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Textbooks and Nationalist Values: Revitalizing Civic Learning in Nepali Schools

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Abstract

This study investigates the learning content of government school textbooks in Nepal, analyzing their political implications and their role in cultivating a national character. By considering the textbooks as cultural products, the research examines the learning content to explore how they contribute to the formation of national character. The content of the textbooks was purposefully selected and subjected to analysis using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The findings of the study reveal that the prescribed textbooks were crafted to promote the state's vision of national character by either emphasizing or downplaying specific values, ideologies, and belief systems, rather than fostering critical thinking and cognitive skills among learners. Three main trajectories were identified: the notion of being *Gorkhali* (synonymous with “Nepali”), reverence for the past, and the concept of national indivisibility. It is argued that the development of the learning content is not merely a pedagogical endeavor but also a political one, reflecting the state's adherence to dominant narratives. The study focused on analyzing the themes of civic learning and national character, without considering the perspectives of teachers and students regarding the content.

Keywords: Nationalist values, national character, school textbooks, citizenry

Introduction

Limited available research that concentrates on political reading and critical analysis of Nepali school textbooks, to a greater extent, attempted to only explore if there was a standard materialization of curricula and objectives. By the same token, a handful of researchers have largely focused on pedagogical implications and the transmission of values, information, culture, morality, behavior, or knowledge. However, textbooks are taught not only for sacred socialization and enrichment of cognitive and behavioral development (Lee and Collins 120; Torney-putra 33). Schools as perceived sites for cultivating national attachments and for socializing the citizenry into national framings of everyday experience have been a historical phenomenon (Anyon 54; Darom 190; Aspin and Chapman 216). Such socialization is enhanced through designing particular

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values and teaching content. One of the prominent aspects of such socialization and civic learning has ever been the act of arousing national consciousness (Epstein 50). Arousing national consciousness in or during the school years has been the political propriety of the education system and national education design. Most states view educational systems, through the discourse of teaching and learning, which involves the role of teacher, textbooks and designation of curriculum, as key channels to the manufacturing of national identity and citizenship. Schools in particular are endowed with the task of "socializing the young into an approved national past, the approving agency being the stance" (Kumar 20). However, the specific mechanisms of how national socialization unfolds in schools often largely remain a discernible niche in the available literature.

In this light, this paper examines trajectories of nationalist values and offers a political reading of textbooks of government schools. Focusing on what the content teaching aims at instilling in the minds of young learners, this paper tries to explore the role of textbooks in constructing the notion of nationhood thereby attempting to instill specific traits in students. More specifically, I argue that a choice of certain teaching content gives rise to the particular notion of the nation and inspires a form of national character. How textbooks have been used to speak the official versions of national identity and history is the basic contention of the paper.

Literature Review

The cultivation of nationalist values through textbooks has been a historically engaging site for critical scholarship (Apple, *ideology and Curriculum* 3; Freire 68-70; Prokop 88). Studies across the globe on the psychological and enduring effect of textbooks affirm that "learners, who generally attach great credibility and authority to educational materials, tend to absorb and assimilated the materials in minute details without comment, and [are] susceptible to their influence" (Lee and Collins 128). Moreover, this assimilation to educational materials, especially textbooks, and reliance on authority and credibility is further underscored by the fact that students in most schools in Nepal are educated in a traditional mode of teaching—drilling, as a major pedagogical approach (Mainali and Heck 506; Adhikary 27).

Textbooks do not always reveal the "facts"; they on many occasions can convey particular visions of social reality by emphasizing and deemphasizing certain aspects of the world. As cultural artifacts, textbooks are planned, designed and distributed by actors with real interests; textbooks, seen from a critical perspective, are power discourse (Apple, "The Politics of Knowledge" 222). In particular, states are the key actors in shaping textbooks. Textbooks are written by individual authors and often compete as economic commodities in the market, yet the "'political hand' of state textbook-adoption policies" primarily determines their content and structure (Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum* 6). In this light, a few political and critical readings so far conducted suggest that the Nepali school government textbooks have become the site of surmising religious, political, ethnic and ideological agenda to cultivate specific values. For example, the mythical content in the textbooks "is presented in such a hegemonic way that puts the convivial pictures at the front and rival ideas and values at the back"; thus, "the project of creating middle-class value is practiced through the reproduction of such mythical content (GC, "Mythic Content as Rhetoric" 43). Textbooks have historically been used as a cultural production to disseminate the discursive agenda of building a nation-state. For example, R.B. Bennike's study concluded textbooks as "only a medium for transmitting the Panchayat state's discursive representations of national space" (58). In other words, the Panchayat used textbooks to nationalize the brave past and portray the nation as an organized and harmonious space (Bennike 59). However, Bennike's study

did not explore how designing the textbook content (learning materials) is itself a power discourse. His work builds upon Pratyoush Onta's thesis, highlighting how textbooks, as politically crafted tools, served the Panchayat's agenda. The textbook compilers selected existing narratives, modifying them to portray a strong and vigorous national image (Onta 231).

Though these studies focused on how textbooks have been instrumentalized to achieve the exterior goal of keeping specific content and teaching the content, they have paid little attention to investigating the role of textbooks in cultivating the values and shaping the students' cognitive behavior and their character. In other words, the available corpus of research on critical reading of textbooks has overlooked how the role of selecting and designing the content of textbooks by (de)emphasizing certain values to nurture a national character. To address this issue, this paper analyzes the values historically regarded as the primary content of the pedagogy to define and create a national character.

Research Methodology

As the study is likely to link two disciplines— school textbooks and the socio-political context. It primarily engages Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a useful theoretical and methodological approach to deploy as an approach that provides a theoretical framework through which researchers can critique intersections of society and culture by examining the use of language in social or sociopolitical dynamics (Rogers et al. 1200). In addition, since the CDA regards any textbooks as the cultural artifact— an object of analysis shaped by political and historical parameters, this approach is appropriate to analyze the textbooks and explore a particular way of writing about the past (Wodak and Meyers 2-3). To put it succinctly, the CDA explains the trajectories of discourse produced in knowledge-making (Jäger 32-35). Moreover, it is deployed to interpret the messages mediated in the learning content. In that, the textbooks form “the larger discursive unit of text,” which testify to an understanding of language as “discourse . . . [and] as social practice determined by social structures” (Fairclough 51). The CDA provides scholars with a tested design through which how language creates inequality can be investigated, and relationships between dominant social, political and economic interests, and other hegemonies can be interpreted and analyzed (Fairclough 16).

In this research, 20 textbooks (10 Nepali and 10 Social Studies)¹ prescribed for the government schools that constitute the large discursive unit of analysis. The analysis of these texts began with a careful reading and rereading of the content selected purposively, paying a special attention to the purpose of this study identified above. Instead of constructing a coding schema to identify specific words or phrases, I used this purposefully broad, the question-based interpretive framework to allow for a detailed qualitative analysis of the meanings of selected educational units and individual lessons.

Results and Discussion

The concept of a nation is abstract until it is brought into existence by cultivating and nurturing certain shared perspectives. While the concept may undergo a continual process of reevaluation as the societal and political situations change, some of the traits are continued as legacies as major constituents of the concept to be historically transmitted to the later generations. An attempt in this respect, the Nepali school textbooks contain a variety of learning materials such as myths, biographies and national symbols: anthems, flags, animals as well as historical narratives; these learning contents are rigorously mediated as learning content to elicit powerfully felt emotive responses.

Accordingly, the learners' purview is shaped through cultural signification implied by these contents. Since textbooks are often the first, and sometimes the only, sources of knowledge that students are exposed to, and publicly treated as authoritative and authentic sources of what students should know, they become a special cultural space for maintaining the core values of the nations. Then, textbooks in the modern world are one of the important and ensuring methods through which this lore, the notion of the nation, is disseminated and cultivated. While doing so, the values or concepts— the stories and experiences of aggression, oppression, or enslavement are pruned and modulated to create a feeling of national integration and imagination. The analysis of the sample contents of the textbooks demonstrates three trajectories for the building of the Nepali national character of the citizenry.

Be a Gorkhali: Sacrificial, Self-esteemed, Brave, or Militant

The construction of character in the learning content simply begins with a handful of generic traits of being a Nepali. For example, to be a Nepali means a skillful mountaineer, kind even in hostile situations, such as facing an enemy. However, the notion of character in the textbooks brings a more specific political and ideological nuance; it echoes the character of being *Gorkhali* (synonymous with “Nepali”) - brave, militant, and sacrificial, always being accompanied by the historically celebrated eternal weapon, *khukuri* (“a Nepali knife”). A persona, for example, in a prescribed poem by Siddhicharan Shrestha, muses: “As my beloved *khukuri* is ever ready to drink the hot red blood of enemy/ brothers, be careful” (my trans.; *Nepali-7* 1). In the rest of the poem, the persona purges a Nepali to be more than just a kind person and a mountaineer.

According to the poem, the Nepali character is characterized as:

हाँसी हाँसी विपुल दुखको गर्तमा फाल हाले
कालै आओस् तापनि खुशीको कठोर गाना सुनाई ।
बढने छु के डर मरनको एक वाजी सवैले
मर्ने पर्ने बुझी प्रकृतिको ऐन हो देह फेर्ने ।

With regretless laughter throwing into the pit of abundant sorrow
Though the death calls, singing the song of happiness,
I will march ahead knowing, the law of nature that
one day everyone dies and one has to change the corporeality. (my trans.; 2)

First, the poem imagines every person in the nation is likely to be a militant and has an unquenchable thirst for the blood of the enemy. However, such sanguinary zeal is prompted by the enemy only. The character imagined in the poem is also oblivious to the mundane corporeality because, for him/her, the sacrifice is more redemptive, spiritual and heavenly. Such learning contents on the surface constitute *Gorkhali* character as a brave, militant and sacrificial Nepali. However, the person on the backdrop also subtly evokes the character of Nepali being aversive and noxious to foreignness.

The trait of bravery and militancy is evoked by recounting the episodes of encounters with soldiers of the East India Company during the Anglo-Nepal war. For example, a poem, "*Aahwaan Geet*" (“Invocation Song”) in the school textbook *Nepali-9* urges them to be brave to replicate the same character and sacrifice as attributed by their ancestors (76). This character is imbued with one of the most celebrated ethos— brave history, supposed to have originated from the episode of the Anglo-Nepal war in which *bir* (“brave”) Nepali are accounted for being so valiant against the soldiers of East India Company. In the poem, the writer pleads to the learners to work for the nation and die for the nation, for today's diligence will be mirrored in tomorrow's future world, and the sacrifice, the work will be inscribed for eternity (75). Therefore, "we" should work for it.

The pleading goes to the extent that it even demands the body and blood from the learner to irrigate the nation². The poem further mentions:

देशको शक्ति मानिस हो, मानिस लागे बन्दछ
चरित्र हाम्रो बने पो जगतले राम्रो भन्दछ ।
देशको लागी मर्नेको अमर नाम लेखिन्छ
सबैको मन मिले पो उज्यालो आकाश देखिन्छ ।

The power of the country is the people, people can make it
If we have good character, the world will say us good
Dying for the nation will have their names eternal

If all agree, the sky will appear bright. (my trans.; 76)

The *charitra* (“the character”) here is not a normal moral integrity or rational thinking about what is right and wrong. Instead, it is relational—how “you” are rational about the nation about your moral propriety. The character insisted here ideologically refers to the moral character demanded by the nation, the character that was displayed by *bir Gorkhali* (“brave Nepali”) in the First World War and the Anglo-Nepal war. Any other characteristics except sacrifice and being *Gorkhali* are curbed aside.

The learning contents endorse the idea that the heroic birth of the esteemed nation took place amid great suffering and sacrifice, and to continue the legacy, the coming generations should be true to this sacrifice. For example, the poem, “*Aahwaan*” (“Invocation”) in the school textbook *Nepali-9* calls for the sacrifice to the soil and the nation, evoking the cultural memory of historical icons. The persona expresses: “Where the flame of existence surges fervently in the vein of Balabhadra and Bhakti / where spreads the predominance of Nirvana/enlightenment” (my trans.; 122).

The character of being sacrificial is deduced to the virtue of being *Gorkhali*, where the nation demands: “Sacred touch of your courage and bravery” (my trans.; *Nepali-9* 123). Here, the propriety of being a *Gorkhali* means the morale endowed with the *Gorkhali* vibrancy, militancy and dedicated soul that the soldiers demonstrated in the First World War. Not only this, the sacrificial character is also evoked antithetically by portraying an imagined regretful contemplation. For example, “*Deshko Maato*” (“The Nation's Soil”) in the school textbook *Mero Nepali-5* presents a persona regretting for not being able to sacrificial:

केही गर्न सकेको जस्तो छैन अझै पनि
निदले छोपला भने डर लाग्छ छााना मुनि
मृत्युलाई हांसी हांसी बर्न सके हुन्थ्यो
देशको माटोलाई सिर्जनाले बर्न सके हुन्थ्यो ।

Have not been able to do anything significant till now
I fear the deep sleep will take me away like a shadow
Wish I could embrace death without a smile

And, irrigate the nation's soil with creativity. (my trans.; 89)

Being sacrificial is an important component of the *Gorkhali* character, which has historically been characterized and is aimed to be transmitted to the coming generations. For instance, Eden Vansittart and Bernhard U. Nicolay claim: “. . . from the warlike qualities of his forefathers, and the tradition headed down to him of their military prowess as conquerors of Nepal, is imbued with, and cherishes the true military spirit” (62). Thus, this moral character is not complete unless it is the character of yielding some significant contribution to the nation. This moral character only is a good character that is sacrificial.

The *Gorkhali* character further escalates to the traits Prithvi Narayana Shah supposedly showed: the expansion thus “unification” and the aversion for foreignness. Further, the *Gorkhali* character denotes, it is the civic responsibility to warn against any

encroachment to the nation from external forces and help in selecting a good leadership. Sloganeering against foreignness has historically been one of the means of reminding the character of citizens, or part and parcel of civic learning. The reminder evokes Prithvi Narayan Shah's mission of winning the Kathmandu valley by chasing away the firangi and the representative of anything that is foreignness to create *asal* ("good") Hindustan (Gellner et al. 24). The legacy was more strictly carried to the attempted encroachment of East India Company. The despise for the foreignness or the difference became starker in the Panchayat era when King Mahendra attempted to strengthen the nationalistic fervor of solidification of all the hitherto existing differences under the slogan: one language, one dress and one country. The aversion to foreignness took another form. During the decade of insurgency launched by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), foreignness was also referred to as Indian expansionism. Later, this foreignness, extended and advocated by leftists, was particularly that of threat from Indian politics. However, this aversion to foreignness comes in many forms as the concept is an abstract, constantly transforming, transpersonal entity.

Not only the aversion to foreignness is endorsed as bravery and love for the nation, but it is also marked as a symbol of civilization. For example, in a poem in the school textbook *Nepali-7*, the aversion to foreignness³ is despised, and the idea of being cultured and civilized is constructed as despising the foreign and endorsing the locale. While the persona in the poem regrets the loss of *rodi* ("a traditional Nepali song"), the sound of *khajjadi* ("a Nepali musical instrument"), loss of garbs like *gunyu* ("a Nepali dress for a woman") and *bhoto* ("a Nepali traditional shirt"), the loss is attributed to the adoption of foreign culture, and aversion toward foreignness is straightforward:

किन यति फितलो भो यो सबै संसार हाम्रो
पराई किन राम्रा, लाग्छ आफ्नै नराम्रो
अब कति दिन उड्ने ? नक्कली प्वाँख जोडी
तनमन त स्वदेशी भेषभूषा विदेशी ।

Why did our civilized world (nation) become shallow?

Why all the foreignness good and nativity is bad?

How many days will we fly the pairs of fake feathers

While the heart is native but the dress is foreign. (my trans; 134)

Though the loss of nativity is regretted, it can be otherwise seen as the advocacy of the promotion of local culture and identity in the globalized context. However, the persona ascribes the loss to the preference of Nepali for foreignness. The loss of *rodi* is metonymically referred to as the "arsoning of civilized home" (my trans.; 134) and disco as the destroyer of the civilization as it is making *rodi* outlandish.

The learning contents construe *birata* ("bravery"), militancy and the aversion to foreignness as the single most prominent features of being Nepali. However, these cannot be the only requirements to be defined as Nepali. If someone has them, it might be commendable. Given that humans are primarily cultural creatures, Nepalis of two geographical locations, for example, differ in their thinking. The lifelong socialization and acculturation make a difference in the apprehension of people. A person's habits and nature are determined by how the person tries to adapt to the ecological system to survive. In a certain environment, a certain kind of behavior is built up. In addition, a person acculturates oneself according to the struggle the person makes with the environment. Who is Nepali or what it means to be a Nepali is beyond this simplistic generalization and stereotyping in the globalized context. Hence, "it is necessary and possible to construct an accommodative *Nepaliya* [Nepaliness] nationality" which needs "a national resolve and political will" (Lal 61). Therefore, for every Nepali citizen,

coming from different geographical locations and cultural orientations, the nation means differently even if he/she is not as brave as insinuated in the learning texts.

Never be Critical but Extol the Past

The history contents— significant stories on the ancestors of the nation, be they cultural or political—, are rich texts for learning and are more pliant to promote particular ideological perspectives. In that, the writers/compilers of curriculum, employed by the state agencies or serving on advisory commissions, get more comfortable space to nurture specific political ideals and social values in the minds of the learners because such texts perform in tandem with cultural and popular memory. In this light, the contents on history prescribed in Nepali school textbooks eschew the troublesome details of objective historiography (GC, "Teaching History" 33) and are pruned to cultivate a character through historical moralization. Moralization occurs in two trajectories: extolling the past and teaching the glory of being self-esteemed.

Most of the teaching of glorification of self-esteemed cascades from the virtue of being *Gorkhali*, particularly the masculine and militant quality supposedly shown during the attempted encroachment of the East India Company. A poem in the school textbook *Mero Nepali-3* succinctly recounts this fervor:

हारी भागे साम्राज्य ति हारे मैले कता?
उताई फर्के परदेशी खुकुरी हुँ म त !
कोदालीको बिँड मेरो राईफलको नाल
पसिनाको खेती मेरो जीवनको ढाल ।

The imperialism was chased away, did I lose?

Foreigners, turn toward your country, here I am with *khukuri*

The handle/stalk of a spade is the shield of your rifle

The diligence I cultivate is the shield against you. (my trans.; "Nepali" 55)

In the poem, the pride and glory of being a Nepali has been expressed with some important terminologies to which the nation's glory has historically been attached⁴. Again, this character of self-esteem echoes the characteristic of bravery shown in Anglo-Nepal war⁵. The poem overall insists on the virtue of "cleanness". Here, the cleanness refers to the fact [narrated] that Nepal has been untouched by the "dirty foreign hands" (55). This stanza typically summarizes the past of the nation; in fact, a strand of the past when the Nepali, as it is said, fought bravely against the British while they tried to encroach the territory of Nepal. Officially, it was an unsuccessful attempt to encroach into the land of sovereignty. Based on only this instance, the self-esteem citizenry has been "promoted" as the defining characteristic of Nepali people. Further, in the following stanza, the self-esteem⁶ is operationalized as a self-respecting citizen in the world is Nepali; and, the citizen is also "manly," intrepid and gallant, for he fights for the nation only to make it recognized in the world.

On many occasions, the historical episodes are fictitiously thinned, appropriated and packaged. For example, "*Swabhimaan*" ("Self-respect") in the school textbook *Nepali-8* narrates three historical fictitious episodes: Lord Hastings of East India Company opines (in Nepali) we need to expand our empire even if we should use "every means of hook and crook" (my trans.; 158), and concedes that Cinlok, James Logan, Kirkpatrick, Hearseyra [Paris] Bradshaw also could not conspire against Nepal (158). Similarly, the story does not fail to insert the saga of Prithvi Narayan Shah's "unification" process. The text mentioned that Prithvi Narayan Shah had already prepared his successors to lead Nepal. But, the East Company, through its spies, was trying to exert the required information and thus influence, and was forging diplomatic strategies. It

also recounts the intrepid and militant fervor of Bhimsen Thapa, taking the sword, with his eyes furious and reddened, and says:

के कुरा गर्नुहुन्छ तपाईंहरू? पराइले माग्थो भन्दैमा आफनी आमालाई अर्काको हातमा सुम्पिने ! आज बुटवल मानेले भोली राजधानी माग्छ । म मेरो देशको एक टुक्रा भुभाग ति गौरालाई कदापी सुम्पिने छैन । युद्ध गर्नुपर्छ, तपाईं मर्न र मार्न तयार हुनुहोस् ।

What are you talking about? How can we hand over our mother [nation] to someone else? The one who asks for Butwal today will ask for the capital tomorrow. I will never hand over a piece of my country to the Britishers. We have to fight, get ready to kill, and die. (my trans.; 159)

The content above demonstrates an example of how textbooks have projected the historical episode through the lens of a prescribed paradigm. Historiographies found in schoolbooks, often elide or ignore inconvenient facts, twisting the logic of cause and effect this way and that to support a particular perspective of nationalism or an ideological trajectory. Unlike the text endorses, the Nepalis were never required to fight for independence against the foreign power, particularly against the British colonialism. The encounter between the Nepali soldier and the British is narrated as an instance of national glory, constituted by chasing way imperialism.

However, Nepal was never politically colonized, so the rise of Nepali nationalism has been speculated as having a peculiar impetus in its orientation. During the Rana regime, Nepal was kept completely insulated from the foreign influence. Industrialization is prevented to enter into Nepal's territory; the rise of the middle class and market economy was developed very slowly and late. The rise of the middle class and market economy are considered as two essential conditions of nation building, thus an impetus for building the character of the citizens (Mishra 110). Mishra makes a compelling statement that it is the absence of colonization that gave rise to the notion of nationalism. She argues:

The rise of Nepalese nationalism defies the general pattern of nationalistic upsurge all over Asia. The feeling of nationalism in other Asian countries emerged as part of their struggle against the colonial powers. The multi-religious and multiethnic societies in these countries attained a degree of territorial and administrative unity as a result of colonial rule and started a search for their identity and freedom with the help of an ideology inspired by Western socio-political thought. (26)

The textbooks try to cultivate the national character based on nationalism built as a spillage of the clash with the East India Company. However, the nationalistic upsurge in Asia was part of the Asian Renaissance particularly propelled by the western educated middle class, which also was a creation of colonialism, industrialization and a capitalistic economy (Mishra 26). The course of development of nationalism in Nepal, against the backdrop of which the character of bravery is situated, has been altogether different mainly because this country never underwent colonial experience. As a result, Nepali people were never required to fight against a foreign force. However, including that textbook that accentuates nationalistic fervor was the result of a clash between the East India Company and Nepali is a political strategy of legitimating the official knowledge.

Embrace the Homogeneity and Assume the Indivisibility

Another trajectory through which national character has been constructed is an endorsement of national indivisibility. On the one hand, textbooks have acknowledged the constitutional definition of Nepal as a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-religious, multi-cultural country and an autonomous, undivided, sovereign, secular and inclusive federal republic (*Samajik Adhyayan-6* 58). On the other hand, the learning contents on

many occasions undercut the definition and underpin the idea of homogeneity and indivisibility as the only beauty of the nation. Two trajectories—the homogenization of the geographical difference and submerging of the cultural differences—have been hegemonically and tactfully inserted into the learning contents.

In the historically and politically changed context of Nepal, instead of drawing the differences and recognizing them, the learning contents reproduce one of the strands of Prithvi Narayan Shah's *divya upadesh* (“Divine Council”): four castes and thirty-six ethnicities, as the emblem of beauty. A poem in the school textbook *Nepali-9* the unity between and among the different geographies: Himali, Pahadi, Tarai and ethnicities, is natural; and such unity or harmony was achieved by the tenacious labor of the ancestors (121). The same message is endorsed in the following lines, too: “With unity, we can lead the world ahead / The division among us will spoil the dream” (my trans.; *Nepali-6* 122). The persona further reinforces the geo-homogenization: “Let's bloom in unity, Terai and the Hill is the same / Nepal is everyone's, let's forget the anger and greed” (my trans.; 76).

The poem entitled “*Rashtrako Akhandata*” (“Indivisibility of the Nation”) in the school textbook *Nepali-6* acclaims the glorification of the labor of the ancestors who created it with their much sweat and toil to keep its unity as beauty⁷. The diverse nature of the nation has been compared with the fountains and springs which have to do with the same origin – the nation (74). The persona further claims:

पारिन्छ सत्ता सब खण्ड खण्ड
रहन्छ के राष्ट्र त्यहाँ अखण्ड ।
थुतिन्छ पत्ता जब खतखात
सिधिन्छ शोभा अनि फूलबाट ॥

When the polity is divided into fragments
The nation does not remain undivided
When the petals are pulled off incessantly
All the beauty is gone all from the flower. (my trans.; 74)

This stanza implicitly reproduces the ideology of unity and completeness. In other words, the persona emphasizes the beauty in unity, which is compared to a flower. Again, the petals in this stanza refer to the diverse Nepali groups whose unique existence the poem denies and homogenizes. The message is further reinforced as: “Hills, Madhesh, Himal, all are my home / All the castes, all the classes are my family” (my trans.; *Mero Nepali-2* 1). This *eutai* (“sameness”)⁸ permeated through the text can be linked to a historical and temporal legacy of nationalism developed during the Panchayat system. One of the most significant ways of centralizing the power of the monarch and Nepalization the Panchayat system practiced was language. By dictating one language, he enforced unity among people. The constitution held that “the national language of Nepal is the Nepali language in the Devanagari script” (Grover 766). Similarly, another enforcement was the dress; the Panchayat polity made *daura suruwal* (“a national uniform”); it was mandatory for government officials.

However, this textualization of unity and completeness contradicts the fact that “Nepal is a culturally heterogeneous polity with dozens of ethnolinguistic groups scattered across its rugged and sprawling territory, but of all that heterogeneity, the most significant to the state has been the Tarai region and its people” (Gunaratne xvii). For example, Frederick Gaige states:

. . . the Tarai is geographically and culturally a transitional region between the hills and the plains. The plain features predominate, but the hill features make their impact. The transitional nature of the Tarai creates for Nepal problems

associated with the integration of the region into a national economic and political framework. (11)

In the similar way, the Himalaya region of Nepal has a different history because of geographical and ecological conditions compared to the Hills and Tarai. "[. . .] the family and nobility [for example] in Mustang, located in the high Himalayan region, are the only people who did not adopt Hindu high caste status. The local culture to rich and colorful to abandon" (Bista 49). The poem does not give an ontological existence to Himali areas. At the backdrop of the poem what governs is the supposed unity, necessitated ideal wholeness but impossible harmony. To enforce the "character," the values of eternity are emphasized.

The lessons, such as *Rastra* ("Nation") and *Rastriyata* ("Nationality") in the school textbook *Samajik Adhyayan-6* accentuate the importance of completeness and unity, appropriated as a nationalistic feeling. As it is dictated, the citizens must realize the importance of unity and harmony and must try to maintain it in the future for the nation. This prose is accompanied by a rhymed poem, an invocation to make the nation heaven, which states, "language and dress are same, love and affection are the same/together we were brought up, mother's lap is the same" (my trans.; 59). This sounds peculiarly like a homogenization. "Mother's lap" here refers to the nation. Mother's lap can be the same but not the feeling of the citizen living in the lap. As the feeling of living in the mother's lap is different therefore different sorts of riots and social tensions and upheavals are underway. The anonymous poem strategically asserts: to love and fight against the forces that hamper national unity is the sole responsibility of people living in the territory because if the nation does not exist, "we" cannot be Nepali (59). The character can also be exhibited by showing due respect to national signs, such as songs, the flag, animals and colors. While such texts acknowledge Nepal as a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-religious and multi-cultural country, the compilers and writers fail to maintain that diversity is achieved not by homogenizing the disparate cultures, ethnicities and geographies but by recognizing the differences and emphasizing the similarities. Moreover, people living in Nepal do not have the same dresses and languages. Certain communities and ethnic groups deem the ethnic dress and language more vibrant and important than the national dress and language.

The making of national character through the textualization of supposed homogeneity and completeness directly echoes Benedict Anderson's definition of the nation as "an imagined political community— and imagined both inherently and sovereign" (6). According to Anderson, the imagined integration is possible because they live in each other's minds the image of solidarity though they never meet or hear them. However, Nepali institutions, societies and communities have undergone a substantial change, both in a political and cultural sense due to political movements, such as the People's Movement, 2007. Such textualization of sameness turns out not other than a grand narrative of impossible and infeasible national homogeneity. This projection contradicts the main spirit of the current constitution that Nepal is a multiethnic, multicultural and geographically diverse nation.

Conclusion

The analysis exhibits that learners are made to study certain values designed and speculated by official knowledge attached to the nation. The official knowledge projected in the learning contents tries to cultivate a specific type of character on the part of the learners. Such designation and projection of learning contents have devised three important orientations of national character: being *Gorkhali*, which historically connotes sacrifice, bravery and militancy; reverent to the past, not critiquing it; and embracing the

supposed homogeneity. Instead of recognizing the changed context and orienting the learners toward more critical and cognitive skills, the compilers and writers have been perpetuating some legacies whose rationale has consistently been questioned and critiqued. Such construction and design of the learning contents tend to produce some infeasible grand narratives, bearing no pragmatic aspect of learning in the changed contexts of the nation.

Focused on the school textbooks only, the study captured the dominant pedagogical content that only concentrated on the theme of civic learning, the notion of nation, and building character. The study does not address how these narratives were perceived by teachers and schoolchildren. In particular, the focus on textbooks as the main unit of analysis does not consider the role that teachers play in (re)interpreting the meaning of texts and illustrations. This analysis does not explore and analyze “official” educational narratives that reach the children. Furthermore, the study focused solely on a few textbooks taught at the school level. Future studies would certainly benefit from a wider variety of subjects and grades and different approaches to investing textbooks.

End Notes

1. All the books were published (2010-2021) by the Curriculum Development Centre, Ministry of Education, Government of Nepal, Sanothimi, Bhaktapur.
2. See more avenues of sacrifice called for in *Nepali-6*, 2022, pp. 96-98; *Mero Samajik Adhyayan-4*, 2016, pp. 16-17.
3. See more lessons emphasizing on aversion to foreignness in
4. See more for portrayal of *gorkhali* character in *Nepali-6*, 2022, pp. 1-5; *Mero Nepali-4*, pp. 1-2,
5. See more for this theme in "Swabhimani Mukh" by Kshetra Pratap Adhikari, in *Nepali-6*, 2016, pp. 81-82; *Samajik Adhyayan-7*, 2017, pp. 22-23,
6. See more texts on this theme in *Mero Samajik Adhyayan-4*, pp. 70-71, 72-73, 74-75; 2016;
7. See more lessons on the same theme in "Sundar Fulbaaree" [Beautiful Garden] in *Saamijik Adhyayan-8*, 2016, pp. 22. Texts such as this, while they acknowledge diversity in the language (123 types), and regions (3 types), enforce the message that culture should be the same. For example, Nepali should be used as a common language/lingua franca, the official language.
8. See more lessons on the same theme in "Haami Eutai Haun" [We Are Same] in *Nepali-9*, 2016, pp. 115, *Samajik Adhyayan Kakshaa-6*, pp. 66.

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