

# **Approaches to Sex Education: Sociological and Curricular Perspectives**

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by

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I, Moulee Goswami hereby declare that this thesis entitled “**Approaches to Sex Education: Sociological and Curricular Perspectives**” submitted by me under the guidance and supervision of Dr. Deepa Sreenivas is a bonafide research work which is also free from plagiarism. I also declare that it has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this University or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma. I hereby agree that my thesis can be deposited in Shodhganga/INFLIBNET.

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## Chapter - 1

### **Introduction**

Sex education or sexuality health education is a delicate operation in India. Several reinstatements of sexuality health curriculum have surfaced from time to time, but considering the highly sensitized cultural, and social intricacies of India, the transition into practice has not been the smoothest. The significance of the sex education lies in the fact that apart from the primary fact of providing for a more sexually aware youth; it makes them conscious of the ambiguity regarding puberty, body image and gender identity and also HIV prevention.

Through this research I am intending to do an analysis of the selected textual content used for the purpose of sex education in the recent years. I will be focusing particularly on the prescribed textbooks, teacher's handbook and alternative textbooks used broadly under the subject category of "value education" and "moral science" from the curriculums of ICSE and CBSE followed specifically in Kolkata, West Bengal. In an attempt to map the effectiveness and the structure of the content, the texts will be evaluated with literary analysis along with the theories of social construction of gender and sexual identity. In contrast the independent sex education manuals formed by organizations like Nirantar and TARSHI (Talking about Reproductive and Sexual Health Issues) would be brought in the dynamic too, to understand the framework of the subject from multiple perspectives.

In the light of recent developments and debates around the topics, the dissertation attempts to position the dominant ideology and narrative of the mainstream institutionalized sex education. Since the subject is either mostly neglected in the syllabus or practiced informally by the teachers, the research delves into the prescribed written content used in school in recent years. The subject of sex education becomes particularly fundamental in its significance owing to its origin among constantly evolving and shifting debates about its appropriateness and legitimacy. This is a subject that has found itself in the middle of intense social debate, thus becoming particularly important in framing a standpoint for the dominant social voice. The protocols of sex education along with setting a tone for acceptable sexuality point to the constructions of gender within dominant societal and cultural settings. Hence gendered identity becomes the backbone of the structure of the pedagogy of sex education. This research will thus further the understanding of gender and sexuality in an institutionalized space.

In the first chapter of the dissertation, I have mapped a rough timeline of the history of modern Indian sex education. There is a panning out of some of the significant acts, policies, books, journals, pamphlets etc that have had a role in shaping of the modern face of sexual education. Building on the insights given by each important event in the history, there is an elucidation of how it contributed as a conceptual factor in the current pedagogy of sex education. This also serves as a timeline for changing terminology of the subject of sex education.

In the second chapter there is an attempt to understand the organizing principles of sex education in social consciousness. Sex education as a discourse is understood in the backdrop of

socially perceived meaning of vulnerability, youth, adolescence, risk, safety etc. There is a detailed charting out of the how the modern sexual education is conceptualized with normative ideologies regarding youth as the ‘flawed’ body. Furthermore, there will be an outlining of the contestation that arises when sex is imparted as a subject in a school. The pedagogical gaps that are created in the process are addressed through various examples. The study will be based on theories about sexuality and gender and source from various essays, research papers and independent/formal studies conducted in the area of sex education in various parts of the world. There will be an exploration of the commonly followed aims and the subsequent outcomes of the texts in creating sexual health pedagogy. I also attempt to problematize the category of young adulthood in India. It will be further examined as a social category and understood against the backdrop of dominant thematic portrayals in mainstream ideology.

The third chapter does a detailed analysis of the content dealing with sex education in selected value education/moral science textbooks followed in the recent years in Kolkata. Using literary analysis and theories of gender and sexuality, there is an exploration of the pedagogy and the content of the texts. The perceptions and principles behind the teaching models would be examined to understand the idea of gender and sexuality that is promoted in the texts. Engaging with the texts in terms of their individual aims, objectives and themes, there will be an attempt to understand gender sensitization, sexual health and sexual development in the framework of sex education in schools.

In the following section of the chapter which is an introduction to the chosen field of study, there is a discussion about the texts, essays, and articles that has aided my research in the

subsequent chapters. Focusing on the second and third chapter, there is an attempt to contextualize the content matter. The literature review thus attempts to create a broad overview of the texts and the methodology that has been followed in framing this dissertation.

The modern idea of sex education is formulated after going through many changes over the years. Introduced in the academic curriculum as a part of “sexual hygiene”; it has come a long way. In consideration to the Indian history of sex education, Pankaj Arora’s book *Sex Education in Schools* (2010) marks the major milestone texts and books that contributed in the literature of sex education. It traces the record and the origin of the recently formulated “adolescent education programme”. It uncovers the conceptualization and execution of sex education specifically in keeping with the “acceptable behaviour according to Indian values” (23). Drawing upon a massive span of articles and reports (in multiple languages) throughout the country in its body of work, the book traces the evolutionary curve of the pedagogy of sex education. It reasons, exemplifies, substantiates, and thus effectively drives home the need of envisaging a stronger programme of sex education in India.

Nirantar’s independent study titled *Sexuality Education for Young People* addresses the major problems and conceptual issues with the current format of sexual education. Written by prominent writers and activists invested in the issue, the study comes up with a short history of the major educational policies and conferences that contributed to the change of ideology in the conception of sex education. Elucidating on the given national policies, it marks the shift of the primary aims of the educational policies. So while the national policy of education drafted in

1975 focuses on population education as its foremost agenda, the national policy drafted in 1986 marked the need of promoting women's education as its prime focus. Similarly the study also marks the overarching thematic change of tone in the textbooks, through the years. For example in the case of the post 1986 textbooks, the dominant message promoted was "population being the root cause of India's underdevelopment" (30). Substantiated with statistics, the report aims to place sex education as a fundamental human right: "The right to sexuality education should be considered an inherent part of the rights to life, health, expression, education and information that have recognized as fundamental rights under the Constitution of India" (*Sexuality Education for Young People* 26).

Further understanding the changing framework and strategy involved in the making of the curriculum, J L Pandey's work on 'population education' from the book *Population Education: Content and Methodology* researches on the making of the subject of population education. Placing population education as one of the prime innovation in fight against population, Pandey tries to understand the "varied conceptual frameworks and strategies of curriculum transaction" (1). Creating a timeline of major conferences that went into the conceptualizing of population education, he charts the ideology that was promoted in the wake of the conferences. That is population being an obstruction in the path of country's advancement. The text also clarifies the standpoint of population education and how it differs itself from family planning education. It emphasizes population education's role in "influencing attitudes and behaviour of individuals" instead of "specific messages of family size" (4).

An abstract, conceptual understanding of theoretical practice of sex education does not give enough contexts to understand its practice in a classroom setting. After all the pedagogy, content matter, and most importantly the teaching of the subject is constantly questioned or under reform. Therefore sex education is not just another subject which is formulated and taught uniformly as per the set standard. It is a matter of intense contestation as to how much and in which manner should an adolescent receive sexual knowledge. Lutz Sauerteig and Roger Davidson in their book *Shaping Sexual Knowledge: A Cultural History of Sex Education in Twentieth Century Europe* (2009) discuss cultural rift in the eighteenth century with respect to the idea of a sexually knowledgeable child. It further discusses the conceptualization of the age of consent; and how it is created under multitudes of social maneuvering. The writers also bring out the introduction of surveillance and regulation in European countries during the nineteenth century with the rise of conception of childhood innocence and how it translated into practice in the institutionalized setups. Thus it effectively points out at the politics behind setting the age of consent for children. There is also a wide discussion about the Rousseauian idea of childhood innocence and the regulatory mediums required to contain the “wickedness” of childhood. Therefore the book sheds light the long history of social anxiety with respect to the presence of sexuality within children.

To understand the regulation and control even further, Michel Foucault’s work serves as the foundational theoretical structure. Understanding surveillance and regulation in the context of sexuality is an idea explored in detail by Foucault throughout his body of work. Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* (1978) extensively engages with the idea of sexuality of children as a dangerous entity. Foucault’s theorization of the power knowledge nexus and its implication in

the parent-child relationship is explored too. I will draw on Foucault's "bio-politics of power" which enables one to understand the construction of population education. Population education can be read as a strategy that classifies "people" as "population" to be managed, regulated and targeted by the State for governmental purposes. The differences among people and their specific desires and needs are erased within a larger programmatic schema.

The dissertation further examines how the moral code underlying the teaching of sex education acts as a political device in maintaining of a hegemonic social order. Robinson's critical essay "In the name of 'childhood innocence': a discursive exploration of the moral panic associated with childhood and sexuality" (2008) studies the media representations of the social panic regarding sex education in Australia. The essay examines as to how "moral panics are used as a political strategy for maintaining the hegemony of the nuclear family, the sanctity of heterosexual relationships and the heteronormative social order" (114). The essay creates a premise for understanding the conceptualization of moral panic which is often associated closely with childhood innocence and sexuality.

Drawing on Foucault's idea of body in the social structure ahead, human body is examined as the site of regulation. Body is considered a figurative point for social correction in the nationalist discourse. Therefore it is seen as the site for corrective measures and maneuvering to fit in with the idea of the 'ideal' citizens of the nation. Thus body figures solely as a part of the national community, becoming a part of a collective mass rather than an individual entity. Foucault's theory of body as the site of discipline and power is used once again to politicize the regulatory devices used by population education.

Expanding the idea of an individual further, Gordon Tait's article "Youth, personhood and 'practices of the self'" (1993) helps us to understand the idea of personhood. Focusing the idea on youth, Tait explains how the category of youth acts as a governmental formation. Resourcing from the Foucauldian idea of governmentality, Tait argues how technologies and institutionalized set ups model the bodies as per the heteronormative standard. The construction of the category of youth personhood is understood from the perspective of adult imagination. Tait questions the presumed innocence of childhood and the frames within which youth is understood. The study done by the Queensland School as mentioned by Tait is used as an enlightening example as to how childhood and young adulthood emerge as societal and pedagogic categories.

The image of young adult and childhood in the backdrop of curriculum is understood through the dominant portrayal of adolescence and adolescent sexuality in the textbooks. Lisa Trimble's dissertation *Teaching and learning sexual health at the end of modernity: Exploring postmodern pedagogical tensions and possibilities with students, teachers and community-based sexualities educators* (2012) examines the central themes used by the content makers. There is a discussion about the extreme sanitization and the de-eroticization of the content dealing with sex for adolescents. Additionally, there is also the often used risk and fear discourse. Therefore the content is reduced to absolutely minimalist and ambiguous approach. The dissertation effectively compares the approaches towards sex education by institutionalized settings and independent organizations/community based sex educators in Canada. Trimble effectively addresses the

pedagogical gaps and the limitations of the traditional school based sex education system. Contrasting the discourse, content, approach and the pedagogy of the teaching material from schools with the independent community based sex education programs, Trimble tries to formulate a more inclusive and far reaching approach towards school based sex education.

S Weber and C Mitchell's "Imagining, Keyboarding, and Posting Identities: Young People and New Media Technologies" (2008), Henry Giroux's "Teenage sexuality, body politics and the pedagogy of display" (2009) and Leanne Levy and Sandra Weber's "Yes I am a mother and I am still a teenager" (2010) each discuss about the popular representation of a young adult, exploring the trajectory of social, moral, sexual and psychological underpinning that goes into its careful construction. The authors deal with the manner in which adolescence is positioned in a space of transition between an adult and child.

McLaren's *Feminism, Foucault, and Embodied Subjectivity* (2002) unravels the concept of youth subjectivity. The book explores the concept of the internalized social understanding of an adolescent. McLaren talks about the hegemonic understanding of society, which is institutionally perpetuated in a manner that an adolescent perceives that to be a personal/self standpoint. Therefore the idea of shame in regards to sexuality is considered to be a self actualized realization rather than an externalized understanding on the adolescent's part. As a result it is considered a self reflexive response on the child's part to feel shame and disgust. Wendy Burns-Ardolino *Jiggle: (re)shaping American Women* (2007) talks in similar vein when she further substantiates the idea of self management. She traces the idea of the adolescent self management

as an interrogative act and also an implicit pedagogy. Such self management emerges as critical in maintaining the hegemonic order.

From an Indian perspective ‘youth’ as a category itself acts as a diverse entity considering the pluralist social nature of the country. Meenakshi Thapan’s book *Living the body: Embodiment, womanhood and identity in contemporary India* (2009) explains how social group is formulated according to class, peer group, geographical background, marital status, educational status and caste, thus making the category of an adolescent a highly subjective one.

Mired in debate, sex education has found itself in news in recent days. Several newspaper articles and comments/quotes by prominent political leaders regarding the inclusion of sex education bring in the common ideologies in dominant social imagination. S Anandhi’s article “Sex Education conundrum” (2007) addresses the major problems and gaps that occur in imparting of sexual knowledge among children. Citing numerous sources and quotes from the political activists and leaders, the article brings to light the propagation of abstinence only education as the most popular. “Indian traditions” and “values” remains the most integral argument of the anti sex education campaigns.

Richard Parker’s article "Sexuality, Culture, and Power in HIV/AIDS Research" (2001) substantiates the major panic that the disease of AIDS creates in the social imagination. The article further links the designing of a reformist curriculum of sex education with the disease of AIDS surfacing into the picture. Therefore from a national perspective, the fatality surrounding

the disease of AIDS serves as a major ground for socio-political regulation. This in turn promotes the tone of counsel in the textbooks which relies on the idea of the vulnerable youth.

This very idea of vulnerability is discussed in Louisa Allen's article "Beyond the Birds and the Bees: Constituting a Discourse of Erotics in Sexuality Education" (2004) where she discusses vulnerability being the foundational discourse of sex education. There is no place for the discourse of desire because the thematic tones constrict themselves to counsel and protection exclusively.

This chapter has attempted a broad overview of the dominant frames within which sex education is located, often strongly embedded in the discourses of risk and vulnerability. This has resulted in a persistent tone of de-eroticization and decontextualization in the textbooks and material relating to the subject. It has also looked at the normative constructions of young personhoods, either as vulnerable and in need of protection or as potentially immoral/sexual and in need of policing. The following chapters will closely explore how the protocols and norms of sex education play out in the Indian context.

## Chapter 2

**History and Initiation of the Sex Education Program in India**

This chapter identifies the major policies, books, journals, acts, pamphlets that have come to be associated with the conceptualizing of the modern practice of sex education. It will also deal with the shifting terminology and nomenclature that has been used for the subject over the years. This will also assist in understanding the framework of the principles behind modern sex education in practice. This further serves as a backdrop to the content of this chapter where the conceptual strands and pedagogy of the subject will be examined in depth.

The earliest evidence of any sort of implication regarding sex education in India can be traced back to the year 1921, when a curriculum for ‘Sexual Hygiene’ was proposed and eventually rejected by the national education board (Arora 23). After that it is in the year 1952, that India launched a nation-wide family planning programme which was later expanded to include maternal health, child health, family welfare, and nutrition. ([www.medindia.net](http://www.medindia.net) 1). This family planning program also became the first of its kind in the world, its context being the population discourse of the post-war years primarily as followed in US (*Sexuality Education for Young People* 29)<sup>1</sup>. This marked the introduction of intervention from public and private institutions because unchecked population growth was seen as detrimental to the economic

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<sup>1</sup> “Sexuality Education for Young People” is an independent research conducted by “Nirantar”- Nirantar works towards enabling and empowering education, especially for girls and women from marginalized communities. This aforementioned research “seeks to address the urgent issue of sexuality education, the problems with the existing approach of adolescent education and recommendations by representatives of a range of players who are invested in the issue” (*Sexuality Education for Young People* 3).

growth of the third world countries (*Sexuality Education for Young People* 29). Such interventions continue to this day.

Jointly organized by the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Health and Planning, the national seminar on population education 1969, came to the conclusive fact that 'population education' needed to be an integral part of the Indian Education system. They had the following recommendations to fine-tune and further the cause of population optimization:

- The objective of population education should be to enable the students to understand that family size is controllable, that population limitation can facilitate the development of a higher quality of life.... It should also enable the students to appreciate the fact that for preserving the health and welfare of the members of the family, ensuring economic stability to the family ... the Indian family of today should be small ... with only two or three children.
- Students at all levels have a right to accurate information about the effect of changes in family size and in national population on the individual, the family and the nation so that this body of knowledge is utilized to control family size and national population
- Population should not be treated merely as a quantitative phenomenon.... It is the quality of the population that is most relevant both as a factor of growth and an end product of growth.... (Pandey 2).

In the same year 1969 *Baland Encyclopedia of Education* defined Sex Education to be: “It is the knowledge of the ‘sex act’ – which develops the understanding of emotions, challenges and responsibilities regarding relations between man and woman” (Arora 31). Keeping in with the recommendations from the national seminar, a “population education syllabus” was drafted in the year 1971 by National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) with the aim to increase attentiveness about India’s unchecked population growth. The syllabus attempted to create awareness regarding the “multi faceted population phenomenon” by focusing on six major content areas – “population growth, population and economic development, population and social development, population health and nutrition, population, biological factors and family life and ecological considerations and population” (Pandey 6). Treated as a “demography-laden” concept, interestingly this syllabus was intended to be introduced as “education in demography and population studies”. There was not a trace of biological association.

The *National Population Policy* drafted in 1975 had an explicit recommendation for the introduction of “population values” in the educational system (*Sexuality Education for Young People* 29). It was finally in the 1980s when the realization of an urgent reconceptualisation was felt on the policy maker’s end. The national population education project was implemented with the sole aim to bridge the breach “in the integration of elements of population education in content and process of school education” (Pandey 6). It was collectively decided by the syllabus makers that though noble and ambitious in its intent, the channeling, treatment, and execution of the “population education syllabus” made the integration of the topic to the school curriculum impossible. The focus was virtually constricted to the demographics and the dynamics restricting it from merging in with the entirety of curriculum organically. The population control

programmes “represented the bodies of the poor as oversexed, limitlessly procreative, and hence a national problem” (Anandhi 3368). This line of argument is seen in various manuals dating from 1930s and 1940s written by N S Phadke, A P Pillay, and M N Ganesha Iyer and in the 1978 National Health Policy of the government of India (Anandhi 3368). This argument was also influenced by the counsel provided by the “International Conference on Population”<sup>2</sup> in Mexico City in 1984 (Pandey 6). The five core elements which were identified in the conference were: “Family Size and Family Welfare, Delayed Marriage, Responsible Parenthood, Population Change and Resource Development, and Population related Beliefs and Values” (Pandey 6).

It is in the year 1986 when the need to promote women’s education was explicitly emphasized in the much celebrated *National Policy on Education*<sup>3</sup> apart from the previously recognized vital areas (*Sexuality Education for Young People* 29). The policy specified the “promotion of observance of small family norm” as core curricular areas (*National Policy on Education* 6). It was pretty significant as far as envisioning the population education went as it

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<sup>2</sup> “International Conference on Population, Mexico city 1984” - “This conference, held in August 1984, reviewed and endorsed most aspects of the agreements of the 1974 Bucharest conference and expanded the World Population Plan of Action in order to incorporate the results of the latest research and data provided by Governments”.

(<<http://www.un.org/en/development/devagenda/population.shtml>>)

<sup>3</sup> “The National Policy of Education (NPE) was adopted by the parliament in May 1986. A committee was set up under the chairmanship of Acharya Ramamurti in May 1990 to review NPE and to make recommendations for its modifications. That Committee submitted its report in December 1990. At the request of the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) a committee was set up in July 1991 under the chairmanship of Shri N. Janardhana Reddy, Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, to consider modifications in NPE taking into consideration the report of the Ramamurti Committee and other relevant developments having a bearing on the Policy, and to make recommendations regarding modifications to be made in the NPE. This Committee submitted its report in January 1992. The report of the Committee was considered by the CABE in its meeting held on 5-6 May, 1992. While broadly endorsing the NPE, CABE has recommended a few changes in the Policy (*National Policy of Education* 2).

provided an appropriate context for the scope of reconceptualisation. The consideration of factors like “equality of sexes, protection of environment, removal of social barriers, and inculcation of scientific temper” (*National Policy on Education* 6) were considered vital for providing a strong framework for achieving the population education objectives.

Drawing scheme of content from six major areas: “economic development, social development, environment and resources, family life, health and nutrition, and demographic implications” (Pandey 7), the newly envisaged structure “emphasized the strategy of integrating maximum contents at minimum points in order to provide comprehensive treatment to contents to make the integration of population education elements in the textbooks more effective” (Pandey 7). The new structuring of the content aimed to position population education/stabilization in the “interrelationships among population, development, resources, environment and quality of life” (Pandey 7). Therefore the content of post 1986 textbooks mostly relayed the “ubiquitous message of the small family norm, the overarching ideology of population being the root cause of India’s underdevelopment and the alleged idea of the illiterate, largely rural poor in contributing to the nation’s underdevelopment through sexual profligacy” (“Sexuality Education for Young People” 30). The vociferous promotion of the image of “self inflicted economic immiseration of large families” (*Sexuality Education for Young People* 30) obliquely placed the onus of “overpopulation” on the economically underprivileged exclusively. This went to become the underpinning of the ideology of the widespread campaign of “small family” model and slogans like “Hum do, Hamaare do” (We two, our two) in the 90’s.

In 1993, at a seminar conducted at NCERT the nomenclature of the programme was changed and renamed as “Adolescence Education” which was considered to be an all encompassing and comprehensive material. It factored three major components – growing up, HIV and AIDS, and drug abuse (*Sexuality Education for Young People* 30). The much needed intervention came from the “International Conference on Population and Development” (ICPD) held in Cairo in the year 1994. The policy marked a shift in discourse from the “demographically charged ideology” to “a new strategy that emphasizes the integral linkages between population and development and focuses on meeting the needs of individual women and men, rather than on achieving demographic targets” (<http://www.unfpa.org/public/home/sitemap/icpd/International-Conference-on-Population-and-Development> 1). Often touted as the “paradigm shift” for its advancement of ideology to an action oriented strategy which has its stringent focus on the needs of the individual, ICPD attempted to “integrate population concerns into development strategies rather than pursuing and providing sustenance to population control approach” (Pandey 8). ICPD explicated two roles of education: “education as a key factor in population stabilization; and education as a means to promote greater responsibility and awareness of the interrelationships” (<http://www.unfpa.org/public/home/sitemap/icpd/International-Conference-on-Population-and-Development/ICPD-Summary> 1). Other conferences around the world followed up with similar proceedings – The “United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio De Janeiro 1992” focused on the linkages between population, natural resources, environment, development and quality of life. The Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, 1995 that adopted “Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action” also emphasized these linkages (Pandey 8).

The close association of adolescent sexual health with the HIV--AIDS crisis prevention/education became prominent in the forthcoming policies and syllabus dealing with adolescence education after several reports found the youth of the country most vulnerable to the disease. The “National Population Education Programme” (NPEP) implemented in the year 2000 had an “explicit focus on adolescent sexual and reproductive health (ASRH)” (*Sexuality Education for Young People* 30). *National Youth Policy*<sup>4</sup> 2003, recognized youth as “an underserved group” and addressed the need to include more accessible information regarding HIV-AIDS and reproductive health in the educational information (*Sexuality Education for Young People* 30). The policy also emphasized active participation of youth, including adolescents at all levels of social enterprise. It recommends youth empowerment through education, nutrition, leadership development and equal opportunity. (“Adolescent Reproductive and sexual health” 2)

In collaboration with National AIDS control organization (NACO) and United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), “Adolescent Education Programme” (AEP) 2006, was launched in schools throughout the country. However in 2007, it was suspended in numerous states due to the objections raised by teachers, parents and a considerable section of policy makers who were uncomfortable with the content of the curriculum that addressed sexuality education (*International Women Health Coalition* 3). NACO and UNICEF have further constituted a

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<sup>4</sup> The first *National Youth Policy* was formulated in 1988. The socio-economic conditions in the country have since undergone a significant change and have been shaped by wide-ranging technological advancement. The *National Youth Policy* 2003 is designed to galvanize the youth to rise up to the new challenges, keeping in view the global scenario, and aims at motivating them to be active and committed participants in the exciting task of National Development (*National Youth Policy* 1).

review committee in the light of controversy created by the launch of their new material, in several states of India (*Sexuality Education for Young People* 32).

United Nations Population Fund India (UNFPA) along with a series of partners like Ministry of human resource development (MHRD), The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MOYAS), several non government organizations (NGO's), and other UN agencies have attempted to make a series of interventions. They collectively concluded to propose to look beyond the realm of reproductive health and expand their reach to education, livelihood, and citizenship of young adults ("Adolescent Reproductive and Sexual Health" 2). As per the MHRD, the objective of the Adolescent Education Program (AEP) was "to empower the adolescent population to make informed choices and develop life skills for addressing psychological, social and health concerns" (Anandhi 3367).

This chapter has attempted to bring out the dominant vocabulary and focus of sex education the world over—underpinned by the ideologies of population control, reproductive and sexual health, the panic of the "AIDS pandemic" and the goals of citizen-building. Absent in the discourse are the tropes of desire or the lived contexts of the young people around whom it is designed.

## Chapter 3

**Sex Education in the Classroom: Pedagogy, Perspectives, and Problems**

The advent of twentieth century saw the introduction of the sex education in the formal institutionalized setting. A subject, whose practice is widely affected by the evolving perception of the society, came further into focus with the rapid development of mass communication. Looking into the historical treatment of the matter, it comes through that when it comes to imparting knowledge regarding sex; historians have looked at the manuals, books, posters etc as an evidence of the existence and practice of the sex education. However in most cases no further study has been done to analyze the content or the effectiveness of the medium of sex education (Sauerteig and Davidson 2). The societal perception of the childhood and the sexuality in context to children has undergone a significant change over the last century. As Sauerteig and Davidson point out “Prior to the eighteenth century and Rousseau’s pronouncement of their ‘innocence’, there was a widely held notion that children were naturally wicked and corrupted and that they required strict education, including flogging, to form them into “acceptable” moral human beings” (2).

In particular, churches and physicians were concerned at the dangers of children masturbating. Thereafter, during the Enlightenment, a belief grew in the sexual innocence of children and during the nineteenth century, the emphasis on surveillance and regulation by the central and local State and civil society in countries such as England, Germany and Austria, shifted – as in the raising of the age of consent for sexual relations – towards protection

(Sauerteig and Davidson 2). Thus the general consensus was inclined to idealize sanctity of childhood and refrain from associating anything remotely sexual to childhood.

The extent of the regulatory practices is evident through the active propagation of “anti masturbation campaigns” as sexual stimulation of any kind was considered to be pathologically wrong. Children’s association with sexuality was heavily scrutinized as they were considered to be the upholder of “dangerous and endangered sexual potential” (Foucault 38). Child sexuality was seen having an immense potential to ruin social balance, hence their sexuality was to be strictly restrained. Seen from a biological viewpoint specifically catering to reproduction, there was no room for discussion. The intervention came from the Freudian psychoanalytical analysis which insisted on the presence of sexual impulse in children as young as infants. Sexologists Havelock Ellis and Albert Moll further contributed to the study with their famous book titled *The Sexual Life of a Child*. The social construction of the discourse of childhood thus is mostly associated with the innocence in the popular imagination. Therefore according to the hegemonic structure, childhood is considered to be pure, chaste, and an inherently corruptible phase of life, with no association to sexual knowledge.

The construct of childhood innocence and its presumed asexuality is thus done in synchronization with the sanctified image of the children, in dire need of “saving” from erotic knowledge. A category devoid of sexual subjectivity in its entirety, it has been a matter of repeated inspection as to what amount of sexual knowledge is appropriate for the children. This continues to be a much debated matter and is often used as a political device to strengthen the argument of supporters of abstinence only education (Robinson 123). Struggling with conflicting

epistemological and social apprehensions born out of the evolving society, sex education is thus struggling hard to come out fill in the substantial knowledge gaps left in the wake of the reformist curriculum.

We live in times where fresh stories and beliefs about identity, sexualities and relationships are trying to emerge even as old myths continue to persist (Weber and Mitchell 31). The human body thus becomes the centre of social focus as body becomes the prime site of conflict even though there are new identities emerging every day. This results in ever evolving conception of the representation and perception of the ideal body. The body is a site of conflict and at a focal point as it becomes the centre of the popular discourse which is reminiscent of the modernist take of Freud on the implication of the body – “Anatomy is destiny”. The envisioning of the body in this manner thus aims for marking the limits of normalcy and acceptability, which in turn becomes the hegemonic narratives of the societal operation.

Therefore the human body acts as a figurative focal point for social structuring. The bodies, specifically those of the young adults are symbolic indicators of the shifting relationship dynamic between individual and the Indian state in the contemporary times. An active ground for restraint and control, these bodies are of prime importance in the instrumentalist objectives of the state. For example interventionist plans/programs on the broad theme of “population curbing or control”, are specifically pre-designed with the aim of regulating the demographical statistic, completely disregarding the individual and its specific needs in the process.

The statist idea of the body remains singularly focused on the nationalist outcome and the role of the bodies in being the agents of the desired change in the society. Thus the individual is exclusively positioned as a pivotal unit of the ‘national community’, resulting in a continual devaluation of its lived existence and being. The overwhelming emphasis on the “population education” and the need of the hour to be an adequate promotion of contraception indirectly remains the only highlight of the state’s conception of the “body”. Foucault calls this discourse around regulatory management and population control to be the “bio-politics of population”. Foucault while exploring the idea of bio-power discusses the concept of regulation and discipline of health and birth to control mass population (Foucault et al 140).

Population education and promotion of population regulatory techniques thus fall under the category of exercising of bio-power. The conceptualization of the nexus of between the state and the young adult body is resonant of Foucault’s designating the body as the site of power and discipline. Therefore sex education as a subject is much more expansive in its reach, as the acceptability of the subject, its execution and its content is rather a loaded and political one.

The statist idea of the category of youth can also be understood through the idea of the ‘personhood’ of youth. Youth as a ‘person’ too is a governmental formation. As Tait describes, “It is constructed at the intersection of a variety of diverse problematisations, being produced but the process of individualization/normalization and the regulation of relations of time”(1). The conceptualization of a person or the acquisition of “personhood” is more than pre-destined biological ‘truth’. The nature of the construction of the person is addressed by Foucault in great detail. He uses the term “population” instead of “people” to emphasize the sense of the term

being a collective variable in the realm of modern political power dynamic. As his primary objective he attempts to position the self against the history of the multitude of ways in which individuals are moulded into the categorical “subjects” (Tait 4). Foucault theorizes the dual regulatory strategies through which the individual is patterned as the desirable object/subject. The interventionist strategy of “governmentality”<sup>5</sup> first marks out various groups within which the population is classified, subsequently through the aid of governmental technologies and detailed management tactics, the conduct of the individual is targeted and modelled to fit into the normative standard.

The institutionalized set ups (school, law enforcement, medicine, etc) of the society play the regulatory role to assemble the modified individuals. The category of a “person” is shaped through these government technologies, as the foundation of personhood is directly dependent on the historical and social context of its formation. In a diverse group of individuals, youth are placed as a discreet entity marked out by their codes of behaviour and their ways of relating to the society. With such strong marking out of labels and “pathologies”, there is a construction of social, legal, psychological and medical norms (Tait 3).

Exploring the idea of acquisition of personhood even further Marcel Mauss has argued that personhood at any given point owes its origin to the social and historical context. In essence a person does not become a person as an inevitability of his being born biologically as a human

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<sup>5</sup> Governmentality (Michel Foucault) - Emphasis is on the “Conduct of conducts” or the regulation of the behaviours. Basically to reiterate a dynamic of command and control, the conduct is an imposition on multitudes of levels. From moralistic conduct to abiding the rules of law, the concept is a nod to Foucault’s overarching theme of human beings being subjects to the creation history.

or even a psychological essence. He rather defines personhood as “a potential; a position and a status which may be allocated under certain circumstances” (Tait 3). Thus if we historicize the acquisition of personhood, it goes on to show the amount of societal or institutional jurisdiction involved in the making of an acceptable “youth personhood” which is considered to be a perfectly natural category. The idea of adolescence is largely drawn from the ideal of childhood—the time of encompassing naiveté and innocence. Therefore the personification of adolescent subjectivity and personhood has a highly volatile place in the adult sociological imagination. There is no dominant construction of adolescence, which essentially makes it origin ahistorical. As a category it is shaped entirely through adult imagination. Stripped of historical contexts and contemporary concerns, the concept of youth personage is constructed by varied means; which essentially makes it boundless in its scope and reach (Tait 6). Furthermore this idea is also in sync with the Foucauldian idea of governmentality which talks about the targeting of the “conduct” with multitudes of management strategies. (Tait 6).

Tait uses the example of a study titled “Human Relation Education in Queensland Schools” in 1988. The study positions childhood against the evolving passage of time. Growing individuals thus are fitted into four categories: early childhood, middle childhood, adolescence and lastly young adulthood. Every category marks out a distinctive amount of sexual knowledge that is appropriate and to be expected. Individuals pertaining to the “Early childhood” display a *natural curiosity* about sex, whereas the ones in “middle childhood” are more consciously aware of their uniqueness in relation to others. The ones associated with the “adolescence” group are considered developmentally ready for acquiring a formal knowledge of physiological/emotional changes. The domain of personal responsibility is assigned to the category of “young adulthood”

(Tait 8). Therefore this essentially breaks down and reveals the interventionist approach and disciplinary rigour necessary at different stages for raising the ideal adult who is in control of his/her sexuality. This distinctive classification is in keeping with Foucauldian idea of regulation and “normalization”<sup>6</sup> of bodies. There is a strict reinforcing in the arrangement of the individuals, creating segregated assemblages. Homogenized, branded and evaluated with pre-decided outcomes, these divisions are done so that it can “measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialties, and to render the differences useful by fitting them to one another” (Foucault 184).

Adolescence is viewed as a time of heightened understanding and awakening of sexuality and hence calls for a reinforced policing. The “ideal” image of the innocent, innocuous, vulnerable, reckless, and unknowing asexual beings in the construction of the image of young adulthood does not leave much room for any sort of dialogue in the reformist curriculum. Oblivious to any discourse on desire, the sex education curriculum turns a blind eye to anything associative with desire and sex. As Judith Levine documents in her work, the social mythology dictates the content of the curriculum to an extent such that there remains nothing except a statist reproduction of fear, warning and panic; consequently the sex education texts remain highly de-eroticized (Trimble 164). The texts are sanitized to the extent of being so clinical that there remains almost no resemblance to the reality. They faithfully reproduce the procedural understanding of the human body and its functionality. In an effort to stick as closely as possible

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<sup>6</sup> According to Foucault “normalization involved the construction of an idealized norm of conduct – for example, the way a proper soldier ideally should stand, march, present arms, and so on, as defined in minute detail – and then rewarding or punishing individuals for conforming to or deviating from this ideal”. See Foucault’s “The History of Sexuality, Volume I” for further reading.

to the anatomical reality of the body and its repercussions, the texts leave out almost every humane feeling associative with sexuality. Ambiguous, instrumentalist and minimalistic, there are many a critical questions of sexuality that remain unaddressed.

The lived experience of early adolescence combined with the anxiety of confirming to the hegemonic standard of the virtue of the young age makes the understanding of childhood critical. A constricted view of adolescence associates teenage years with the advent of puberty and reproductive maturation. However the conceptualization of an adolescent includes the entire trajectory of social, moral, psychological, and sexual underpinning that goes through a transitory period of development between the age of 10-19 (as defined by WHO). They stand out as the liminal beings who are no longer children but neither can they fit into the coveted realm of adulthood nor in the childhood; making them transitory beings coexisting in several mental states at one time (Levy and Weber 131). Thus with an ongoing tussle with the idea of childhood, the societal culture maintains a perturbed relationship with the construct of childhood, “caught between contradictory discourses and spaces of transitions” (Giroux 1). As surveillance of the sexuality is an instrumental objective of the governmentality, the necessity of suppression and disciplining the “reckless” bodies is one of the major points when it comes to childhood. Stemming from the intent of protection and guidance, most of the aspects of societal control are interrogative in nature owing its origin from the adult perception of what adolescence ideally should be like. This makes the perception unable to account for the actual experiences of the young people which are much more critical, complex, and fluid in nature than as imagined in general.

It is to be noted that the category of youth becomes even more volatile with the additions of social categories like race, gender, ethnicity, class, creed, location, etc. Its presumed homogeneity is disrupted. As Giroux points out that sexual lives of poor youth is often fetishized among others youth sexualities, thus making the category of youth a constantly shifting and contradictory category (3). Youth subjectivity is frequently perceived as lacking in criticality and complexity, and as a category finds its position and meaning only against the adult understanding of what youth might constitute.

For the youth to come out of the shadow of the ideology of “crisis of youth” (Kelly 3) it has to emerge as an independent category, breaking away from the recognizable images. This eventually leads to the fashioning of the acceptable youthful self which is found positioned between the normative spectrums of acceptable adolescent behaviour. Foucault observes a continual designing of youthful subjectivity “so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality” (as cited in McLaren 147). These transformations are grounded firmly in the internalized social understanding of the acceptable bodily self of the adolescents. As Bourdieu substantiates that the effectiveness of these interrogative strategies lies in the persuasion done by an implicit pedagogy, a metaphysic, a philosophy or something as commonplace as an injunction of table manners; thus making the medium of “self- management” successful ( as cited in Burns-Ardolino 7).

Understanding the culture of adolescence in India is a complex challenge, given its plural and heterogeneous nature. A social group is categorized according to the peer group, class, creed, gender, and marital status, childbearing and educational status, thus making the category highly

subjective to specific context (Thapan 28). Age thus is not the only deciding factor in defining a well marked period for adolescence, but one of the multitudes of factors considered to mark the category.<sup>7</sup> Therefore an adolescent girl of an upper class, higher caste urban setting has a whole other set of social contexts than a lower caste girl from a rural setting. The approach to sex and sexuality from a minority section thus is not something that is a part of the hegemonic urban narrative of adolescent sexual education. However it has to be noted that the marking of and consent to sexual activity is done in a very different manner in several communities of India. Sexual agency is handed over with the advent of puberty in cases of child marriages. Therefore making the category of adolescence practically non-existent in this case, as sexuality is assigned to and often forced upon the adolescents right away with the maturation of body. While this is an important context for thinking about adolescent sexuality, this dissertation focuses on the more urban/official approach to the idea of sex education and given its limited scope, cannot claim to speak for the numerous historical dimensions of the “Indian young adult”.

The entire ideology of education of sexuality in the rigour of a school core curriculum was essentially a byproduct of the modernity and enlightenment; starting off as a deliberate move on the part of the modern schooling to move away from previously followed structures. Contextualizing sex education by its history is significant in its understanding- Be it the consistent portrayal of adolescence of as a period of reckless decisions over the years, or as the structured control and patrolling over the sexuality of the forthcoming generation, it has these

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<sup>7</sup> See Saraswathi (1999), Kumar (2002), Verma and Saraswathi (2002) which analyses the construct of adolescence as a category in India; The social, political and the cultural factors that shape the category of adolescence are discussed in the aforementioned studies in details.

practices from the background of the current practice of sex/sexuality education as we know it today.

The topic of sexuality has always had to grapple with control. The knowledge of sex is inescapably related to the power that controls the discourse of human sexuality (Foucault 6). Taking in consideration the body of the child here, the 19<sup>th</sup> century thought process has essentially transformed and viewed it as a “local center”<sup>8</sup> of power-knowledge and a subject of intense surveillance (Foucault, 9). Sexuality was present in the most subdued form, present in its most clinical and detached outward appearance. “Everyone knew, for example, that children had no sex, which was why they were forbidden to talk about it, why one closed one’s eyes and stopped one’s ears whenever they came to show evidence to the contrary, and why a general and studied silence was imposed” (Foucault, 4).

The operation of the discourse was such that the positioning of the child as a sexual being was nothing short of marking it as a “deviant” or even “dangerous”. So much for the overt sexualizing in the popular discourse rampant in every visible sphere, we tend to believe that the permissiveness and the openness regarding closeted topics such as sex or the body are now much more acceptable than ever before. However such overt liberal views are contradicted when one looks at the manner in which this very discourse projects the naiveté, chastity, innocence and the virtue of the children in every way possible. Jackson and Scott precisely come to a similar

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<sup>8</sup> Foucault explains the local centre of power knowledge to be “anchor points for broader techniques of knowledge and strategies of power”. He elaborates that it is through discourse that the objects of power relations are established, from local centers of power-knowledge to entire fields of study and investigation. As an example, he cites – “ecclesiastical confession as one such local center of power-knowledge” (Foucault 101).

observation in their article: “Children and sex are seen as antithetical, both being defined as special and bracketed from the real world. Thus there is a little focus on becoming sexual as a process; rather it is seen as a matter of leaping a chasm between “innocence” and “knowledge” (235).

In essence there occurs an adult filtering of the way of perception of the sexuality of the child. This has critical implications resulting several contradictions in what constitutes as sex education of the student; as on one side there is the educator’s idea of what she/he conceives to be the “ethical one” and on another side is one which the student experiences. Consequently the regulation and scrutiny of sexuality by an institutionalized setup like school is thoroughly convoluted. The school through its “official culture” identifies and demarcates the student as a subject that is “non sexual” (Allen 29). This idea of the purely non sexual entity remains in conflict with the “safe sex” motto of sex education. Unrelated to the experiences and contexts of the students it addresses, the ideology/aim of the sex education class remains clinical and disinterested, invested in surveillance and regulation of a “population” with latent volatility.

In the light of the seriousness of HIV – AIDS as a threat to health but also often framed as a threat to morality or the consequence of “immorality”, the formation of the sexual health curricula was designed to govern the sexual choices made by the “reckless” youth. The funding, the ideological set up, and the implementation of the curriculum was thus based entirely on the regulatory aspect of the crisis. A discursive sphere resonating with acute panic and fear, the young “unrestrained” body was highly politicized. “School-based sex education was defined as programs designed to encourage sexual risk reduction strategies for HIV prevention delivered in

school settings. This definition allowed for the inclusion of abstinence-only, abstinence-plus, and comprehensive sex education programs” (Fonner et al 1). The vulnerability associated with the youthful bodies combined with the risk association of the AIDS outbreak made abstinence an easy alternative in the anxious sociological perception.

The discourses regulating the framework of education or school falter in their handling of the sexual agency. In the imparting and conducting of the sex education class, one implicitly acknowledges the existence of the students as a sexual being; perfectly capable of performing, desiring, and receiving pleasure. However, the politicized nature of the sexual knowledge leads to a sanitization of the discourse of sexuality and body, as withholding of sexual knowledge is critical for the safekeeping of “innocence” of the childhood. Such, one might say, is the inherent contradiction of the sex education discourse.

This withholding of knowledge by the adults from children consolidates the dichotomization of adulthood and childhood even further. The subjectivity of the youth regarding this matter is completely erased. It is assumed naturally that adults are in a better position to make the call regarding the subjectivity and perception of the youth. Therefore the power dynamic between the “knower” and “recipient” of sexual knowledge is exercised rigorously, as in any case it is the adult--the knower of sexual knowledge that holds the tenets and the key to adulthood. Education constantly strives towards a social acceptance, confirming the gendered expectations and the popular consensus regarding children’s presumed asexual and “spotless” nature.

Locating the discourse of sex education in the context of India, one can trace the definitive entry of it in the mainstream discussion in 1980s. Issues pertaining to sexuality and sex in general gained momentum in the public eye and alternative identities surfaced into the social imagination. Essentially a product of modernity, the grounding of formal sex education comes from the inception of HIV-AIDS (Parker 164). The massive spotlight on the issue further accelerated by the intervention and insistence of the international bodies, made sure that the topic of sexuality found its place in the school curriculum eventually. In the previous chapter, the various seminars and conferences, both on the national and the international front deliberating on the nature of sex education have been charted out chronologically.

The mode in which the information regarding sexuality and sex is imparted is a matter of immense contestation. Religious ideology plays a cultural role, as reflected in the championing of the preservation of the integrity of childhood and innocence as seen in the recent example of former union health minister Dr. Harsh Vardhan's comments. His primary agenda was to have "so called sex education [to be banned] and yoga to be made compulsory". He further aimed at laying a "strong emphasis on exposing students to India's cultural traditions". His website adds: "Musical training [was] to be encouraged along with dance and drama" (<http://www.drharshvardhan.com/drharshvardhan-views-on-education.aspx>). Kothari commission (1967) recommendations on patriotism, health care, social consciousness and spirituality (four pillars) will be made part and parcel of Delhi's school education system" (Jha 2). Anandhi in her article recounts a similar comment made by Dinanath Batra, secretary of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)-affiliated "Shiksha Bachao Andolan Samiti" who wrote against the

practice of sex education in schools, his reason being sex education making children's mind wildly susceptible to corruption;

(T)he concept of educating youngsters about the graphic details of sexual intercourse is nothing short of corrupting impressionable young minds. The lurid details contained in the curriculum of sex education are absolutely vulgar and shocking and promote liberal sexual behaviour before marriage and adulthood among students (Anandhi 3368).

There also has been an instance in Madhya Pradesh, where BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) activists have ordered replacement of the sex education classes with yoga classes as yoga fits in with the decorum and ideology of "Indian traditions" and "values" much more than sex education (Anandhi 3368). Yoga is also propagated with the idea that it is often associated to be an exercise of control and restraint. In a similar vein various fundamentalist groups have voiced their agitation against institutionalized sex education in schools; RSS, All India Democratic Students' Organisation (AIDSO), and Islamic Organisation (SIO) to name a few (Anandhi 3368). The upholding of Indian "values" remains the most integral constituent in anti sex education arguments. Speaking of sex education in Tamilnadu, L Ganesan has described it as "a conspiracy of the US to bring in degraded values under the guise of AIDS awareness" (Anandhi 3368).

It is interesting to note that sexuality is not considered to be a part of the social consciousness or even healthcare. As for many educators the principle of sex education is in fact based upon healthcare. Addressing public health issues and administering the necessary medical interventions is what becomes the primary goal of sex education. It is noteworthy that most

proponents of sex education see it as a determining element in addressing social order. It is true that we have come far from a place where there was no mention of the word sex to a place where there is a marked out place for it. It is also true that till date there are regular debates as to whether an institutionally prescribed sex education is needed or not.

Apart from the morality questions that underpin sex education, it is disconcerting that gaining sexual knowledge through peer group or media outlets is considered to be the only inevitable way to learn about sex. Parents and teachers often vouch for the discomfort of talking about sexual practices as they strictly associate sex education to be comprising of information about sexual intercourse. It is indeed a popular assumption among many that the subject of sex education is strictly imparting knowledge regarding sexual intercourse. This results into an overall close-minded and uneasy attitude regarding sexual processes in context of the subjects reading the topic. In their study Datta and Majumder refer to the definition prescribed by “Sex Information and Education Council”, according to which sex education is “ a lifelong process of building a strong foundation for sexual health through acquiring information and forming attitudes, beliefs and values about one’s identity, relationships and intimacy” (1).

Sexuality health educational pedagogy owes its existence to the social shifts of thinking along with the cultural constructs and constraints. Ideally a pedagogical approach of any subject aims for a dialogue between the teacher and student. Considering the subjective and evolving content of the sex education, dialogue becomes even more vital for a successful understanding to take place. It tests the comfort zone of both the student and the teachers while making improvisation an important part of the discussion. However in the case of sex education, there is

an acute lack of that aspect. With several contestations in popular discourses and ideologies with respect to gender, sex, social contexts; sex education as a subject must take into the recipients' varied reactions and requirements. In absence of which there is a creation of a pedagogical gap. The discourse of sexuality health education thus is an intricate milieu of authority, morality, legal restraints, ethicality, propriety, and societal bindings.

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The voice of the teacher, as the arbitrator of knowledge, frequently emerges as one of warning or counsel, given the risk and vulnerability associated with adolescent sexuality. The theoretical foundation of youth is based entirely on the idea of vulnerability of the recipients of the sexual knowledge. The designing of the curriculum is underpinned by anatomical understanding of the body and the fatality surrounding AIDS and other venereal diseases. Entrenched deeply in the moral panic surrounding the symptomatic features of the disease, sexuality became even more of a ground for socio-political regulation. The dominance of the reformist governmental perspective renders any other imagination of the course virtually impossible, marking out the control and restraining of the sexual energy to be the only deciding factor in a sex education class. Thus unsurprisingly abstinence remains one of the most highly emphasized topics in the sex education texts/class. The text becomes the voice of the general societal concern, forewarning of the potential troubles or counseling against the upcoming dangers; making sure that the overall thematic content continually reminds the student of impending catastrophes of uninhibited sex.

In the realm of sex education pedagogy, vulnerability becomes a key category. It becomes much more than just an association with weakness. With the whole idea of sex

education manifesting from the susceptibility of youthful sexuality in the adult imagination, one can imagine the concept of vulnerability being the foundational premise underlying the sexual health teaching and learning procedure. Posited as a part of morality code, vulnerability is thus a highly important feature of the curriculum. The adult idea of youth as a state of vulnerability interestingly comes in sharp contrast with the amount of invulnerability and invincibility that the youth themselves associate with the growing age (Trimble 57). Thus the curriculum of sexuality education mostly navigates within the realm of protection and concern exclusively, ignoring almost completely the discourse of desire or pleasure (Allen 151).

Hence the discourse of protection is marked off from the discourse of pleasure. The commonly used technique thus remains associating risk with transgression of normative with the tacit underlying resolve that youthful sexual knowledge is dangerous. The complicated terrains of sexuality, gender and anatomical understanding is therefore reduced to a narrow scale of either relenting to the social acceptable side or being marginalized as the “other”. The absolute detachment of the body from the discussion about sexuality and gendered understanding of the body limits the discourse of sex education.

Therefore to summarize the overall thematic overtures adopted by the prescribed texts, one notes that there are two directions which are most commonly chosen for formal sex education. The most overwhelming theme remains being reliant on medical/biological perspectives while designing content matter for sex education. The other major thematic approach that the texts usually adopt is of the morality. This is done either by using a religious dictum or as proclaiming abstinence to be the “wiser”, “braver”, or “smarter” choice (examples

of which be discussed in the forthcoming chapter). In the midst of health concerns and a vehement admonition of pre-marital sex in general, the sociological aspects of sexuality is conspicuously absent. The questions of the social construction of gender identity and sexuality are hardly dealt with. The instrumentalist approach heavily drawing on the medical and health discourse and societal perceptions of “right” and “wrong”, devoid of any engagement with the lives, desires, and contexts of the students.

In a subsequent chapter, I explore how a student is excluded by normative assumptions of sexuality in textbooks. Heralding of abstinence as their main goal, texts often cite social, religious and health benefits of not involving in sexual activity. This conservative paradigm involves the repression of certain information on one hand and selective dissemination of information on the other.

The more liberal form of sex education would be the one comprehensively dealing with the “risk discourse”. These texts and approach include more overt details regarding sexual growth and intercourse, but from a strictly medical angle. Emphasis is placed on the sexually transmitted diseases and infections and other repercussions of unsafe sexual practice. These approaches are not of much help when it comes to dealing with the issues and problems of the marginalized students and those students who are of an alternative sexuality as they remain invisible throughout. Obviously the curriculum does not take into consideration, the subjective norms related to sexual identity, marginalization, gender, sexuality, morality and body. This eludes the possibility of a more integrative and inclusive approach dealing seriously with non-normative identities.

Further ahead in this thesis, I will engage with lifestyle education, value education and moral science texts prescribed by CBSE and ICSE schools from various parts of India to examine the principles of sexuality education. I will explore the attitudes and perceptions of the prescribed texts, their relevance keeping in with the times and efficiency in maintaining a neutral and plural point of view and most importantly their capacity in catering the student's needs. The diverse teaching models and perspectives which influence and shape the ways in which sex education curricula are designed and implemented will also be analysed.

## Chapter 4

### **Value Education/Moral Science: The Texts and Content Dealing with Sex Education**

As a part of syllabus of state and national curriculums, value education is often a prescribed subject in the secondary and senior secondary classes. Designed so as to impart the moral/social education along with academic education, these textbooks deal with wide range of topics. Value education comprises of lessons dealing with the moral/social development of children, this is often an alternative subject that is prescribed to cater to the non academic needs of the students. Sex education too is considered in the similar dimension and thus is often found embedded in the content of these texts. Among others topics covered are: gender parity, emotional intelligence, dignity, social behaviour etc. This chapter does a literary analysis of the content dealing with sex education in the textbooks.

I have specifically looked into the texts that deal with sex education and related topics within their scope. For my research purposes I have selected three textbooks prescribed by the ICSE and CBSE Boards which are followed nationwide, and I am aware of these texts being used in the schools of the Kolkata region spanning from last six years. These books fall broadly under the category of value education, moral science or lifestyle education. Though anatomical/biological details have been brought up in these books on a few occasion, these are however not textbooks dealing with biology/science. These texts are all about imparting the necessary values and skills to equip the students to discern and make better choices in life in general. Among the onslaught of topics like good behaviour, environmental concerns, healthy

living, general life philosophy, topics on awareness of gender and sex education too find their place. The books deal with gender sensitization, sexuality, adolescence, and sex education in varying manners and in different magnitudes. These books are intended to be taught to pre-adolescents and adolescents with the intention of guiding the students into a much more holistic lifestyle.

The reason for formulating a syllabus with the mandatory inclusion of a subject like value education/moral science incidentally has been recently been brought up in the news. Supreme Court on the basis of a public interest litigation (PIL) filed by a lawyer named Santosh Singh issued a notice to Human Resources Development Ministry (HRD) and CBSE regarding the compulsory addition of moral science in the curriculum citing the reason – “in order to include moral values and nurture national character in the national interest” (PTI, *The Economic Times* n.pag). This sums up the foundation of including value education as a subject in the school curriculum. Apart from the aspiration of rounded multidimensional personalities among the students, the subject aims for at shaping adequate citizens for the nation.

The nationalist ideology permeates these texts almost uniformly making the nation a strong background for the teachings imparted in these texts. Emphasizing the need of the student to be a better student and hence a better citizen to the nation, these texts mould the path for teachings of the values and morals for the societal, political, national, personal, physical and psychological development of the students. It is among these myriad of teaching content that topics of bodily awareness, gender sensitization and sex education find a spot. Ranging from an in depth discussion about masturbation to just about a nod to the presence of adolescent sexuality

in the content, these textbooks reflect what sex education and gender sensitization mean in the setting of the school.

The first textbook that I am going to analyze is intended for usage in standard 7 (for the age group of children aged generally between 13-14) named: *My book of life skills and values—winning ideas for healthy living* published in the year 2012. This book is prescribed as optional in ICSE curriculum for the subject Moral Science. In this text comprising of sixteen chapters, the tenth chapter deals with the topic of adolescence and its effect on the gender and physiology of boys and girls. The chapter is titled “Growing up” and subtitled “Awareness”. A crisp chapter of two pages, the narrative is mostly reliant on counseling and guiding/steering of the young minds towards becoming a “controlled” being. Though not expansive in its structure to talk about anything in full details, the content somewhat briefly tries to acknowledge the presence of sexuality in a growing body. The text does not acknowledge the presence of attraction. It almost reluctantly talks about the age of adolescence being a time where there is a possibility of existence of “feelings like special attraction towards the opposite sex, creep into your heart” (Mohindra 34). It reinforces the idea of this “special attraction” as though it were an unwanted physical compulsion.

The image of this unwarranted physical compulsion creeping in the heart further associates an even more negative connotation to the idea of desire. Refraining from saying physical attraction and replacing it with the word special goes on to show an acute level of discomfort on part of the authors of the chapter in their effort to formulate the idea of the desire that may appear the mind for the intended young subjects. The knowledge that this special

attraction is indeed a sexual desire could only come in a circumspect, indirect, and veiled way into the classroom. The teacher as the arbitrator of sexual knowledge is expected to deliberately choose another word instead of sexual desire or attraction. This sets the tone of the class; that is desire is a word better left unsaid. Interestingly the next line itself tries to put the previously created discomfort at ease with the following message to the intended recipients of sexual knowledge: “There is nothing bad or weird about such feelings- but it’s equally important to maintain self-control” (Mohindra 34). However a reinforcement of the need for self control follows rather strongly quite soon enough. It remains doubtless that control is a skill that would be considered a priority for becoming a healthy rounded civil being, but it is never quite clearly mentioned as to what it is that needs to be controlled.

The chapter begins with a telltale introduction to adolescence and reiterating the transitional aspect of being a young adult. After a rather hasty introduction on desire and control, the chapter delves into religious diktats: “The Bible warns that the heart is fickle than anything else” (Mohindra 34). Religious comes across as one of the most frequently used discourse when it comes to a tone of counsel and control. Once again the counsel comes without any elaboration of exactly what the heart being “fickle” implies in relation to the subject under discussion. The narration of the content of the chapter constantly takes an oppositional stand between what it intends to achieve and what it prescribes. After ascertaining that the “special attraction” needs to be controlled and the sudden appearance of a Biblical quote in the shape of a forewarning; it emphasizes on the normalcy of the said attraction: “It is perfectly normal to feel a normal attraction towards someone of the opposite sex” (Mohindra 34). Unsurprisingly the normalcy is not just because there is the said adolescent attraction; furthermore it is also normal by the virtue

of the fact that is directed towards someone of the opposite sex. Thus the narration underscores the fact for the readers that the aforementioned impulsive attraction is a standard and an ideal “normal attraction”. Any presence of sexuality that is alternative or deviant from the “normal” is left unacknowledged. The “other-ed” sexuality thus remain acutely marginalized, the presence of any other form of sexuality continues to remain neglected. However, the normal heteronormative desire must also be controlled, the chapter counsels that the students along following lines: “[We] must try to control our feelings and thoughts and avoid circumstances which may lead to an awkward situation (at home or outside) with someone you are attracted to. Even if the situation seems to get out of hand, have the sense to say NO firmly” (Mohindra 34).

The content tries to give guidance on the choices of relationships that may be made by the young subjects. But the choices clearly also interferes with the respective moral stand that it ensues. The possibility of ‘having a moment’ in social situations is considered, however its awkwardness and the proper subsequent action is also duly mentioned. Therefore the act of being “attracted” is so fraught with danger that as it seems to be exclusively located in the discourse of risk. There is no exact mentioning of what exactly is the potential danger that the young people might encounter if they do happen to act upon the said “awkward” situation. Now considering that the text is indeed intended for the usage of subjects just standing on the cusp of adolescence, resultantly the content matter is not expected to go to the intensive detailing of sex education. But considering the fact that the content makers have found it appropriate to introduce the idea of impending heterosexual attraction between the subjects a distinctive possibility, it does seem more prudent to address as to what the attraction exactly entails.

A vigorous discourse of risk and conduct management runs deep through the content of the chapter couched in a language of morality. As a result of which the students are “obligated” to make prudent choices. This personal choice reflects the character of the subjects. If they do heed to the code of conduct, they become the “good” children but if they resist then they are “bad” children. The content attains a standpoint that remains unaffected by the societal contexts and seems to be working on the lines of potential risk and the individual choice itself. There also seems to be a slight information gap when the text talks about the “awkward” situation. While the issue of adolescent attraction has been dealt with, it seems odd that there is absolutely no mention about what exactly the “awkwardness” means. Or even for that matter how a situation specifically gets classified as an “awkward” one? However the text does take in consideration the possibility of the “awkward” situation to take place inside a home and outside. As many cases molestation and sexual encounters happen in the family itself, it is obviously important that the young adults know about the use and abuse of their body. However the narrative often mystifies the subject instead of dealing with it in a forthright manner.

The principal secretary of ‘Women and Child Development’, Government of Delhi, Dr Satbir Bedi has stated regarding the matter in hand – “The department believes that though there are laws in place, it is imperative to create a culture of prevention of child abuse at home, in school and form partnership network to raise awareness, mobilize public opinion and action, and disseminate prevention programs. Child abuse affects millions of children and families every year and this has to be stopped” (The Times of India: Times News Network). To increase awareness the Delhi government formulated the “comprehensive awareness modules” in which they launched three separate programmes for children in the age group of 5-8, 9-12 and 12-18

and one for teachers, parents and other caregivers in homes. While the module for the students aged 5-8 years age group described the “good touch” and the “bad touch”, the students belonging to the age group of 9-12 learn of “forced sexual activity, sexual abuse and its prevention”. The age group of 12-18 are provided with the knowledge of the law (Press trust of India, *The Times of India*, n. pag.).<sup>9</sup> This goes on to show that mandated governmental initiatives too are in firm support of enabling students with adequate information regarding their body and sex so that child abuse can be prevented.

Taking in this information and considering the age bracket of the students that the concerned book is intending to cater to (13-14), there is obviously a huge gap of information. In order to succeed in preparing students with for dealing with the danger of sexual abuse, the students must be equipped with an honest and engaged understanding of the body and sexuality. It is the prior knowledge of dos and don'ts with respect to sexual abuse that is supposed to make the child aware of the abuse. The chapter does make an attempt to reach out to the grave issue of the child abuse but it falls short because of its superficial treatment.

As we shall see further in the text, it proposes a series of activities through which sexuality can be contained. It lists a series of things that can rather be done to use through time “productively” – “develop skills and interests such as reading, writing, painting or playing a musical instrument.” While productive usage of time for young students is a very important matter, omitting discussion on sexuality, desire, and sex is the reason why a pedagogical gap is created. The final note that the chapter ends with is a guided instruction- “Participate in activities

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2. Link to the PDF copy of “Delhi commission of protection of child rights” released by the Govt. of NCT of Delhi- [http://delhi.gov.in/wps/wcm/connect/DOIT\\_DCPCR/dpcpr/what+s+new/guidelines+for+the+prevention+of+child+abuse](http://delhi.gov.in/wps/wcm/connect/DOIT_DCPCR/dpcpr/what+s+new/guidelines+for+the+prevention+of+child+abuse)

that build your self-esteem. Lead a balanced life and respect yourself and others”. This also marks the end of the chapter aimed at making students aware about their bodies. However the shallow treatment and restraint on further dialogue owing to social anxiety surrounding the topic in hand leaves the treatment very fragmented. For the pedagogy to be effective, it calls for a contextualization and scope for discussion. The framework functions in a rigid manner and the tone remains cautionary than exploratory.

The chapter gives two exercises for the students. The questions are intended to elicit responses from students in possible social situations. For example a question requires the student to state what her/his response would be if she/he comes across a pornographic website. In the options are responses like proceeding without paying heed, feeling tempted to surf through it or talking it out with parents to obtain safety information regarding internet. Now since it is in form of an exercise, there remains a room for dialogue. However the question does not seriously address such possibilities. So if a student admits to having felt the desire to surf through such a website, he/she is required to reform themselves as per the guidance of guardians. There is a clear dictum of what to do and what not to do in the lesson, and this exercise is modelled upon it. The overall gist thus remains very superficial and irrelevant to the real experiences of the young adolescents.

The next book is titled *Joyful living: Life skills and value education textbook for students* intended for class 9 for students in the age group of 14 and 15. This textbook is used as an alternative textbook in both CBSE and ICSE curriculum. The reprinted version of the book was released in 2008 and has thirteen comprehensive chapters devoted to sharpening of life skills of

the students who are adolescents. There are chapters dealing with various topics like spiritual aspirations, intellectual astuteness, national consciousness, ecological awareness, etc. It is in the midst of all these topics that the chapter “Opposites Attract” finds its place. The chapter opens with a note on awareness regarding bodily changes and gender roles, proceeding towards sexuality/sex later in the chapter. Teaching and discussion about sex and sexuality is intricately associated with the construction of gender. The opening line of the chapter is as follows:

Nature has so arranged things that a boy and a girl have important roles to play in life, but the roles are different. It is true today that with the exception of giving birth, both sexes can do all the jobs in life. At the same time each one is called to play the two roles, masculine and feminine, which are different but equally important (36).

The brief description seems to attempt a balanced representation of the difference between boys and girls. One finds a “vigilant quantitative balancing that ensures a ‘politically correct’ arithmetic of equal representation” (Chakravarti 396). There is a frantic reiteration of the belief that the said roles of the boy and the girl are indeed very “important”, though evidently ‘different’. Without any engagement with the functioning of gendered identities or even the aspects, the book falls back on an ambiguous referencing of nature. The societal conception of gender roles are understood exclusively in the realm of this said “nature”. Chakravarti notes in her article that there is almost an “obsession with balancing men against women” in texts dealing with gender roles (397). Hence it is said with emphasis that apart from the childbirth aspect, women are capable of managing everything that a man can. However with such empirical premise, there is a clear privileging of “roles”. The next line strategically refers to the “role” that

has to be played “at the same time” while going through the activities in life. These gender roles can be situated in the context of the heteronormative hierarchy. The significance of either gender is understood with respect to the acceptability in relation to the opposite gender- “It is a fine thing when a person accepts his or her sex and role with pride, and seeks to be attractive and acceptable to the other sex. A girl rivaling, imitating and blindly yielding to a man is as ridiculous as a man carrying a handbag or doting over knitting” (*Joyful Living* 9 36).

While one is asked to be proud of their gender, the realm of understanding the nuances of gender is exclusively limited to the stereotypical roles and images associated with men and women. The conventional role of the docile, quiet, and ideal girl is considered a ‘ridiculous’ idea. At the same time, actions like doting and knitting is considered deplorable for ideal men. It is quite a conundrum to think that a particular action when attributed to a specific gender is supposed to emanate pride, while the same thing in the opposite gender is supposed to yield shame. Gender stereotyping is a critical element in social construction of gender, based on the normative belief system which dictates what is typical of being feminine or of being masculine. Premised on a dichotomous version of gender, it goes on to decide the “roles” of men and women. Actions of men and women are rigorously segregated as per the analysis of their “gendered” content, thus neatly dividing the social experiences of either gender.

Let us look at the following as an example of such stereotyping. An image of a girl “rivaling, imitating and blindly yielding to man” is strongly dictated by the idea of the traditionally perceived idea of fragile “femininity”. As Young observes:

Insofar as we learn to live out our existence in accordance with the definition that patriarchal culture assigns to us, we are physically inhibited, confined, positioned, and objectified. As lived bodies we are not open and unambiguous transcendences which move out to master a world that belongs to us, a world constituted by our own inventions and projections (152).

The all-pervasive attempt to socialize young people into gender norms produces a hegemonic representation of otherwise ostensibly routine actions and reactions. Regardless of acknowledging of gender equity in the concluding part of the text, the writers still find the idea of a physically strong, rebellious or a combative woman to be almost ludicrous. Furthermore the action is projected as an imitative behaviour quite possibly rising from wanting to be like a man. Femininity thus is modeled within a very limited confines, breaking the barriers of which is considered to be downright “ridiculous” (*Joyful Living* 9 36).

The text goes ahead to test the student’s assumptions regarding what entails the characteristics of males and females on physical, intellectual, emotional, and social levels. After the tabulation there is an additional note: “These traits are the general characteristics of the two sexes, but they are by no means exclusive. What is said of the one maybe true also of the other. They are meant to complement each other. When there is perfect understanding of this, both will grow to be better and fuller persons” (*Joyful Living* 9 37). This additional note comes forward as quite paradoxical in nature as the text seems to be contradicting its own stand. There is a clear attempt to put forth the idea of the equity of awareness and access regardless of gender. Yet simultaneously there is propagation of clearly demarcated gendered activities on every level.

These formulations point to the segregation of activities along gender lines. The anxiety of the possible transgressing of a conventional gendered order is felt in the text when there is a repeated emphasis on the need for men and women to “complement each other” in all their activities.

In the concluding segment of the chapter named “Reflection” there is a broad overview of the entire content. It re-emphasizes and talks about the acceptability and the complete normality of the desire and attraction covering the idea of “courtship/dating”. However there is a clear limiting of sexuality to the confines of heterosexuality as one’s search of self worth is fulfilled through a healthy “man woman relationship”. Heterosexist norms underlie the ideals of maleness or femaleness. Biased in its pedagogical practice, the tone of the chapter resists any breaking of gendered normative. Considering children’s transitional position in the societal discourse, their self image is highly dependent on the level of acceptance gained. Their definition of personhood in the text is limited to the boundaries of “normal” heterosexual relationship.

Furthermore, the affirmation of “maleness or femaleness” through a healthy man-woman relationship reflects the performative aspect of gender. Queer theory questions the heteronormative ideology in understanding of sexuality and gender and looks at gender as a performance. From this standpoint, confirming to the status quo of being an ideal man or a woman to retain the tag of wholesomeness would be problematic as it foregrounds gendered identity as something that is performed and reiterated on a continuous basis and is not something that is innate/natural.

The next textbook used for the study is *Joyful Living: Life skill and value education handbook for teachers* (2006) intended to be taught in classes 11-12. This textbook is prescribed as an alternate value education textbook for ICSE curriculum. Intended to be a guide for the teachers rather than a textbook for students, this text expects the teacher to set the tone with the content and then proceed according to the exercises. The chapter which deals with sexuality and sex education in its premise is “My body – a gift”. The opening note of the chapter marks out the objectives of the content which is: “Understand that our bodies are a gift for use and not for misuse, be aware of the different abuses of the body and to take steps to maintain the sacredness of the body” (*Joyful living 11/12 58*)

Going through the introductory note, the religious and a moralistic undertone of the forthcoming content is expected. In its essence value education textbooks are supposed to impart the tutors with the tools to investigate the place of values in the prescribed curriculum and furthermore to study the implications of these values in practice. The authors elucidate in the introduction of the book that it intends to educate the students as follows: “to create a society where true and lasting values are cherished, upheld and lived”. Some of the values mentioned are : “spiritual aspirations”, “emotional well being and integration”, “intellectual astuteness”, “national consciousness and service”, “social inter-relatedness and concern” etc. The placing of sex education in this context value education tends to be quite problematic as Steiner points out “these taxonomies (values) are useful insofar as they broaden the potential context and pool of values in relation to sex education; however the way the authors distinguish between values and value frameworks is confusing” (7).

The chapter “My body- A gift” represents the sexuality of an adolescent subject mainly from the perspective of a guardian figure or the society. There is a clear demarcation of the pros and cons, right and wrong, and use and abuse. There seems to be absolute no grey area or middle ground in this listing, but absolute binaries. The title of the chapter interestingly holds the body of the adolescent subject to be “a gift”, essentially holding the subject to be accountable of his/her choices towards his own body as the autonomy and the ownership of the body/self is not existent in this discourse.

The chapter starts off with recounting of a small story. The story has two teenagers named Sumi and Rajesh, aged 14 and 17 respectively, who happen to meet each other at a beach in Goa while vacationing with their families. Gradually their relationship becomes intimate eventually resulting in Sumi’s pregnancy. Their age stops them from marrying and despite pressure from Rajesh’s family; Sumi goes ahead with the pregnancy. At the end of the narration of the story, the story elicits response from the students:

On March 23, 2003 Sumi and Rajesh met at the Baga beach in Goa while they were holidaying with their families. Both came from good families with strong morals and good upbringing. Sumi was a class IX student and Rajesh was a higher secondary student. Both felt good that their parents had trusted them to be on their own. They felt they could take care of themselves as they came from good families and good schools. Their relationship grew with their visits to the beach. They felt attracted towards each other, which is normal. Soon, their attraction turned into an intimate physical friendship which tarnished the sacredness of two bodies. It’s only when Sumi missed her periods that she

realized that she was pregnant. Marriage could not be thought of since both were still studying. However Sumi decided not to abort the child in spite of pressure from the boy as well as from the families for which she held life to be sacred and knew that the unborn child has a right to live.

While Rajesh roams apparently free but with a guilty conscience that will haunt him for the rest of his life, Sumi has to face the wrath of society and also the qualms of her own conscience.

However, in all her trauma, her own consolation was the fact that she was able to stand up against societal pressures and not abort the child- one right among some of the wrongs that she did (*Joyful Living* 11/12 58).

The retelling of a cautionary story is a common technique used by the educators as sex education is placed more than often in the discourse of guilt, trauma, and societal rejection. There is a strong reinforcement of the popular belief that an ‘upright’ family with a good financial standing can provide the necessary amount of “good upbringing” (*Joyful living* 11/12 58). The domain of good upbringing and good familial values is thus confined to a certain class of the society. There is a repetition and emphasis on how “they felt” and henceforth how their perception of independence was in a sense misguided. The fact of being from “good families and good schools” (*Joyful living* 11/12 58) is also duly accredited to be the reason for such misguided sense of independence. This seems to be a nod to the common perception of sexual independence among adolescents in urban locales; as it is possibly the most susceptible to the “westernized immoral” trends in society and media. The upheaval of social and economical change in the cities post liberalization along with the increased visibility of sex in mainstream pop culture has

indeed carved out spaces where people can access material relating to or talk of sex/sexuality with comparative freedom. However that being said, exposure to the topic is certainly not the sole reason for adolescents experimenting and acting out on their sexual instincts. The text equates independence of young people as the grounds of making a hazardous mistake that can put their health in jeopardy. As in the similar vein of the previous texts, the attraction felt towards a person of the other sex is addressed once again; with stress on the normalcy of its occurrence. It's quite ironical that the text normalizes attraction in one sentence and then goes on to describe the consequences of such normal attractions as disastrous.

The story of the “misguided lovers” is then brought to the point where their relationship enters a sexual dimension. The culmination of the relationship is called to be “intimate physical friendship” (*Joyful living* 11/12 58). After this point their actions are seen as immoral, there is no attempt to emphatically deal with the complexity of such relationships. It is only seen as tarnishing “the sacredness of the bodies” (*Joyful living* 11/12 58). The body is treated as a site for the preservation of morality. The emphasis on shame permeates throughout the discourse. The supposed “sacredness” of the body is an extension of the societal anxiety that surrounds the idea of a growing female body. The regulation and the safeguarding of its chastity thus becomes of the foremost value in sex education. The adolescent body, being a blossoming and a growing entity thus become the prime target for the regulatory structures to restrain and control. Forceful words like “tarnishing” and “sacredness” are intended to bring in the tone of authority into the statement. Within such a framework there is no scope for sympathetic engagement with “sexual intimacy”. The verdict remains one-dimensional in its perspective, leaving no room for further discussion regarding the events of the story.

The message appears to be: young people must not make willful use of their bodies; it is a ‘gift and its behaviour needs to be regulated by the norms of the society. There is no scope at all within this frame to admit the possibility of two growing individuals who might quite normally indulge in an intimate relationship. Body and sex are taught only in the discourse of fear and shame in an attempt to guide students into making ‘responsible’ sexual choices.

One also finds a reiteration of the concept of virginity and the virginal innocence. The chapter attempts to discuss the dimensions of an adolescent body in a societal discourse. This calls for a format that allows discussion. Bringing in a contested and fraught topic like “virginal innocence” requires discussion and contextual understanding. However the text merely endorses it, making the whole content prescriptive rather than descriptive. The idea of shedding some light on the hushed topic of sexuality thus becomes ineffective as such treatment of the concept of body leaves the content laced with overtones of prejudice. The complexity of a contentious topic such as gender and sexual identity needs a lot more depth in their scope and understanding. The focus is on anatomy, erasing out the whole topic of gendered and sexual identity. The rationale behind such absolute biological focus obviously does not allow for any scope for inciting any sort of inquisitiveness or for piquing the curiosity of the child (Strong 2).

The story continues with Sumi coming to the eventful realization of her impending pregnancy. As mentioned earlier, there is a limiting of the topic to pathological outcome, hence venereal disease or a pregnancy is the most possible expected climactic turn to the story. The concept of marriage is brought in wake of the pregnancy as the heteronormative relation in the

marital context is the only discourse in which sexuality is considered “acceptable”. This results in a very limited, moralistic understanding of the pregnant adolescent girl for whom marriage is now the only redemption. Both in regards to understanding of the sexuality and health, the idea of marriage for the sake of societal acceptance is a troubling one.

As pointed out earlier, the content relies on a prescription rather than opening a space for further discussion, though ironically the intention of the chapter discussed above is to open the platform for discussion. Sumi’s persistence on keeping the child with the logic that the “unborn child had the right to live” makes for a complete anti-abortion stance. Since the woman in question does happen to be an adolescent girl, the text could have considered termination of pregnancy as a prudent choice, citing health and young age as reasons. The burden of carrying the moral objective is conveniently placed on the girl’s head while showing the boy in the negative light. The idea of woman as child bearer further accentuates the necessity of the girl continuing the pregnancy regardless of repercussions. Notably the story is presented as the story of a single mother as against that of the single father. The boy is seen to be absent in the whole process of parenting. The responsibility of the child hereafter is shown to be a sole duty of the mother, the father being the absentee figure. This treatment and portrayal of the young adolescent mother shows a profoundly distorted and prejudiced version of the possible outcome of an intimate relationship between young people.

The intention of the text thus is to scare the readers/students into choosing abstinence over acting up on desires. It is important for the students to know the consequences and the hazards of an unwanted, ill timed pregnancy; however the chapter turns the intimate relationship

between two young people into a subject for a moral lesson. The ultimate consequence of Sumi's actions makes her into a social pariah, which further strengthens the idea that women's morality must be policed continually to stop them from going astray.

Sumi's character is conceptualized solely through the idea of vulnerability. The role of Sumi is seen first as the "naïve" and "tainted" teenager and later as the "helpless", "righteous" woman. There is mention of her trauma and being a thorough outcast, but no mention of her ability to survive as a single mother. The idea of putting the child up for adoption is also overlooked. Sumi's character and story is never explored as the single mother of the child or her personal growth as a person after the incident. Sumi's story as a single mother or her growth as person after the incident is not pursued. The portrayal is limited to Sumi as the traumatized and shunned young mother. Sumi's position thus has a very limited scope in the text.

The idea of a modern Indian womanhood is explored by Sumi's sexual choices and the consequences. She compromises the "purity" of her body by engaging in a sexual intercourse, thus doing away with her "innocence". However she 'redeems' herself a little after making the choice of keeping the child with herself as killing a foetus would be a "sin". The writers applaud her action by regarding it as – "one right among some of the wrongs that she did" (*Joyful Living* 11/12 58). Thapan articulates the persistent ambivalence of this complex idea of womanhood and femininity in India by saying that– "The ideal Indian woman contradictorily embodies the dichotomous, and yet congruent, identity of innocence and sophistication, purity and maturity, together in a single frame" (78).

The next part is subtitled “Learning experience” which explores the modern ideology and practice of sex and sexuality. It depicts the rights and wrongs regarding the usage of the body in a conjugal relation:

For decades, sexual liberationists claimed that people needed to be liberated from repressive sexual ethics. They taught that everyone should be free to experience their own sexuality in any manner whatsoever with anyone who is willing. Such thinking and experimentation has brought multitudes of men and women permanent diseases such as sterility, genital herpes, genital wart virus linked with cervical and penile cancers and other such related diseases. Young boys and girls have suffered guilt, shame and scorn from families and society. Unable to live this trauma they have to put an end to their lives. Instead of enjoying sexual bliss, human sexuality for such persons is now associated with personal misery, disease and death.

Our bodies are not toys to be played with. They are sacred and as such have to be handled with delicacy, respect and care. There are many ways in which we can abuse the body by focusing solely on pleasure the body can give (*Joyful Living* 11/12 59).

With no scope for discussion, this section of the chapter is an absolutely prescriptive and inducing a tone of borderline propaganda. It relentlessly pushes forward the idea of sanctified body and sex being the corrupting element. Liberation is very problematically equated into the loss of “value based” sexual choices. While it is imminent that the content is preaching a healthy social and mental lifestyle for adolescents; there is a very prejudiced viewpoint of the idea of

sexual liberation. Liberation has been portrayed to be a sort of sexual anarchy, where an individual's right to exercise his/ her sexual agency is marked as wanton.

The idea of sex is considered only in the discourse of science and kept in isolation from the context of relationships. Further ahead there is an extensive usage of the disease discourse to justify the criticism of liberation. Trimble describes a "diseased body discourse" as –

A teaching method born from the philosophies of the social hygiene movement, which have contemporary parallels in the values and pedagogy of abstinence education, and use fear and shame based rhetoric to convince youth to modify/police/regulate their sexual behaviours (69).

With a mention of several diseases like genital herpes, genital wart virus, cervical cancer, and penile cancer, there is a morbid tone in the beginning of the text itself. As mentioned in the definition; the rhetoric is designed to assert stern regulation. There is a morbid note in the middle when the text insinuates suicide, to be a possible side effect of an ill timed sexual encounter. In fact the paragraph ends with the reminder of "misery, disease, and death" (*Joyful Living* 11/12 59) to be eventual results of a sexual misdemeanor. The point comes out in bold letters to be of a stern practice of abstinence. The agency-less bodies of adolescents are marked as "not toys to be played with" (*Joyful Living* 11/12 59). The writers of the content prescribe them (the students) a treatment of bodies with utmost "delicacy, respect and care"; however they are forbidden to explore their own bodies or feel a sense of ownership.

The writers then go ahead to broadly tabulate the possible abuses of the body; the first and the foremost being; "Masturbation: is the self-stimulation of the sex organs resulting in an

orgasm. Adolescents are more susceptible to the practice. Compulsive masturbation can be very debilitating to the personal development of the young” (*Joyful Living* 11/12 59). While the topic of masturbation is discussed as healthy practice in sex education manuals released by Independent organizations like TARSHI (Talking about reproductive and sexual health issues)<sup>10</sup>; the content of the given textbook downright condemns it as a practice that ensnares the “adolescents” into its “unhealthy” trap. The mentioning of “susceptibility” implies weakness on the participating individual’s part. There is a marked omission of the possible benefits and necessity of self stimulation and self exploration, or relating it to the formation of body image or gendered identity. There is also no attempt to discuss masturbation separately for both genders. Negating and overlooking the desires underlying the practice and rather marking its disadvantages creates a restricted space for students.

As the texts lists out the possible misuses of the body, next in line is the topic of Homosexuality:

Homosexuality: is a perversion characterized by a desire for sexual relations with members of the same sex. It is called lesbianism or sapphism if it occurs between women. If children are involved, it is called pederasty. Some homosexuals are capable of heterosexual stimulation and are called bisexuals. Homosexuality is tragic because it can lead to a complete breakdown of human communities and exclude procreation of the species (“*Joyful Living* 11/12” 59).

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<sup>10</sup>TARSHI has released immensely popular bilingual sex education manual named “Red Book” intended for the age group of 10-14. Illustrated with extensive coverage of lived experiences of the adolescents, the book gives a free space for discussion regarding sex, gender, sexuality.

The aforementioned definition of homosexuality reflects the repressive authority of a heterosexist culture. Locating homosexuality in the discourse of sin and moral depravity, the text represents homosexuality as deviant. Heterosexual norms underpin the content and homosexuality is shunned or condemned. Homosexuality is viewed only as a “perversion”. Lesbianism is mentioned in the same breath as pederasty (pedophilia), thus criminalizing it. Bisexuality is explained as homosexuals capable of heterosexual sex. Gay, lesbian, bisexual and pedophile are all clubbed together, highlighting the perversion shared by all these categories. Such hegemonic heterosexist portrayal reflects how “the representation of legitimate (hetero)sexual orientation and traditional notions of family are embedded in practices of Othering and privileging that rely on demonizing the queer subject” (Martino 552). The moral repugnance elicited by alternative sexualities is clear when homosexuality is called as tragic and responsible for “breakdown of human communities” (*Joyful living* 11/12 59). The practice is condemned as it does not lead to reproduction. Such an orientation leads to an extremely oppressive pedagogy which consolidates the distance that might exist between heterosexual students and students who may not conform to the heterosexist norm.

Premarital sex is also on the radar for being one of the abuses committed to the body, the content defines it further as: “The body, which is meant to be kept virgin for one’s partner, is used to have sexual pleasure with other persons or even with the intended partner before marriage” (*Joyful Living* 11/12 59). Once again any form of sexual relationship outside the context of marriage is a thoroughly invalidated. Virginity regardless of gender is prioritized high on the list of validated/morally sound things. Desire and pleasure, categories which were missing in the discussion for so long finds their presence finally in the approved model of marriage. Most

sex education content shy away from discussing the context of desire as Louisa Allen's study points out – "...sexual learning in schools still had lapsed dialogic threads when it came to navigating the complexities of emotions, pleasure and desire" (Trimble 194).

As an exercise to test the understanding of the content, the chapter puts up two scenarios. The first depicts the following:

Sonia and Deepak are classmates, in love with each other. Deepak holds her hand in public. Coming from a conservative family background she feels awkward. But she allows him because she loves him and wants to be accepted by the peers. Deepak takes the liberty to hug her in public. Sonia does not object. They go on a date to a secluded place. He takes the chance to rape her.

- Is Sonia responsible for the rape? Give reasons.
- How could Sonia have avoided this unfortunate rape?
- What advice would you give to a boy-girl in love regarding the sacredness of the body? (*Joyful Living* 11/12 61)

The above narrative presents a social scenario with three situational questions in the end. The imagined scenario ends with a crime and the following questions are meant to lead the students to analyze and present a perspective which is already anticipated by the framework. The questions are not exploratory but cautionary. The narrative actively perpetuates existing gendered expectations and social roles attributed to either gender.

The narrative is also marked by what maybe characterized as victim blaming<sup>11</sup>. The information given about the lead characters of the tale is quite revelatory. The opening line tells a story of two college classmates in love with each other. The consequent lines explore the identity of both the lovers. On an abrupt note after the introduction, the male lead Deepak is described as someone who “holds her hand in public”. That is pretty much the only grounding the character of Deepak gets, he is for lack of better words “hand holder” with no origin or background. Sonia on the other hand, is said to come from the background of a “conservative family”. She is also said to be awkward owing to her conservative origin. Further ahead, in both the case of hugging and holding hands, Sonia is said to give the liberty to Deepak so that she can find peer acceptance. The case study thus reveals the following about their lead characters- Sonia is the one looking for “peer acceptance”, she is also the one who “gives liberty” and most importantly the one who “doesn’t object”. Sonia’s “mistakes” are thus highlighted as terrible results of her misguided search for love and acceptance. Deepak on the other hand comes off as one who transgresses boundaries. In an abrupt conclusion to the story, on a date in a secluded place, Deepak rapes Sonia.

Socio-cultural gender roles shape the behaviour of both the characters. In sync with the gendered stereotypes the case study reiterates that image that “Men are primarily oriented toward dominance, egoism, and avoiding weakness. In contrast, women are oriented toward support or enabling the others, intimacy, reciprocity” (Ridgeway 102). Staying true to that image, no effort is made to contextualize Deepak or situate him in a familial background; he only appears as aggressive and dominating, embodying essentialized male qualities. Sonia’s characterization

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11 The rampant growth into the culture of “victim blaming” was addressed by Bollywood actress Kalki Koechlin in her now viral video titled “AIB: Rape – It’s your fault”. (AIB)

positions her as the quintessential vulnerable girl who defies her familial boundaries seeking pleasure outside the marital bond. Sonia is said to seek peer acceptance. But there is no mention for Deepak doing the same. If Sonia going out of her comfort zone to hold her lover's hand is a move to gain peer acceptance, shouldn't Deepak's wanting to hold hands be a part of peer acceptance too? Deepak's transition from classmate to lover to rapist appears abrupt and unreal. The reason for the rape is merely sudden temptation in a secluded place. The narrative finally zeroes down on Sonia's failure to thwart Deepak's overtures.

While Deepak is an emblem of aggressive masculinity stereotype, Sonia stands for exaggerated vulnerability reiterating the stereotype of a woman being responsible for her own virtue (Stahl, Eek, and Kazemi 241). The blame is unabashedly on Sonia; as the question asks – “How could Sonia have avoided this unfortunate rape?” (*Joyful Living* 11/12 61); putting the onus of the crime completely on her. In the last question the sacredness of the body is once again brought into play, drawing on religion to decline young people any agency over their bodies. Overall the book tries to have a bigger expanse of conversation regarding body, body image, sexuality, sexual crimes; but its fall short at multiple levels because of the moralistic and obfuscating treatment.

The next book which discusses the premise of gender and sex education is *Discovering Myself* (2009); a textbook on value education textbook intended for usage in class 9 for the age group 13-14. This book is used as an alternative textbook in both CBSE and ICSE boards. The book is designed as self-help guide for growing adolescents. It attempts to help the students through “the consciousness of their self-image, the discovery of their sexuality, the menace of

AIDS and drugs and the lure of consumerism” (Bruylants, Braganza, and Choudhury 3). Over the expanse of three chapters named “A Beautiful Feeling”, “Falling in Love” and “AIDS”. The chapters intend to explore on the ideas of the following values respectively -“Understanding love”, “Handling emotions”, and “Feeling for others”.

Contrary to most other value education texts, this text actually takes to consideration the lived experience of an adolescent and places romantic interest outside the context of a marital bond. The first chapter “Falling in Love” does have a preliminary discussion regarding relationships. With a sample conversation occurring amidst men and women regarding attraction, love, affection; the content tries to connect to the readers of the book in their context. However in the chapter “Putting Things in Perspective” the text tries to emulate the prescriptive tone of an adult. A relationship that happens at a young age is trivialized and marked as a distraction. A well meaning teacher may encourage self awareness among the growing adults to get their priorities straight. However the pedagogic move here forecloses any discussion of desire and pleasure among adolescents. Additionally any possible attraction must only be directed towards the opposite gender. Once again the framework remains completely heteronormative.

With the title of “Responsible love” the narrative forays into the area of safe sex. In a manner followed by many other value education/moral science texts, the writers choose a scientific discourse to address the issue of sexual intercourse. Calmly detached and strictly anatomical, the writers seek responsibility from the adolescents on the following grounds:

All other living beings are restricted by nature to “seasons”. We should use our sexual freedom reasonably and with responsibility. The choices of responsible love are:

- Chastity and Patience before marriage
- Faithfulness and restraint within marriage
- Celibacy as a sacrifice to spiritual love (Bruylants, Braganza, and Choudhury 24)

Keeping the scope narrow and limited to biological outcome and social restraint, the content steers towards a very socially approved and sanitized version of sexual knowledge. Sex here is understood strictly under the realm of procreative ability, there is no other type of sex other than the heterosexual marital relationship culminating in reproduction. Virginity/chastity is once again prioritized and endorsed heavily citing it to be the “correct” sexual expression inside the marital bond.

The section preceding the present topic named “Love protected” talks about the “preciousness” of a baby conceived in the traditional marital bond – “The gift of life is precious and, therefore, it is protected by society in the institution of marriage. Marriage brings two people together in a relationship that is a call for commitment and unconditional love...Marriage provides the child with a nest of security” (Bruylants, Braganza, and Choudhury 23-24). A strictly heterosexist understanding thus leaves out the various other forms of sexual expression. Additionally it reinforces the primacy of marriage. With a proclamation suggesting the validation of a child only if it is conceived within a marriage; it rules out single parent families and other alternative familial arrangements/possibilities.

Sex education was initiated within India as a part of the bigger fight against the AIDS epidemic. Consequently, the subject is largely framed within the discourse of this disease. In an attempt to make recipients aware of this sexually transmitted fatal disease, the text charts the possible events which have led to the growth of the “AIDS pandemic”. These are the following:

- Rapid changes in sexual behaviour marked the third quarter of the twentieth century.
  - Women’s liberation movements caused a shift in the status of the women and an increased presence of women outside the home and in the public realm
  - Women gained freedom concerning reproductive choices and sexual expression.
  - With the acceptance of gay rights in the seventies, sexual permissiveness reached new heights.
  - There was a strong ‘peace movement’, characterized by a break from authority symbolized by long hair, scruffy clothes, sexual permissiveness and use of narcotics
- (Bruylants, Braganza, and Choudhury 36)

The reactionary and conservative thrust of the list can hardly be missed. It is clear from the above passage that sexual permissiveness to be the sole reason for the breakdown of collective morality and eventually leading to AIDS. The view strongly propagates that AIDS is some sort of punishment designed for immoral lifestyle. Feminist struggles stand depoliticized and trivialized as “women’s liberation” is identified as a cause for the spreading of the disease. AIDS is much more than a disease; as part of this restrictive cultural imagination, it is

represented as a moral threat to all that is outside the patriarchal heterosexist norms of the society. The text brings forward a similar thought in the end: “Could AIDS be nature’s way of reminding the world that it has been misusing sex?” (Bruylants, Braganza, and Choudhury 37). As HIV prevention supposedly remains one of the primary goals of sex education, it is rather odd that the text does not address strategies of safe sex. The content perpetuates the stereotype that abstinence is the only strategy that must be adopted by adolescents. The pedagogic framework rules out any other choice.

Independent organizations like Nirantar and Talking about Reproduction and Sexual Health (TARSHI) have done their part in releasing some comprehensive texts in the recent years. TARSHI on its part has released three set of books- *Red book*, *Yellow book*, and the *Blue book*. All the above mentioned books deal with the overarching theme of sex education, but each book caters to a different set of audience. The *Red book* is intended for students aged between 10-14 years, while *Blue book* is intended for the students aged 15+. The *Yellow book* is intended for the parents of young adults. Precise and openminded in their approach, these books deal with clear highlighted questions. Whereas it is not uncommon to find texts with content which has discomfort talking about sex in general, the book brings up all the marked “uncomfortable topics”. The book has clear divisions between tips, questions, tools, facts and additional resources. There is no moralizing tone of counsel or mentioning of what is normal and what is not. It breaks down myths surrounding common misconceptions like masturbation, nocturnal emissions, body image issues etc. Substantiating its statistics and information from sources such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the content of the books empower the readers to take control of their own sexuality and choices. Written in a lucid manner to reach one and all, the

text covers serious topics like child abuse, sexual abuse, AIDS, abortion, without turning judgmental. The information provided is adequate and sensitive, empowering the reader to make informed choices.

Nirantar's texts were released in Hindi named "*Yaunikta aur hum*" (Sexuality and Us), as an online publication. Refreshing in its approach in covering the topics in a conversational manner, the book covers the taboo topics of sex and sexuality with ease. The book is aimed more at gender sensitization and making readers aware of gender as a fluid category. With two demarcated sections on masculinity and femininity, the book reflects on how both these categories are constructed. Taking examples from mythology and pop culture, the text intends to break down the hegemonic perceptions associated with gender and sex. These texts serve as great examples as to how sex education can be done in a much more accessible, thoughtful and democratic manner.

## CONCLUSION

The thesis tries to identify the pedagogical gap that can be located between the content dealing with sexual education and the students reading it. I have attempted to foreground how the archaic pattern of sex education remains disengaged from and irrelevant to the realities of the lives of the students. Definitions of matrimony, parenthood, sexuality, sex etc are in the process of constant flux. It is critical to adopt a pedagogic approach that deals with issues of sexuality with seriousness, outside the normative, restrictive frames of societal morality. There is a drastic need to get over the reformist and the “population-control” focused content imparting sex education.

Sex education is an attempt to create a safe space for the young adults to gain a perspective and have a clear notion about their sexuality, values, and choices. This calls for clarity and candidness with respect to the content, and also respect towards the young people who are addressed, ensuring that they are able to judge the perspectives and information on sexuality, available from multiple sources. Such education must provide the skills to students that enable them to navigate through the pressures exerted by sexual taboos and the diktat to conform to socially acceptable standards.

The teacher’s version of what an adolescent needs should actively evolve into what the adolescent needs/wants for himself/herself. No serious or productive engagement with “body, “desire”, “gender” or “sexuality” is possible if the tone and content remain moralistic and prescriptive. An inclusive sex education must take into account the experiences of young men

and women from a range of backgrounds. The student-recipient should be able to engage with the material and identify with the reader-position offered to her/him through the address of the text. With the bombardment of knowledge from a large number of channels without any constraint, the sex education class can only succeed if there is room for an active dialogue. The interests, anxieties and queries of the recipients should find place in the modern pedagogy of sex education. The power structures and the regulatory control that revolves around sex have to be discarded as much as possible, so that the students can feel engaged to the content.

It is also strategic to note that students with the influx of knowledge through various channels and mediums find it quite easy to get information regarding sex. With websites such as [www.sexualityandu.ca](http://www.sexualityandu.ca), [www.iwannaknow.org](http://www.iwannaknow.org), or [sexetc.org](http://sexetc.org) that have an exhaustive amount of information for every query regarding sex/sexuality that an adolescent may have, young people more often than not are as aware if not more aware than the adults when it comes to sexual knowledge. The restrictedness of the text-based content thus makes the students being more and more dissociated from/disinterested in the subject matter. Having access alternative sources of information, they are often sexually knowledgeable, contradicting the very position that the regular sex education text would like them to occupy. Therefore the sex education textual content in no way is a decisive factor in deciding on the sexual agency of the children. Thus restricted content while intended to control the bodies/desires of young people, can in no way regulate the sexual knowledge gained by the students from a range of sources. While I have not been able to engage with these alternative sources given the limited scope of this dissertation, they open out extremely interesting possibilities for further research.

One can always look up the texts and manuals used by the independent organizations like Nirantar and TARSHI to understand how the pedagogy of sex education can be made thought provoking and engaged with the contexts of the students that it is addressed to. There is no attempt in this material to limit a topic to make it appropriate for the dominant category of the “adolescent” who must be protected from sexuality, but the attempt is to make the subject as lucid and candid as possible, unbound by dominant gender and societal norms. There is usage of illustrative cartoons and diagrams to make the content student friendly, but never an approach to represent the students as a potential risk group or as innocent youth who must be simultaneously protected and policed.

Education serves to create rounded social individuals who are socially adept and aware. Sex being an important aspect of a growing adult is not a category to be ignored but something to be addressed in its complexity. An engaged and non-moralizing approach to sex education can lead to a more grounded and democratic understanding of gendered relations and sexual differences among adolescents and in turn, lead to a more egalitarian society. Clearly the official discourse of sex education would be re-energized by drawing on the worldview of alternative textbooks such as those produced by Nirantar and TARSHI as also the plural/lived realities and contexts of the student groups that it addresses.

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