some errors in it from their side, then they will correct them. Otherwise, they would return it to the Lok Sabha and if the Lok Sabha passes it, then it goes to the President. Now it is compulsory for the President to sign it.

Q: There is a Vidhan Sabha in every state, in Karnataka, in Maharashtra. So, would this bill go through all these houses? This bill that is to be made on women's reservation, would it go though all these states and then to the Lok Sabha?

A: No. It would be fixed up earlier, which Vidhan Sabha would have it. And what to do in this Vidhan Sabha and Lok Sabha.[55]

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55 Discussion with children from an urban middle school.

Another urban high school group had described a hierarchical pattern while identifying the lawmakers.[56] This group was from the same school as the groups that identified correctly the process given in the textbook. But their notion of lawmaking changed when we gave them the pre-framed question about law.

Lawmaking roles were attributed now to the minister, the Speaker, the President, the Collector, and the Chief Minister, etc. Children used their imagination to work out an order, to make sense out of a crowd of terms. This was different from the mode of lawmaking they had explained earlier. In their view, people give a suggestion first to the Collector, who recommends it to the Chief Minister. Then it is given to the MLA who puts it up in the house during the question-answer session. After that, the Speaker sends it to the President. If the proposal gets approval "by passing", it becomes a law.

Another student added that the ministry/minister related to the law would take up an active role in proposing the law. One of them attributed the role of forwarding suggestions to the MLA and another to the minister. For example, when they were asked to think about how the suggestion of abolishing the Board examination for class 10 could be made into a law, they attributed the role of forwarding suggestions to the education minister.

Another group failed to recollect the initial stages of the lawmaking process, but it could recollect the role played by the President. At the same time, it seemed to mix up the implementation and the making of laws. The group said that a law is made in consultation with the President and then implemented. From its viewpoint, a law could be made by the Prime Minister in consultation with the President.

At the beginning of the conversation, the students were able to talk about Jawaharlal Nehru when I asked them to identify his portrait on the wall. So, in order to elicit their notion of lawmaking, they were asked questions about how the first Prime Minister

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56 Discussion with children from an urban high school.

and the first President might have consulted each other on lawmaking. They could not explain it in detail, although they agreed with the example. Further, they added "other leaders from all over", and then the "Governor" and the "Chief Minister", etc., to the list.

It is quite possible that these children were influenced by the information given in the textbook about the role of the Prime Minister in advising the President on the appointment of ministers, and were applying that knowledge in this context too. Textbooks usually put it as "on the advice of the Prime Minister the President appoints other Ministers":

Q: Does he consult only the President...?

A: And the Governor.

Q: And he does not tell anybody? Directly executes it, is that so?

A: —

Q: (On the wall) This was the first Prime Minister. Did he do like this?

A: Yes.

Q: He with some... Who was the first President?

A1: Radhakrishnan.

A2: Not Radhakrishnan.

Q: Then?

A: Dr. Rajendra Prasad.

Q: So he directly consulted Dr. Rajendra Prasad and then it was implemented?

A: First he must have called all the leaders from everywhere.

Q: What do you mean by leaders from everywhere?

A: All the Chief Ministers and other leaders, all of them.

Q: OK. And then...?

A: Consults the Governor, the Chief Minister, leaders and the law is made.

Q: (Referring to the textbook) What do you think?

A: The Governor is made by the President. The Governor signs on the Vidhan Sabha thing.

Q: Not that. There are some three readings. Three readings of the bill... It is read three times in the Vidhan Sabha... Is there anything like that in the Lok Sabha?... Where is the Lok Sabha, and the Rajya Sabha?

A: At Delhi and Bhopal.

Q: Do they read any bills?

A: —

Q: Does your textbook say that after the bill is passed it becomes a law?

A: No.[57]

This passage clearly shows that when children are asked about procedural details, the crucial processes are lost and they try to arrange terms in some commonsensical way. This is what these children did when we pressed them for an answer. This also happened with another urban class 7 group when we asked children to apply their knowledge. The role of power and authority becomes prominent here and outshines the perception of democratic participation of the people.

While explaining the process of lawmaking, children stop at one point: "is signed by the President and then it is implemented". This is precisely where the textbook also stops. The only other images children might evoke to discuss the idea were seen in statements like "One should spread the necessary information among the public," or "It becomes the duty of the people to obey laws."

Generally speaking, children are unable to give any details about specific laws. The information they have regarding actual laws is very limited. This is unlike their knowledge of events such as elections where we always got a good narrative from them.

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57 Discussion with children from a rural middle school.

Normally, elections are an event that happens once in five years. Thus, a child who moves from middle to high school (covering a period of five years) is likely to see, at best, two elections. On the other hand, the proceedings of the legislative houses are on during the year (a minimum of three sessions a year), and a major part of the representatives' time is expected to be spent on "lawmaking". Yet, whenever children are able to identify actual laws and how they were made, they always pick up examples from the Parliament. Examples from the state legislatures are completely absent. In spite of the frequency of such sessions, they do not find a place among children's images of the Sarkar.

We may also mention that when children see events as shown on TV, it is not necessary that they are able to make meaningful linkages between the visuals and the narratives provided along with them. This happens because TV is an adult medium.[58]

It follows that while teaching concepts such as law, it may be necessary to build up some images regarding law before talking about the processes of lawmaking. Similarly, it is important to discuss the need for law, and to explore the significance of democratic governance in the process used to make laws. At the same time, however, we are not quite sure how extensively one can conduct this discussion at the middle school level, an issue that we shall take up in a later section.

We had some fairly long discussions on how children visualised the process of implementation of the law or the welfare activities. We will not elaborate them here. However, we may mention that children described the process of implementation of the welfare activities through their individual experiences, and a strong view of how power works through some individuals in power guiding the activities was clearly visible in their

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58 C. Cullingford, in his study *Children and Society: Children's Attitude to Politics and Power* (Cassel, London, 1992, p. 147) brings out this idea in a very effective manner.

descriptions. The implementation was always thought to be done by "spreading the idea" or "giving orders to all".

Some possible explanations for children's difficulties in understanding the process of lawmaking could be summarised as follows:

- Absence of clarity about the differences between laws of the state and the usual customs of their own society, the rules they obey in schools, etc.

- The association children make between laws of the state and ideas like crime and punishment, including the idea of the violation of the laws, which they pick up from the society around them.

When children argue that it is a law "not to spit on the road" and that "only those above the age of 18 can vote", they do not see the differences between the two. What they observe in their own schools is that when they disobey the "rules", they are punished. Similarly, many of them seem to visualise law only in the context of its violation, with which images of the police and judiciary are associated. For a child, it would not be easy to translate this nebulous understanding of law into the laws made by institutions whose names they come across, may be for the first time, only in the textbooks.

Basic Structure

The concept of the various organs of the Sarkar is a significant concept in learning about political institutions. This was probably the most difficult concept that we had taken up for discussion. But it was necessary to evaluate this concept because the usual pattern in which textbooks classify political institutions adopts the framework of the three organs of the Sarkar. They are identified as the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. The textbooks treat various concepts related to each of these organs and the personnel associated with them as separate entities. The attempt to bring out the overlap between these three organs or

show their linkages is extremely weak.

Our group discussions showed that children were unable to go any further than the textbook definition.[59] We did this exercise mostly in the high school groups, so their poor performance shows the complexity of the ideas involved. Children find it difficult to translate the memorised textbook explanations into concrete examples of these terms.

Children often look for solutions by splitting up these terms into their parts. By doing this they at times hit upon the correct explanation but mostly they come across misguiding clues. This leads them to associate these officials with wrong institutions. For example, in one conversation an attempt was made to link courts (*nyayalaya*) to the category of judiciary (*nyayapalika*). Children similarly linked the office of Nagarpalika to Karyapalika because it is called Nagar Karyalaya. They interpreted the duty of the legislative wing as "*vyavastha karna*", that is, to arrange welfare activities. Thus, here they give an altogether different meaning to the word legislative: to organise. Such misconceptions could also partly be attributed to the abstract nature of the roles associated with the personnel working in such institutions:

Q: In the executive?

A: Nagar Panchayat.

Q: And...

A: —

Q: How would you classify the Prime Minister – in the legislature or the executive?

A: In the executive and the legislature.

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59 The pre-framed question designed to test children's knowledge of this concept included the list of following terms: Collector, teacher, Session Judge/Chief Justice, lawyer, the police, MP, postman, Tehsildar, Prime Minister, Patwari, President, Governor, Mayor, panchayat president, Chief Minister, BDO, MLA. Children were expected to identify the organs of the Sarkar to which each of them belonged and give reasons for their answer.

Q: In both...?

A: Yes.

Q: What do you include in the executive?

A: *Ve vyavastha karte hain.* (They arrange things.)

Q: Who does it?

A: The Prime Minister is elected for arranging things.

Q: What type of things?

A: Like... there is some city... then arrange things for it.[60]

A look at the specific terms used during our discussions would aid us in understanding the problems students face. Terms like Collector, Tehsildar and BDO are easily identifiable as roles in the executive wing of the government.[61] Familiarity or unfamiliarity with the work of the Tehsildar, for example, could be a hindrance in the attempt to classify this term. Urban children

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60 Discussion with children from a rural middle school.

61 Among the three roles mentioned here, it is only the role of the BDO which gets a place in the textbook. "The state governments are responsible for the implementation of these programmes... At each block level a Block Samiti functions. To assist this Samiti in all its work there is an officer who is called the Block Development Officer (BDO). The BDO knows all about the village development programme. There are many officials to assist him in his task. These officials are experts in agriculture, cooperation, animal husbandry and education. The BDO supervises the work of these officials." (Muley et al, op. cit., p. 13.) There are various problems with this sort of discussion of these officers. One cannot easily fail to notice the fact that this discussion comes in the context of a chapter called "Rural Uplift and Community Development", nor the way in which a rural community is sketched in this chapter. The passage overlooks if children are familiar with the Block Parishad and the Block Samitis. Those terms are taught to children in the chapter on Panchayati Raj, which comes after three more chapters. One is left guessing what the BDO would be doing by "assisting" the Block Samiti. Thus, in some ways the only executive role which has been described in the textbooks does not seem to be of any help to children.

were found to be unfamiliar with the terms, compared to rural children. The BDO was, however, unknown to most rural groups, too. Other terms like teacher and postman should also have been classified as part of the executive if children had understood the executive in a wider sense of the term. But that did not seem to happen.

Similarly, it became a difficult task for children to classify terms which describe functions that have overlaps with one another. The role of the Chief Minister and the Prime Minister as representatives – as MLA and MP – and thus their dual role of being simultaneously a part of the executive and that of the legislature is difficult to recognise. One cannot deny that certain terms have become familiar to children. But while addressing complex concepts such knowledge is not used. The classification of institutions in the textbook does not help children in viewing or categorising the officials associated with them:

> Q: MLA?
>
> A1: Executive.
>
> A2: Legislature.
>
> Q: Why?
>
> A: MLAs make the ministers.
>
> Q: So...?
>
> A: Executive.[62]

This conversation could have been considered correct if the group was arguing that ministers are in the executive and MLAs in the legislative wing of the government. However, this level of abstraction does not seem to have been attained even by high school children. The other terms used in the context were lawyer and the police. Every group was sure that the Session Judge or Chief Justice belonged to the judiciary. All groups also identified the lawyer to be part of the judiciary. In fact, the term lawyer

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62 Discussion with children from a rural high school.

was used in the list to verify whether children could differentiate it from the judiciary. So, one can assume that children associated lawyers with the judiciary because they are seen in courts.

From children's explanations, it is very clear that they confused the police as being part of the judiciary. This confusion is partly due to the fact that the police investigate a case and frame charges. The police work in close relation with the judiciary. Crime, justice, and punishment are ideas that children link with the judiciary, and the police and lawyers are viewed as being essential to its functioning. The maintenance of law and order is not the only function that children associate with the police.

The difficulties children face in classifying functionaries and institutions in terms of the organs of the Sarkar could also be because the textbooks describe only the upper hierarchy of the institutions or individuals. Further, they are almost silent about the kind of people these individuals interact with. This is especially so with regard to the executive arm of the Sarkar. The probable reason for such a selection of knowledge is the belief that textbook descriptions of institutions should follow the Constitution rather than the experiential reality of the child.

Here, it would be interesting to note how children describe the interaction of the local and the upper hierarchies. They observe functions through a personalised channel, often in terms of the kind of role they play, such as providing financial support and/or approval for various projects:

Q: Suppose a road has to be built here. Who would do it?

A: They will make it.

Q: Who?

A: Those who had won.

Q: How?

A: Would provide money and make it.

Q: Who?
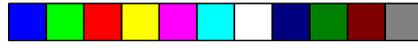
A: Sajjan Singh Verma (name of the local MLA) will.

Q: Where would he get money?

A: From further ahead... the Sarkar gives it.

Q: Who is this Sarkar which is further ahead?

Q: Whose Sarkar is it?

A: —

Q: To which Sarkar does Sajjan Singh Verma belong?

A: —

Q: What do you mean by "further ahead"?

A: It will come from Delhi.

Q: Why would they give money from Delhi?

A: To construct the road.[63]

The local area is clearly identified and the rest is "*aage*" or further ahead, from where the finances have to be arranged. This is not a textbook notion of the executive but a notion distilled from real events. In such situations, we do not find children associating the role of providing money, etc., with any department or ministry. We questioned their explanation of "*aage*" as being the Sarkar from whom money was to be obtained. What if the representative was himself or herself a part of that Sarkar? In answer to this question, they remained silent, and then explained that this "*aage Sarkar*" was in Delhi.

However, some of them felt uncomfortable about their own explanation. In the hierarchy, they identified two important roles: those of the MLA and the Chief Minister. They explained that the Chief Minister collects the amount necessary for his region from the Prime Minister, which is divided among the ministers to solve the problems of the people:

Q: Now the Sarkar has been formed. What all does it do? Or any Sarkar...?

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63 Discussion with children from a rural middle school. Similar examples were seen in discussions with urban and rural high school groups.

A1:   Develop the cities.

A2:   Water, electricity, to provide facilities for the farmers.

Q: How do they do it?

A: They would give all their problems.

Q: Who will give them?

A: Those who had stood (in election).

Q: Whom would they give?

A: Digvijay Singh would give money.

Q: Digvijay Singh would give the money directly?

A: Yes.

Q: And...?

A: They will do the work.

Q: Suppose you need a hand-pump in Tonk Kala. You asked Sajjan Singh Verma. Sajjan Singh Verma asked Digvijay Singh. Digvijay Singh gave money to Sajjan Singh Verma. Now they will instal the hand-pump here. Is that so?

A: No.

Q: Then?

A: It would go to the Prime Minister.

Q: Who is the Prime Minister?

A: Atal Behari Vajpayee.

Q: So, we have to install a hand-pump. We demand this from Sajjan Singh. Sajjan Singh demands this from Digvijay Singh. Digvijay Singh would demand this from Atal Behari Vajpayee.

A: —

Q: What is the procedure?

A: The Prime Minister would give it directly to Digvijay Singh. Different regions have a fixed amount. You have to give it to do the work for the region.

Q: What is the region for Digvijay Singh?

A: Madhya Pradesh.
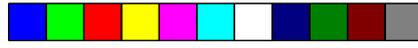
Q: Are there any other regions like this?

A: (Silence) No.

Q: What do you understand by region?

A: —

Q: Suppose it has been reached, then what would happen?

A: They would give it to the Sarpanch.

Q: Would it be given directly?

A: Yes.

Q: What would Sajjan Singh Verma do?

A1:   Chief Minister gives to Sajjan Singh Verma. Sajjan Singh gives it to the Sarpanch.

A2:   Sajjan Singh would see the problems of the village and give money to the panchayat and they would do the work.[64]

They defined region as the state of Madhya Pradesh but could not identify any other state. The money necessary to implement various projects, in their view, reached the Panchayat through elected representatives. Largely, the description given here is of a personalised nature. What is also striking in these examples is that they come from high school children. They also attempted to give some reason, like the specific region being under different authorities at various levels of hierarchy.

While concluding this section, we may note that the framework being used to describe various elements in the Sarkar does not seem to have been clearly perceived. Part of the reason for this failure could lie in the fact that the textbooks describe only the upper hierarchy and leave out the local level functionaries and institutions. This leads to a situation where children try to visualise the actual functioning of the Sarkar through various personalised channels.

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64 Discussion with children from a rural high school.

3

Conclusions and Alternatives

Redefining the Sarkar

The dominant image of the Sarkar among children is constructed on the understanding that power is concentrated in the hands of certain powerful individuals who are expected to be benevolent. The access to and the functioning of the institutions and persons associated with the Sarkar is seen as working through a personalised and hierarchical order. The ideas and images children pick up from the milieu around them make them aware that these institutions and persons often fail to perform their functions. The ideals of the textbooks and the images from the actual political world often do not fully corroborate each other. This is a disturbing consequence to emerge from the teaching/learning of the texts which claim to contribute to the making of the citizens of a democracy.

Stress on Recollection

It is a general practice in the current teaching methodology in schools to evaluate children only on the basis of their ability to recollect. We noticed during our discussions with children that groups from the middle schools seemed to recollect better than the high school groups. However, they were at a complete loss while trying to apply the ideas. They did not seem to be interested

in doing this. Here, the performance of the high school groups was remarkably different from that of the middle school groups. Often, the middle school groups did not seem to perceive the need for or the advantage of applying these ideas. At the level of curiosity and motivation, the two groups appeared to be quite different from each other.

The performance of the high school groups, when taken together, did not seem to show improvement when the concepts were repeated. Rather, they were more conscious of and interested in the events in the political world around them. Their ability to explain or grapple with the processes we were investigating was often a reflection of what they had observed in the context of actual events.

Rural and Urban Groups

There were some marked differences in the exposure that the rural middle school children had had in comparison with their urban counterparts. This was obvious from the superior knowledge shown by the urban groups in the discussion on political parties and ideas related to law. However, the urban children appeared to be unsure of the concepts related to the administrative structures in the countryside. The rural middle school groups did seem to catch up on these ideas by the time they reached high school. At the high school level, at least some of the urban children appeared to have become cynical about politics, whereas their rural counterparts showed an active interest in the political questions.

Gap between Ideal and Real

A question that is of critical importance in this study is the question whether the ideas children gather from the real political world and their textbook knowledge corroborate each other, and if so, then how does that happen. Our investigations reveal that in the case of the concepts like elections, the textbooks do not provide space for the images children pick up from the actual events.

Hence, they do not help children to verify and concretise these images. As such, it appears to us that, in addition to the conceptual knowledge they provide, the textbooks should attempt to draw a picture of the political processes as they actually take place in the milieu that surrounds the children.

The components of the knowledge drawn from different sources on complex concept areas like the formation and the functions of the Sarkar, and those relating to law, are often contradictory to each other. For example, the textbooks insist that the institutions and persons associated with the Sarkar function through democratic processes. However, what children learn from their observation is quite different. They learn that the functioning of these institutions follows hierarchical processes, and that the persons who operate through these processes behave in a personalised manner. The textbooks can identify such contradictions and cautiously discuss them, showing the tension between the ideal and the real.

The failure of the textbooks in this context can be summarised in the following manner.

One can see that the texts are terse in nature and have a Constitution-centric or legalistic approach. They fail to critically evaluate and blend the ideas or perceptions children gain from experience with what the textbooks want to teach in the legalistic framework. By sticking to this framework, the textbooks manage to keep "politics" completely outside the civics education.

The emphasis in the present textbooks is on giving factual information regarding various institutions. However, despite this information, children often fail to identify the relationships between various concepts. This happens because of the lack of examples in the textbooks from the real political world in order to present a concrete picture of these concepts. A meaningful classroom discussion should be able to connect the ideas children have learned during their socialisation to the textbook notions. This way the discussion would become a two-way interaction.
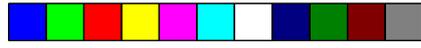
The subject matter in civics has rich possibilities for using children's everyday knowledge. But the textbooks insist on describing only the rules and regulations. Thus, one can easily say that the knowledge they provide is partial and one-sided. It is possible that this insistence on providing incomplete knowledge to children about political institutions and their functioning stems from certain prejudices that sociologists have talked about.

It is important to mention that the discussions we had with children took place in situations that were, under the circumstances, the "best" possible situations. And, similarly, the problems we have identified and described in the context of the textbooks on civics are the ones that were thrown up by discussions with students who can be said to be the "best" students available to us for this study. Given this fact, one can say that the textbooks fail to describe, explain and communicate many of the central concepts and issues regarding the nature and functions of the Sarkar.

Why "Politics" becomes "Uncivil"

As we have said before, the textbooks rely on details provided by the Constitution and, thus, what they impart is selected knowledge from the Constitution, which does not take into account the actual functioning of the institutions and the processes. At the same time, it is also true that the textbooks try to incorporate certain values and ideals into the description of these institutions and processes.

This, taken together with the fact that there is an emphasis on the ability to learn and remember what institutions are or ought to be, points to an overall failure of methodology. This failure stems primarily from the unwillingness of the textbooks to deal with, in the context of the institutions and concepts they describe, the political values and culture that operate *outside or away from* the legalistic, constitutional framework. These political values and culture constitute the elements which, in practice,

affect and modify these institutions and concepts and thus take away the purity of their idealistic form. As such, one can say that the textbooks remain in a state of withdrawal from the political world that exists outside the legalistic framework. One reason for this withdrawal can perhaps be derived from the critiques of the subject's framework. It was pointed out at the beginning of this study that these critiques suggest that civics, in treating various concepts, has not been able to free itself of the prejudices of the colonial/male/urban/middle class viewpoints.

In this context, we felt that the term used for the subject, namely "civics", which has similarities with the term "civil" carrying the sense of "being polite" or "gentlemanly", has its biases. On the other hand, the responses we received from a number of teachers, with both the urban and the rural backgrounds, during our discussions with them, revealed that they view the politics as it is practised today as "uncivil". This view of politics accrues especially from the viewers' analysis of the behaviour of the MPs, MLAs and members of panchayats, and of the way this behaviour affects the functioning of the institutions and processes described in the textbooks.

Clearly, the textbooks discuss only the "ideal types". They describe the structures and institutions as they ought to be. However, in the everyday life the functioning of these structures and institutions gets modified under the influence of powerful individuals, who derive their power partly from the political positions they hold but also from the socio-economic and cultural structures of the society. As such, the discipline of civics ought to incorporate into itself the structures, institutions and processes associated with politics as they appear from *outside* the legalistic framework. However, if they were to do this, the subject matter would not remain as it is today, and it would become difficult to call it by the name of "civics".

Towards an Alternative

We shall now explore the alternatives available for teaching the
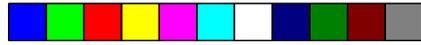
various abstract concepts involved in the functioning of political institutions.[65] It was mentioned at the outset that not only the institutions remain distant, but also the theoretical understanding necessary for comprehending their functioning is complex.[66] Our discussions with children on ideas like law and majority too brought out these complexities. Children at the middle school level do not really grapple with such issues or possess any broad images of institutions. For example, it was noticed that children have no concrete images of laws. They see and try to understand them in the context of customs and rules. The level of abstraction necessary for understanding an idea like "why law?", as against the images of rules, mores or customs, seemed to be unsatisfactory.

Syntax of Political Education

The way to look for an alternative framework could be based on the arguments of educationist Jerome S. Bruner. In his book *How Children Think and Learn*, David Wood explicates Bruner's views as follows:

> On the basis of Bruner's theory, what we would expect a child to learn and generalise are not grand, underlying logical structures but processes of self-regulation. He argues that effective teaching in school, for example, exposes children to *ways of thinking* that characterise different disciplines. The "syntax" of a subject – its formal structure, facts and "solutions" – is only one aspect of what a child needs to learn. Teaching procedures, facts, dates, formulae and so forth will not engender understanding or facilitate

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65 This is an area that is of critical importance to Eklavya for whom this study was undertaken. The particular theme for this research emerged from Eklavya's experience of developing the social science curriculum. Here we bring forth various alternative possibilities in the civics curriculum, which, however, call for a larger discussion.

66 See "Complexity of the Structures" and "Functioning of the Structures in Real Life" under "Methodology and Sample Selection" in Chapter 1.

generalisation, unless the child understands the intentions and purposes that motivate both the discipline and the people who practise and teach it. Ways of thinking, in mathematics, history, geography, or whatever, have developed to achieve certain ways of making sense of and understanding the world. Unless the child *practises* the role of being a mathematician, historian or geographer, learns the issues that excite such people, the problems that interest them and the tools that help them to resolve and solve these, the child may only learn empty tricks or procedures and will not inherit the *discipline* itself. If we accept such views on the nature of what it is children learn when they are involved in both informal and formal instructional encounters, we would expect to find important, far-reaching differences in the way children from different cultures, sub-cultures and social groups develop and learn.[67]

If one attempts to reformulate the curriculum for teaching political institutions and processes (and not civics), it would be necessary to begin from what has been pointed out in the passage quoted above.[68] However, the issue of creating a "syntax" of how the world of political institutions and processes could make children imbibe ideas for evaluating them needs to be carefully explored.

Most political scientists would probably argue that the syntax of political science education is the study of power. This particular area has been taken up in the studies of political socialisation. Many studies, like those by Greenstein and Almond and Verba,[69] attempt to evaluate children's understanding of politics as their understanding of the power relationships in peer groups, at school,

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67 David Wood, *How Children Think and Learn*, Blackwell, Massachusetts, 1995, p. 84 (emphasis in the original).

68 Though this paradigm may look attractive, civics traditionally has not been used for teaching political institutions and many writers have used "civics teaching", as against the "subject specialist approach", to evaluate the perspectives on social science curriculum. For an example, see Chapter 1 in Gary Wehlage and E. M. Anderson, *Social Studies Curriculum in Perspective: A Conceptual Analysis*, Prentice-Hall, New Jersy, 1972.

69 See footnote 8 above.

in family and in media, etc. They say that children do have experiences and capacities to visualise how power operates in these different arenas in which they interact with other people. Can this understanding be translated into the realm of experiences with regard to political institutions?

Here, it would be useful to look at a study that attempts to build a philosophical basis for teaching ideas in civics curriculum, that by Patricia White. White[70] begins with the disclaimer that she is a non-specialist in the area of education. However, while looking at the possibility of teaching politics in the curriculum, and making use of the studies from the political socialisation perspective, she argues that "there are good reasons for not delaying the introduction of political knowledge, argument and ideas, but for beginning to bring them in quite early in the child's formal and informal education."[71]

The concept of politics in the way she uses it looks into the role of power relationships children experience in their day-to-day life at school, in the family, with peer groups and so on. She says that "primary school children – from, say, six upwards – do operate with political concepts and embryonic forms of political argument."[72]

However, while the emphasis on discussing political ideas in the class appears to be appropriate, we are not sure whether these ideas can be meaningfully talked about in the context of political institutions at such an early age. In fact, while looking at the functioning of institutions in a democracy, White herself says that teaching these ideas may not be easy. As she puts it, "The problem is that the device of majority voting, seemingly indispensable to decision-making in a democracy, necessarily involves exercises of power over others. The issues it raises need to occupy a prominent place in any programme of political

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70 Patricia White, *Beyond Domination*, Routledge, London, 1983.

71 Ibid., p. 104.

72 Ibid., p. 110.

education... My own efforts at discussing the issue of majority voting, even with adult students, suggest to me that teachers may have to work quite hard before its problems are appreciated – in particular, the connection with power and with fraternity."[73]

In our view, what we need to know is what should be given priority in teaching politics and how institutions need to be analysed. We have already suggested that understanding abstract ideas like law, majority, etc., is not an easy task for children. White herself argues for "the need to make explicit the distinction between bedrock principles and basic assumptions, on the one hand, and institutions, on the other."[74] Among the bedrock principles that may need to be included, she identifies "fraternity as a value" "justice", "the idea of power and its relationship to individual", etc.[75] According to her:

> Unless the very different status of values like justice, fraternity and benevolence is distinguished from that of institutions like the British parliament, the American congress, the German Bundestag and so on, there is a danger that pupils will come to see the latter *as* democracy. Societies that have, for instance, a parliament elected on a one-person, one-vote basis, modes of decision-making which involve majority voting and no imprisonment without trial, will be regarded as democracies and any societies with different arrangements will be beyond the democratic pale. It is also likely that if people regard a collection of institutions and procedures as democracy, they will think that "making one's society more democratic" can only mean either maintaining or strengthening those institutions.[76]

While reflecting on institutions, White says that "Pupils will need to consider the broad institutional structures that might embody democratic principles." The neighbourhood groups,

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73 Ibid., p. 107.

74 Ibid., p.105.

75 Ibid., pp. 105-06.

76 Ibid., p.105 (emphasis in the original).

democratisation of the workplace and national forum are suggested as examples. Significantly, she discribes the various complexities that would emerge in this context as "...a scheme of political education which is not simply a presentation of facts about systems of government and institutions..."[77] Thus, in a certain way it has become a difficult task for the proponents of political socialisation themselves to think beyond the arena of political institutions. In any case, they have not been able to suggest a way by which the syntax of power can be used to develop meaningful curriculum.

Contemporary Political Institutions

Another approach that the textbooks can possibly adopt is to encourage an analysis of the working of the political system that has emerged in India in the post-independence period against the backdrop of ideas in the Constitution.

The current civics textbooks encourage only the memorising skills of children. The legalistic framework of the curriculum does not seem to open up any wider possibilities. However, a curriculum conceived differently could encourage the use of certain other skills such as critical thinking, applying concepts to concrete or imaginary situations, initiating debates and evaluating the views of others. It appears to us that by using and developing these skills children would get a superior understanding of the ideas and concepts laid out in the text. At the same time, they would learn the importance of critically evaluating the knowledge that is imparted to them by the textbooks and similar other sources. Thus, while developing a curricular framework, it would be necessary to keep in mind whether it is flexible enough to adapt to these expectations.

A glaring gap in the textbooks is the absence of a discussion of the relationship between the state and the society. The texts seek to explain the structures of the government as if the latter

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77 Ibid., p. 107.

is an independent entity. Thus, "the conceptualisation of the state collapses into a description of the powers of the officials."[78] Generally speaking, the textbooks carry a long description of the power of various people but meagre analysis of the processes and principles on which the structures of the government are based. The society is seen as "inactive and submissive" and little attention is paid to political conflicts and alliances within it. "...[T]he manner in which the state is constructed by society in its agendas, the way in which society subverts and reorganises state-society agendas"[79] is totally ignored.

We feel that at the middle school level the textbooks should try to build images and concretise certain ideas, whereas in the higher classes the focus should be more on discussion.[80] Similarly, the practice of treating the concept of the Sarkar on the basis of organs of government needs to be avoided. If one attempts to build images, beginning with the knowledge of the local levels of the Sarkar and then moving on to its higher levels, quite probably one could convey many ideas in the context of the institutions of the Sarkar. It would be useful to make children aware of the underlying principles and ideas that enable the institutions and structures to function. Ideas and institutions should be treated in such a way that they address children as citizens; they should not be handed out as dispassionate, factually loaded information.

The focus should be on explaining the causal relationships of the institutions of the government with the underlying ideas in the Constitution. The Constitution is essentially a political document.

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78 Neera Chandhoke, *State and Civil Society: Explorations in Political Theory*, Sage, New Delhi, 1995.

79 Ibid.

80 At present, the textbook writers have a strange logic. In class 3 itself children are introduced to political institutions. Then more and more concepts are added as they go to the higher classes. For example, in class 3 children are made to study panchayats. They study them again in class 6 and then again in class 9.

It marks a stage in the struggle for freedom and justice that began with the national movement and continues till today. It includes a statement of the goals and objectives that were worked out during our struggle for independence. All this richness of meaning and significance would be lost if the Constitution is studied only in terms of its formal procedures. The legal structure of the institutions of the government is only the bare bones of the Constitution.

Children may not fully appreciate this meaning and significance of the Constitution, but they could be given a sense of the importance of the Constitution in guiding our political life and the goals and hopes that the Founding Fathers built into it. With what perspective should we study the Constitution? We feel that it should be the perspective of a citizen of the country whose hopes and prospects are embodied in it. The clearest statement of these values is in the Preamble and the chapters on the Rights and Duties.

The functions related to institutions, such as rulemaking, the enforcement of rules, and the regulation and settlement of disputes, etc., are interconnected functions, which are carried out sometimes through particular organs of the government, and sometimes they are combined in a single functionary or institution. The theory of democratic government says that laws should be made by representative bodies that are accountable to the people. The reasons for adopting particular procedures, for example lawmaking, can also be explained in terms of the needs of democratic control. This might instil some sense into what would otherwise seem like meaningless rituals. It is important to understand different institutions in their interrelationships, all sharing in carrying out the overall obligations of the government as laid down in the Constitution. This would provide a point from which the success or failure of the institutions can be examined.

Altogether, there is a need for the text to gain wider acceptability. While it does appear appealing and, theoretically, more appropriate to place ourselves within a wider state-society interrelationship,

we have to keep it in mind that this is a contested terrain. The nature of the Indian state is liable to be variously interpreted. Therefore, a critique of the political scene in India carries the risk of being sympathetic to a particular political position. Things become even more problematic when a text that describes the nature of the Indian state is prescribed by the government. In such a situation, following the Constitution in letter and spirit appears to be a relatively non-controversial plank. Which means that if we seek even a minimum of critical space, it would have to be linked, for wider acceptance, to the ideas and debates that have been given a place in the Constitution.

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Eklavya

Eklavya, a non-governmental registered society, has been working in the fields of education and peoples' science since its inception in 1982.

Eklavya's main aim is to develop educational practices and materials that are related to a child's environment, and are based on play, activities and creative learning. In the course of our work in this area, we have discovered that efforts in schools can become effective only when children also get opportunities for creative learning in the time and space outside school. Books and magazines and other teaching aids are essential parts of such inputs.

In the past few years Eklavya has extended its area of work to include publishing. We regularly bring out the following periodicals: *Chakmak*, a monthly science magazine for children; *Srote*, a science and technology news feature; and *Sandarbh*, a bimonthly on education. In addition to titles on education and popular science and creative activity books for children, we develop and publish books on wider issues of development.