

# Gujarat textbooks betray Young Students Are Taught: A Crow Is A Safai Kamdar, All

By Harit Mehta/TNN

**Ahmedabad:** The Union HRD ministry's "detox" drive—purging textbooks of saffron agenda—might well have to expand its ambit to cover the casteist bias promoted by textbooks prescribed by the Gujarat state education board.

The examples are many, and shocking. In a Class 4 textbook here, a crow is referred to as a 'safai kamdar'. Chapter 6 of the Gujarati textbook reads: "It (crow) eats everything—dal, rice, chapati, vegetables, mutton, eggs, the kitchen waste, rotten fruits. It is our bird and filth is his food...he is our biggest safai kamdar."

Chapter 8 of the same book asks students to identify objects with the help of drawings. The visuals are of a lotus, Lord Ganesha, a bow, a rath, a trident, and a Brahmin, whom the answer identifies as a 'gvani'. "There is an attempt to convince a tender 8-year-old mind that all Brahmins are learned men," says Martin Macwan of Navsarjan Trust, which has recently taken up the issue.

Page 65 of Class 1 maths textbook has a subtraction sum. There is no text. Instead, students are supposed to solve the sum with the help of a drawing. The drawing shows a man sporting a 'shikha', a necklace of beads, a sacred thread and his forehead is smeared with red powder—sym-



bolising a Brahmin. In front of this red dhoti-clad man is a plate of laddus. The students are asked to count the laddus. "Where is the need to show a person of a particular caste in a math sum," asks Macwan.

Besides, in Chapter 15, titled "Aapno jillo (Our district)" of the environment textbook for Class 3, students are asked to name a saint and a 'bhanjik' of their district.

Teesta Setalvad, who directed a study of school textbooks across the country in 1999, says Gujarat fared badly in the survey. According to her, a 42-member all-party parliamentary committee had recommended certain changes in the textbooks in April 2000. "However, no change has been made so far," she says.

According to the survey, the only reference in the Class 9 social studies textbook to the

## casteist bias

### Brahmins Are Learned Fellows

indignities of the caste system as it exists today is through an attempt to blame the plight of untouchables on their own illiteracy and blind faith.

The section, called "Problems of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (page 95)", reads: "Of course, their ignorance, illiteracy and blind faith are to be blamed for lack of progress because they still fail to realise importance of education in life. Therefore, there is large-scale illiteracy among them and female illiteracy is a most striking fact."

Says Jesuit-activist Cedric Prakash, "Besides caste and communal biases, the portrayal of women in these textbooks too is very objectionable." Prakash has been actively protesting against these textbooks.

Maadhu Patel, director of the Gujarat State Board of Textbooks, says, "We recently organised a meeting of the state resource group and members came up with certain suggestions. We will try and implement all those changes shortly." Patel, however refuses to accept that any textbook maligns any caste.

Ganpat Parmar, member of Ahmedabad's municipal school board, says, "Such prejudices are being planted in young minds in a subtle and clever manner. We are aware of the issue and will protest against it."