

State's Class 11 sociology textbooks turn the page on taboos, biases

THE BOOK ADDS SINGLE PARENT, COHABITATION, SAME-SEX PARENTS AND STEP-PARENTS TO THE LIST OF TYPES OF FAMILIES

MUMBAI: If you went by Class 11 sociology textbooks in the state until last year, the answer to "What are the different types of families?" was always, "There are two types — joint families and nuclear families." Not any more. Under the revised syllabus, the sociology textbook adds single parent, cohabitation, same-sex parents and step-parents to the list. The textbook published by the state's publishing bureau, Balbharti, has been introduced from the current academic year (2019-20) as part of the curriculum- revision exercise for Class 11. The book explains in detail same-sex marriages, gender equal families and cultural hybridisation in the age of social media. Dr Vaishali Diwakar, chairperson of the subject committee, which framed the new curriculum, said a need was felt to teach sociology with the help of contemporary references, while challenging existing biases. "The committee was of the opinion that students need to learn more than just concepts. We also wanted the book to be a reflection of the changing social fabric. For instance, in a chapter on social stratification, along with caste and class discrimination, we have extensively written about discrimination on the basis of gender, which one can see everywhere," she added. Decriminalisation of homosexuality forms an integral part of the module on family, kinship and marriage. "In a historic verdict, the Supreme Court of India on September 6, 2018, decriminalised section 377 of the IPC, and allowed gay sex among consenting adults in private...' While introducing the concept of cohabitation as part of a newly introduced module on "21st century families", the book normalises live-in relationships, while stating that "younger generations, especially in many parts of Europe and in urban areas of India, are preferring cohabitation as a family relation. This is especially true about same-sex couples... live-in relations or cohabitation might not lead to marriage," read the text. While talking about the need for gender equity, the chapter on social stratification poses a question — "Where are the women?" while highlighting the ways in which discrimination operates, while paying women equally, giving them rights to a healthy living, rights to participate in policy decisions, among others. "The text helps link concepts in sociology to our realities, which makes it relevant. For students to become critical about issues, they first need to know our society," said Trupti Vaity, subject head for sociology at VG Vaze College, Mulund.

Dr Joseph MT, assistant professor at the department of sociology, University of Mumbai, said such changes would definitely help develop the idea of plurality from an early stage. "Having said that, I think that teachers also have a great role to play in determining how a subject is taught. One cannot say that merely including something like this would directly influence the life choices of a person, but showing that these realities exist is extremely important," he added.

In one chapter, mass media is mentioned as one of the agencies of socialisation. It also has a box titled, "How real are the reality shows", which throws light on how reality shows tend to normalise bullying and the use of harsh language. The concept of cultural hybridisation is explained with an illustration of a hijab-clad barbie doll. "These are the images that children see all around them, which would get them interested to learn about the underlying concepts," added Diwakar.

Prachi Sathe, chief co-ordinator, Balbharti, said the idea was to make textbooks more relevant. "We had some key objectives, while preparing the new textbooks. Making topics relevant and explaining them in the Indian context is reflected in all the new textbooks this year."

Vaishali Joshi, associate professor in sociology, St Mira's College, Pune, said while the concepts of cohabitation and same sex relationships had a passing reference in the previous version, they are now looked at from a broader perspective. "We are not just saying that same-sex relationships exist, but are putting across a point that such couples are very much a part of our society. We are hoping that this would help remove the taboo associated with non-normative relationships. The decriminalisation of homosexuality has acted as a good starting point for this conversation," she added.

The Class 11 textbooks for CBSE refer to families headed by women. The books also talk about the phenomenon of increasing divorce rates. OTHER ADDITIONS Rapid growth of divorce, increase in the marriage age: The average age at which people get married is also increasing along with the increasing number of individuals not getting married. Work from anywhere: Laptops, mobiles and accessibility to information technology can turn any space into a virtual office