

Peace Dialogues

A Review for the **National Curriculum**

The Need for Gender-Neutral Representation in Textbooks

Dr. Rubina Saigol

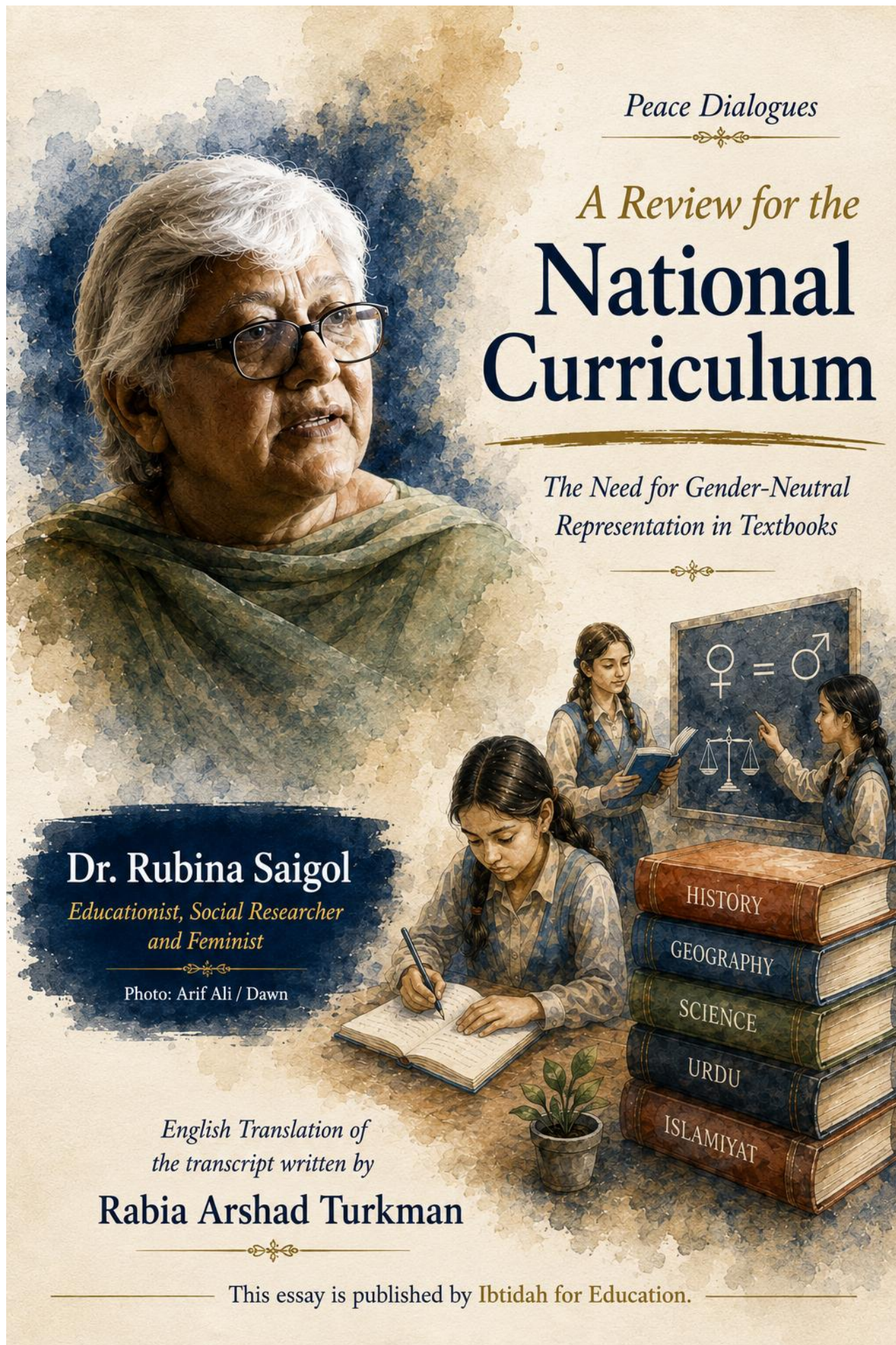
*Educationist, Social Researcher
and Feminist*

Photo: Arif Ali / Dawn

*English Translation of
the transcript written by*

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Educational reform is a complex and difficult undertaking. With this in mind, the Peace Dialogue Series, carried out and designed by education researcher Zeeba T. Hashmi between 2020 and 2021, brought together the views of education specialists in a public forum, so that they could indicate problems in the curriculum, syllabus, teacher selection and textbook content.

This special edition has been issued to commemorate the work and legacy left behind by the late Dr. Rubina Saigol. This piece is based on the transcripts from the interview carried out with her by journalist and researcher Rabbia Turkman.

About the Dialogue Series

The purpose of this series was to address contested and discriminatory issues through peaceful discussion.

The Need for Unbiased Gender Representation in Textbooks

The guest for this conversation is Dr Rubina Saigol, social activist and education expert. The host is Rabia Arshad Turkman, journalist and researcher.

Portrayal of Acceptable Traditional Roles in the Curriculum

Host: *What is your view of the curricula produced so far on the question of gender equality? Is the situation improving, or has it deteriorated? Or does the influence of colonial literature still remain?*

Dr. Saigol: Whenever feminism and women's rights come up for discussion, matters improve a little. Even then, only the socially acceptable aspects of women's rights are included. The role of women in Pakistan's independence movement is a good example. It entered the curriculum because the national movement is regarded as a respectable cause, and so the stories of the women who took part in it began to be told as well.

Depiction of traditional gender roles: Textbooks include images of women in their traditional roles as mother and daughter. The mother cooks at home while the daughter helps her, washes the dishes or minds the younger children. The father goes out to work and the son plays cricket outside. These are fixed gender roles, in which the woman is shown doing domestic work and nothing else. She is never shown working outside the home, conducting scientific or social experiments, or doing fieldwork. Athletes and scientists are always boys. The purpose is to teach children that girls who confine themselves to housework are the 'good' girls. This began to change when women's rights came under discussion and the Women's Action Forum was formed. Even then, only what society finds acceptable was admitted. Women's part in the national movement was added, along with two professions: teacher and doctor. After that, all the stories took the same shape. The family wakes early and eats breakfast. Father goes off to the bank, mother goes to teach at school, and the children go to study. The role of women in the independence movement was given great prominence. Other professions were left out, and so were women's own movements for their rights. Women around the world work as scientists, businesswomen and athletes. They have made a great name in cricket, hockey and tennis, winning medals along the way. None of these stories appears in the textbooks.

Share in gross domestic product: Women have always worked in the fields as agricultural labourers, yet when a field is shown in a textbook it is a man with an ox. In Sindh and Punjab it is women who pick the cotton, and they have worked in agriculture since ancient times. This has never been made visible. The farmer and the factory worker are shown as men without exception. Pakistan's informal sector is very large and

full of women. They contribute a substantial share of gross domestic product. Women are also pilots, scientists, soldiers and fighter pilots, and they are inventing all manner of things. Many are bankers, mountaineers and media professionals. None of these roles appears in the textbooks, because they have never been considered suitable work for a woman. A stereotype was propagated, and PTV dramas reinforced it. A woman who works outside the home, they suggested, loses her marriage. In reality she goes out to work in order to support her husband, because in a time of inflation a single income is not enough to live on.

The difference between national freedom and personal freedom: Textbooks have always been conservative in the way they portray women. When women appear at all, the roles are those society accepts and does not judge. A woman who is independent is treated quite differently, as is one who chooses her own profession — modelling, acting, voice work or the media. She is still largely regarded as a bad or immoral woman. The freedom of the nation is held to be a matter of the highest importance, but the moment a woman asks for freedom the word turns negative. This is repeated again and again in textbook images. Older books carried a lesson called 'Bano's home, Dara's village'. The meaning is unmistakable. Bano, as a woman, belongs only to the house, while Dara, as a man, represents the entire village.

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Colonial literature: The previous curriculum carried a short extract in the Class Six book, while at A and O Levels the whole of *Mirat-ul-Uroos* is taught. It is the story of two women, one capable and one slovenly. One destroys the home. The other builds it, manages her husband, and proves an excellent manager, thrifty and wholly devoted to household affairs. In the story, the capable woman has no desires of her own and never acts on her own wishes. Laughing, playing, meeting friends and mixing with people of other castes are all treated as failings. The story was written in 1861, in the nineteenth century, in order to construct a particular idea of womanhood. In our own time this inherited figure has grown even more backward-looking. Yet religion offers the example of Hazrat Zainab, who was educated, who taught, and who understood political argument. Religion requires both women and men to seek knowledge, and says one should go as far as China to acquire it. Society, however, dresses its own conservatism in the clothing of religion. Children are taught things that are neither in religion nor part of

our traditions, many of them borrowed from other societies. Textbook writers come from this same system, most holding an intermediate degree or at most a master's. The writer's mind carries only the traditions already present around him. In those traditions there is no conception of a woman's freedom, her will, or her authority over her own life.

The Zia Era and the Widening Gender Divide

Host: *What flaws in the 1979 curriculum of the Zia era have widened gender discrimination, and what problems emerged as a result?*

Dr. Saigol: Religion was part of education before 1979 as well, but within reasonable limits: Islamiyat was religious instruction, and a small portion appeared in Urdu. In the Zia era even science was made religious. All the secular subjects were drawn in: geography, history, physics, chemistry and mathematics. They began to be taught in the spirit of religion.

The era of Islamisation: Religion was given such a central place in this period that the entire curriculum was built around it. It should be remembered that Pakistan was then involved in the Afghan jihad, and the Taliban were being formed. The state had to appear religious. There was a second reason as well: Zia-ul-Haq had taken power unlawfully and needed a justification. He came in the name of Islam, and nothing that arrives in the name of Islam can be challenged. He Islamised three areas heavily. The first was the judiciary, where a parallel sharia court system was created. The second was the media: cover your head, and begin everything with hamd, naat and recitation. The third was education. Zia knew that government schools reach into every street and every household, and that most people attended them. The minds of the public could be shaped there. Islamisation was also given the name of Islamic nationalism, and nationalism carries a fixed idea of woman. She is a mother who produces brave warrior sons, ready to die for the homeland. She can take her son from her own lap and place him in the lap of the earth. Cultural nationalism holds an equally strong idea of the man: a soldier, a mujahid, one who gives his life — valiant, brave, strong and protective. The mother is strong too, because she gives such sons to the nation. This is why every form of cultural nationalism widens the gender divide, whether in India or in America. The 1959 education policy of the Ayub era stated that a woman's primary role is to be a mother. She must be trained in motherhood, it said, so that she may produce a good nation. The reasoning is plain enough: educate women not because education is their right, but so that the country may progress. It is given for instrumental use rather than for the woman's own sake.

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The woman agricultural labourer completely ignored: In earlier times Maulana Israr presented a programme called 'Al-Khuda', in which he argued that a woman should not take employment and should confine herself to keeping house and raising children. He never considered that most women in this country are agricultural labourers who work outside the home, in the fields. If they stayed at home, their families would not eat. This was a middle-class conception of woman — the schoolteacher, the banker, the nurse. That the public depends so heavily on women's work in agriculture was simply not accepted, even though our food comes from there. The same conceptions were then carried into education: one good woman and one immoral woman, the man a soldier and the woman a mother. That was the basic gender division.

The national security narrative: Up to the time of my last research, the 1984 curriculum of the Zia era remained the most dominant of them all. Yet the democratic governments of Benazir and Nawaz Sharif each issued an education policy afterwards, in 1992 and 1999. I gave some thought to why the curriculum was not changing — why the value placed on jihad and the rigid gender division both remained untouched. It then occurred to me that our curriculum is made under a national security narrative, and that narrative is 'army, Islam and Pakistan'. The army guards the country's territorial borders and its ideological ones. We entered the Afghan jihad in 1979. The curriculum written under this narrative then defined jihad, praised it, and described its good outcomes. After 1979 we created jihadi groups such as Lashkar-e-Taiba, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and Hizbul Mujahideen, some to operate in Afghanistan and some in the neighbouring country. This had a strong effect on the mainstream curriculum as well. The madrasas taught precisely this, and their numbers grew considerably. There is an interesting difference between the two, however. The madrasas taught knowledge that refutes Western values, holding that secularism, democracy and human rights are Western and must be rejected. Their gaze was fixed on the West. Our mainstream school literature was focused instead, and very heavily, on India and the two-nation theory.

Militarised nationalism: After the defeat in the 1971 war with India, a great deal of militarisation entered the curriculum. Military values grew and so did their effects. There were images of tanks, artillery, warplanes, soldiers and martyrs, and whole chapters written on jihad and on the martyrs. As militarised nationalism grows, women's role shrinks to motherhood, with other women supporting their men in a subordinate capacity. Men defend the country and women stand behind them as a

second line. History shows the same pattern in war-like societies, where motherhood is heavily glorified. This is not peculiar to Pakistan. India, France, England and America honour the same idea: that mothers should bear sons and offer them in sacrifice to the homeland. The war itself is begun by the ruling classes in their own interest, and mothers give up their children for the rulers. The slogan raised is the welfare of all. The real benefit is the defence of the ruling class, since there is no defence at all for the peasant or the worker. As militarised nationalist thinking grows, gender division grows just as sharply.

Religious Diversity and the Lack of Tolerance

Host: *In Pakistan, gender balance and a progressive approach are visible up to the 1950s. After that, the element of religious diversity appears to shrink year by year, whether in the name of educational reform and national identity or for some other reason. What is your expert view on this?*

Dr. Saigol: I have studied a number of textbooks from the 1950s, which were very hard to obtain because the Textbook Board kept no records. One feature of them was striking. They carried whole chapters in praise of Ram, the Buddha, Hazrat Isa (peace be upon him) and the leaders of other religions. Ram was praised at length for being humane and compassionate, as were the Buddha and Hazrat Musa (peace be upon him). No religion was spoken of badly; every religion was held to contain some truth, and the reader was told to respect them all. I was astonished to find that all of this has now disappeared. As these chapters were removed, the Rightly Guided Caliphs took their place, and the textbooks were progressively Islamised. We are Muslims first and something else afterwards. With that change, the lesson of tolerance and mutual respect was steadily withdrawn. So were the subjects that build peace. A Christian, a Hindu, a Parsi or anyone else holds equal rights and is a complete human being, to be met with tolerance and friendship. It is this diversity that makes the world beautiful. All of that moral teaching was taken out. Up to the 1960s, religious hatred was nowhere near so visible.

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A flood of hateful material: Then, in the 1970s, arms were laid down before India, and after that the hatred grew, reaching its peak in the years following the Zia era. I have written a research paper on this, titled "Enemies within and enemies without", which

deals with the stereotypes. The Hindu is base and a scoundrel. Gandhi was very sharp, a Machiavelli. They always deceived the Muslims. Hindu social inequality and the caste system are held up as thoroughly bad. In short, the Hindus carry the faults and the Muslims were good: we believed in equality, we always showed mercy, and they always committed cruelties. Real history contains both. Every religion has at some point suffered oppression and later inflicted it, and every religion has merciful people and cruel ones. In the textbooks the Hindu is quick-witted and wins by cunning, never by bravery, while we always won because we are brave and never resorted to cunning. The Jews are mentioned only as money lenders charging high interest, and are described as destroying families in the process: borrow a hundred rupees and you must return two hundred or four hundred. Beyond this history of usury there is nothing — no account of where they came from, who they were, or what they believed. Sikhs appear only as knife stabbers. In the passages on Ranjit Singh and on Partition, the Sikh is shown killing women and children with his *kirpan*, and Sikhs are murderers and nothing else, with no detail about their religion, their beliefs or their social life. All other qualities are set aside so that one aspect alone remains. The same is true of the separation of the Bengalis, where the textbooks say they were backward and had been caught up in Hindu conspiracies. They do not say that the Bengali party won the election and West Pakistan refused to transfer power, which is why they separated. Nor do they say that West Pakistan was using the Bengalis as a colony. It exported jute from there, earned foreign exchange, and invested the money in the west. The Bengalis were being exploited. The textbooks will not tell the truth: an army was sent against them, and hundreds of thousands of Bengalis were killed.

One-dimensional history: The textbooks give prominence to one-dimensional accounts and show no other aspect, so we are never told what a religion believes or what its principles are. At Partition, all three communities — Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus — killed one another's people in front of gurdwaras, mosques and temples. No community is entirely good or entirely bad, which makes this way of thinking hollow even as a matter of logic. Psychology tells us that human qualities are distributed equally among all people. Nobody can claim that one community is uniformly good, brave and intelligent while another is bad, cowardly and foolish. The spirit of truth has been taken out of history. Nobody explains why the Bengalis separated, or what made Hindus oppress Muslims — whether they were bad by nature, or whether Muslims attacked them, destroyed their temples and built mosques in their place. When the Babri Masjid was demolished, Muslims protested strongly; when we broke temples, we felt no regret. Mahmud of Ghazni's seventeen invasions are glorified for the destruction of the Somnath temple, while over the Babri Masjid the Hindus are called oppressors. How

can this be just? It is the same act — the destruction of a place of worship, whether mosque or temple — good when one man does it and bad when another does. One chapter of our textbooks praises the destruction of Somnath and another condemns the Hindus over the Babri Masjid. Why did it happen, and how, and for what reason? What were the underlying problems and economic conditions? There are no answers to such questions, and without them history has no living spirit and no reasoning in it. That capacity for reasoning is absent from the textbooks, even though events can be explained through politics, social structure or economics.

History as binary construction: These are mythical stories, much like children's fairy tales or legends, in which a good king is paired with an evil jinn. It is a hero-and-villain structure, and its foundation is drawn from the gender division of man and woman, because that is the first division in the world. All the history in the textbooks is written this way, without logic, like an Indian film or an English cowboy film. The hero and villain carry no complexity whatever. This is why our history and our textbooks suffer from serious problems of logic and psychology. The connection with gender lies here: of woman and man, the woman is the first other. The very first thing a child registers is that a girl and a boy are different, and parents behave differently towards them. That first difference becomes the basis of every other. After man and woman come good and bad, and then the Muslim is good while the Hindu or Sikh is bad. The habit settles deep and enters the bloodstream, until we see the whole world in binary terms. It is divided between good people and bad, rational and irrational, honest and dishonest. Such narratives are common in politics today. The current government describes its own people as angelic, honest and clean, and its opponents as thieves and plunderers: we are all good and they are all bad. A truthful account would say instead that every party contains all sorts of people, and that the same figures sit in government in one period and in opposition in the next. This binary narrative has soaked into our blood, and we go on putting the same illogical idea into the textbooks without thinking — the very textbooks that shape how we think.

Ordinary people make history through movements for change: We have no alternative or supplementary history: no history of workers and peasants, none of the women's liberation movements, and none of subaltern or ordinary people. The real historical causes of social change are never explained. We remain confined to the history of kings — the Slave Dynasty, the Lodhis, the Sayyids, the Mughals — or to the history of great personalities. Yet the individual plays no large part in history. It is movements for social change that make history, and those movements are made up of ordinary people like you and me rather than kings. This is precisely why people have no sense of their own power. The peasant grows the grain and feeds people; the worker weaves the cloth.

History is always made by ordinary people, but the textbooks teach that it is made by rulers, and that is a great deception. History and textbooks shape our minds and push them into a narrow, closed alley from which nobody can get out. After Islamisation you have to be kept ready for jihad and for fighting at all times, and if a man carries no hatred within him, why would he fight anyone? The public is fooled in the name of the nation, while wars are always fought for the ruling classes.

An Analysis of the 2006 Curriculum

Host: *The 2006 curriculum is considered perfect. In your view, how good is it in general terms, and on the question of gender equality?*

Dr. Saigol: The 2006 curriculum was better than those that came before it, since the 1984 curriculum and its values had continued for a long time. I am personally strongly opposed to authoritarian rule. Even so, the new curriculum under the dictator Musharraf was less stifling, with some enlightenment and some progressive tendencies. It contained diversity, equality and other constitutional rights. The Women's Protection Act also came in 2006, reducing the effect of the Hudood Ordinance. This curriculum did not set out to teach children a hateful ideology. It aimed to build learning through games and play-way methods — teaching a child to make or do something step by step — and through fun learning. A curriculum of this kind is somewhat idealistic.

A curriculum of the imagination: In the course of my work and research I observed classes in a number of government, semi-government and low-tier private schools, where a single teacher has eighty to a hundred students. When is that teacher to teach, and when is she to manage homework, play-way, group work or any other form of activity-based learning? From what I saw, half an hour goes simply in controlling the children's teasing and mischief, and sometimes attendance is not even taken. The government will have to invest more than 2 per cent in education and recruit more teachers. Additional class sections could then be formed, so that no teacher has more than twenty children. Until that happens, the activities written into the curriculum are not possible, and children cannot learn joyfully through play, dance, drama, role play and theatre. Because the government does not make the necessary investment, the teacher-to-student ratio remains poor. Teachers also face pressure from school administrations to finish the syllabus on time. Is the teacher to manage a hundred students, run activities, or complete the syllabus? In short, this ideal curriculum requires an ideal classroom and an ideal teacher-student ratio. It requires a teacher highly trained in modern methods, and a salary good enough to keep her committed. No

thought is given to how any of it is to work in practice, and my expectation is that it will never be implemented. A great many things have simply been presupposed.

Gender, Individual and State Discrimination in Education

Host: *What is your analysis of gender equality and coeducation? Can these ideas find a place in our society, and what benefits might they bring?*

Dr. Saigol: Pakistani society is fundamentally conservative, and at the same time sexual crimes against women are very common, yet we describe ourselves as an Islamic and clean society. Gender discrimination exists in every society, whether secular or modern, but in conservative societies it runs deeper than usual. A woman holds fewer rights than a man and is regarded as inferior to him. The effect falls most heavily on low-income households. They bear the school costs of boys alone and, within their means, send only their sons. Daughters are not educated. They are taught the Quran at home and kept back to help their mother with cleaning and cooking, and to look after the younger children. Girls' education is therefore not encouraged.

Lack of facilities in the education system: In recent decades parents have wanted to educate their daughters as well, but girls' schools are poor and their women teachers are not well trained. Girls and their parents feel safer when women teachers are present, and the place, the environment and the transport must all be safe. As soon as girls reach puberty, parents withdraw them from school, and the dropout rate rises. They fear their daughter may face sexual assault or violence on the way. When the primary school is close by they send her; when the school or college is far, more girls leave. Then there is the cultural belief that there is no point in a girl studying, since she has only to run a household and bear children, so why exhaust herself with books? Spending on a girl's education feels like a burden, because after marriage she will belong to another household and bear children for that household — so why, parents ask, should we spend our money?

The absence of other facilities: Many village schools in Pakistan have no boundary wall and no toilet, both of which adolescent girls badly need. There is no proper lighting, electricity or provision of fans. In village schools I have repeatedly seen the same pattern: the administration says the fans have been ordered, but they never arrive. Girls' schools have never been a government priority. In higher education the picture is different, with more women taking part and performing considerably better, in medicine and engineering for example. There is also a gap between village and city, since girls in villages do not receive the same facilities; computer education is now common, but it remains difficult in a village. In many areas, such as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, there is still

no willingness to educate girls. People say that education will turn a girl's head, and that she will not keep to the compromise of marriage. Some improvement has come because international donor countries keep pressing on gender equality. The 18th Amendment gave the fundamental right to education under Article 25-A of the Constitution, yet education is still not treated as a girl's basic right. Unfortunately the state does not spend on health and education. The 2009 policy claimed a commitment to seven per cent of GDP, while four per cent is the minimum needed to provide basic education to children aged 5 to 16. Girls' education suffers greater harm than boys' on account of gender. Boys have opportunities but are often less interested in study. In the cities, girls have moved ahead of boys even in higher education. Girls are denied freedom, so they see education as the route to it, and they work harder and achieve better results. Like the individual, the state too carries a great deal of gender bias in education.

Coeducation: I am in favour of coeducation. In a society with this much distance between them, girls and boys grow up in two separate worlds and remain strangers to one another. They cannot understand each other and are gripped by fear, which produces real harm in later life. With coeducation from childhood, boys and girls would not be strangers. The curiosity that leads to sexual violence would not build up, and they would learn to respect one another. Children in coeducation are psychologically healthier, and they learn how to form relations with the right intention and within proper limits. Otherwise fear takes hold, and out of that fear they sometimes adopt wrong methods. Our society, however, treats coeducation as an evil and will not send girls to coeducational institutions even for higher education. Separate schools and colleges for girls are therefore needed for the time being, until people accept that coeducation does no harm.

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School Subjects and Gender Representation

Host: *You have done a great deal of work on gender equality and education. How fair is gender representation in the textbooks of other countries?*

Dr. Saigol: In 2008 a study was carried out on the subject of Home Economics. It covered schools run by religious institutions such as Minhaj-ul-Quran, Jamaat-e-Islami (the S and F groups) and some Shia organisations, and the findings were very surprising. The difference between the views of women and men was striking. Almost

every woman, including the strictly conservative ones, voted that Home Economics was not needed in school. Every girl learns these things at home from the older women of her family, and school time should not be wasted on them. In that time she should be learning history, economics, geography, mathematics and science. Almost every man, by contrast, said the subject was necessary. I once put the same question to a social worker from a non-governmental organisation. She replied that Home Economics and domestic sciences should be taught to boys only, so that they learn how to make a home, since girls already know these things. I find the subject useless myself. When I was in Senior Cambridge, two subjects were introduced, Mothercraft and Housecraft, and I was not good at either. Later I came to feel they had been a waste of time, teaching us how to wash a baby's sheet and what breakfast to give a two-month-old child. A British teacher taught us about the broom, although in Pakistan at that time we used the jharoo, so it had no connection with our lives. If a girl wishes to study the subject herself she certainly should, but everything in Home Economics is learned from our mothers, aunts and grandmothers.

Gender Equality in Textbooks Around the World

Host: *Are women heroes mentioned in the books of other countries?*

Dr. Saigol: I have not done a great deal of comparative research, but during my studies in America I did not see this kind of gender gap in their books. The curriculum of the Indian National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT) contained considerable gender equality and brought forward the positive role of women in history. The BJP is now removing many of those chapters. Women have fought many battles in history: Hazrat Zainab argued her own case, and Hazrat Aisha taught. There is a very long list of successful women in Islamic history and in the subcontinent whose stories we simply do not tell. Who tells the story of Bakhtawar, a great heroine of Sindh? She refused to hand over the landlord's share of the crop. The peasant grows it by his own labour, so why should the rulers be paid for it? For that rebellion she was shot dead. Who knows the stories of the ordinary women of the Anjuman-e-Mazareen, or of the labour movements of Hashtnagar? I wrote a book on peasant women and interviewed the women of the Anjuman-e-Mazareen. They described acts of courage that we could not even contemplate in our ordinary lives. Nothing has ever been written about our finest women writers — Zahida Hina, Khalida Hussain, Altaf Fatima — or about the poets Fahmida Riaz, Zehra Nigah, Kishwar Naheed and Parveen Shakir. Women have produced a great body of work in the short story, the novel and literature more broadly. The textbooks will teach Mirat-ul-Uroos but not Aangan by Khadija Mastoor. There are women scientists and pilots, including fighter pilots, and there is the women's cricket

team that took first position in Asia and won a medal. Women are present in every field: in the Thar region of Sindh they drive tractors, and in Afghanistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa they drive supply transport. There is no field without women. Yet when I reviewed the current curriculum, only Hazrat Khadija and Hazrat Fatima were mentioned. The chapter on Hazrat Khadija omits the most important facts. She was an independent and successful businesswoman. The Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) worked for her, and she herself sent him the proposal of marriage. The story given is simply that she was the first Muslim, and that she was good because she devoted all her wealth to Islam. It is a subordinate role, and it leaves out her real personality: a woman who was independent, free, successful, and made her own decisions. Hazrat Fatima appears only as Ali's helper, a loyal daughter and wife: the acceptable role alone, with none of her own achievements mentioned. Hazrat Zainab was a powerful speaker and Hazrat Aisha a teacher and a narrator of hadith, and neither is mentioned at all. After the Islamic period only Razia Sultana appears, and she is shown in a masculine manner. Yet she was the first democratic ruler in history, brought forward by the votes of the people because her brothers were not capable of it. She was the first elected woman leader. The first book of travel writing was written by Fakhr-un-Nisa, who travelled widely across the world. Working women are a major issue in Pakistan, among them home-based workers and factory workers, yet in the textbooks women have no other role at all. It is said that economics lies beyond a woman's capacity, and yet women are visibly at work in banks. Peasant and labouring women are not so much as mentioned. Travel the GT Road from Lahore to Islamabad, or travel through Sindh, and you will see a woman working in every field, picking cotton and harvesting wheat. Even the women who help with housework were once agricultural labourers. There is a blindness in gender representation, whereby certain traditional and acceptable things are shown and others are not. The peasant is always 'he', never 'she'; the labourer is always 'he', never 'she'. The language itself insists that all agricultural labourers are men. The same applies when we write about our society. We are alive because of these classes, who make and cook the food and weave the cloth. We could not pass a single day without them, yet their history is never included. A particular class favours Mirat-ul-Uroos and Bahishti Zewar, and it is these conservative values that find their way into the textbooks. In the field of women's rights, Begum Shahnawaz, Begum Jahanara and Tassaduq Hussain achieved a great deal, and history is full of their work. They go unmentioned, because they fought for their own rights. So long as they fought for national freedom they were heroes; the moment a woman speaks of her own rights, she is declared a free-thinker and misguided.

Who tells the story of Bakhtawar, a great heroine of Sindh? ... For that rebellion she was shot dead.

Gender prejudice is very deeply embedded in language and carries many contradictions. Neelam Hussain is a language specialist who has done a great deal of work on how these ideas have entered the language of society.

Educational Psychology and Teaching Method

Host: *What is your view of educational psychology and teaching methods in Pakistan today?*

Dr. Saigol: Fewer children in the classroom is the ideal. The teacher can then give every child equal attention, understand each one's psychology, and teach at the child's own level. In private schools the teacher-pupil ratio is reasonable, so the teacher can observe each child's individual qualities and teach accordingly. A child who learns slowly is given extra time, and a quick child is given further activity. The children's interests are considered too, since one may lean towards singing, another towards dance, another towards mathematics. In such an environment no child feels inferior or foolish. 'Learning disability' and 'slow learner' are the most wrong-headed terms in the world. Nobody is disabled; everyone has an individual talent. A child may be weak in mathematics but sing a *raag* well, or weak in physics but expert in dance. Every child's own inclination should be looked for. In elite schools this happens to some extent, but where a class of a hundred children cannot even be brought to order, how is a teacher to learn what each child needs? Talk to children, listen to them, understand what they say. A child is not a jug that the teacher fills with knowledge by making speeches. He is actively building his own knowledge, discovering things while he plays — look, mother, what I found, I found this insect. He hangs from trees, learns in his own way, and forms a picture of it in his mind. A child is a self-directed learner from birth. Knowledge should not be forced on him, and he should not be told to study only what everyone else studies. If he wants to study something else he should be allowed to, so that his self-respect is not injured. He should never be called foolish, a slow learner, backward or weak. Every person is expert in something.

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Life Skills Based Education

Host: *What is the basic purpose of life skills based education, and are you satisfied with the part of it included in the curriculum so far?*

Dr. Saigol: The basic idea of life skills is that the child has to live in his own society and should be taught from a young age how to protect himself. Protection from child abuse is one instance. What is good touch and what is bad touch? If someone touches your private parts in a bad way, you must tell your parents or your teacher. A child lured away with a sweet must not go. He must know how to behave with a stranger. In short, the child must be made aware of the dangers around him and of how to avoid them. Teaching this has become necessary, since a great many reports of sexual assault and abuse of children now appear. The term 'sex education' is itself the problem, because it places this knowledge in the category of the obscene, when in fact it is essential. The child must have the confidence to share his fears with the adults around him, without any fear that telling will only get him beaten. Some time ago a grammar school launched such an awareness campaign. The clerics in particular reacted very strongly against it, even though this is information for the child's protection. The misunderstanding arose from the term itself, so the term will have to change; it should be called self-protection education, or given some other name. A child learns life skills at home as well — do not do this, do not run fast, you will fall — and protecting oneself and surviving in one's surroundings are part of that. A child picks up the other skills with time, but self-protection must be taught. Children trust adults, and will obey whoever gives them a sweet or chocolate kindly, thinking that person means them well. They are very small, and cannot tell the right manner of affection from the wrong one, or right from wrong. Vocational education is available in school, but nobody provides education in self-protection.

Recommendations

Host: *What changes should be made in the curriculum so that we may rebuild a culture of tolerance and equality in society?*

Dr. Saigol: My proposals appear in every article I write. First, increase the education budget, raising it from at least 4 per cent to 7 per cent. Developed countries spend the most on education. I once went to Japan for teaching training. I was astonished to learn that the highest paid civil servant there is the teacher, whereas in Pakistan the teacher is the lowest paid. Developed countries give teachers great respect, and in America too the primary teacher is highly valued. Pakistan should take budget from the non-productive sector, such as defence, and put it into education. More teachers could then be hired, each able to teach fifteen to twenty children with proper attention, and to run activities, play-way and group work as well. So the first step is to find a diversion in budget resources. The first line of a state's defence is its people. Illiterate and mentally weak people cannot defend it, and bombs and artillery do not defend it. If people are not healthy, they will not want to defend it either.

Prejudice of every kind should be erased, including prejudice based on religion. Rather than speaking ill of a religion, each should be examined. God has shown His power in every religion, so respect for each is obligatory. As human beings, Hindus and Christians are all equal, and tolerance towards human beings should be maintained. The prejudices that encourage gender bias should be removed. Words, gestures and images should be shared with care, so that the atmosphere of hatred can be brought to an end.

Strong women role models, both local and international, should be included in the textbooks. Among them should be women who made inventions, such as Madame Curie. Chapters should also be included on women's other achievements.

Movements should be described: how peasant women worked, what difficulties they faced, what principles they held to, and how they took beatings while trying to secure and protect their rights to land.

The stories of working women: How working women keep the household going by labouring twelve hours a day. The history of the people and of movements should be shared, so that we may avoid the worship of individual personalities.

Real-life heroes: If personalities are to be taught, teach people's real achievements. By achievements I do not mean warfare, riots or killing, but the work of those who invented things for the good of humanity. Teach how many books they wrote and what they built. Women's achievements should be included in the same way. How many books they wrote, the music they made, their painting, their inventions, their thought, and their work in art and culture. Sheema Kermani's mastery in dance is one example, as is Nahid Siddiqui's in *Bharatanatyam* and *Kathak*. Among personalities, teach the life and work of Abdul Sattar Edhi. Our children are much influenced by Superman, Spiderman and other heroes. Instead of these artificial figures, the real one should be

described. He lived in poverty, with two sets of clothes and one pair of shoes, sitting on the ground to eat, while billions of rupees passed through his hands. Stories of real heroes of this kind should be brought forward. Recently someone made a very good story called 'Edhi Baba'. It shows how he helped people in storms, floods and earthquakes, carrying them in the ambulance and saving lives in time. The idea of a hero should change, so that the real hero is the one who gives unconditional help to others. The way we write history should change with it, moving from the royal style to that of real people and popular movements.

An end to sectarian and linguistic prejudice: Sectarian and linguistic prejudice should be brought to an end. In Punjab people say that Sindhis would sell the sand of the desert, and that the Baloch are very lazy. They say that Pashtuns and Pathans carry girls off and are kidnappers. I have heard these prejudices since childhood, and these stereotypes should now be broken. All nationalities are equal, and whether Sindhi, Punjabi, Baloch, Brahui, Pashtun or Hazara, all hold equal rights. The 18th Amendment was no favour; the provinces supported the making of Pakistan on precisely that basis. The Single National Curriculum carries the same problem. Which sect's religion will the state teach, when Sunnis and Shias are further divided into schools of thought and every sect teaches its own beliefs? Minhaj-ul-Quran, Jamaat-e-Islami, JUI–Fazlur Rehman and the Sami-ul-Haq group each teach according to their own sect. When the state becomes a madrasa and inserts Islamiyat into everything, how will it decide whose beliefs to teach? If it teaches one, the others will stand against it, and in this way the state will fan sectarianism. In a single classroom the children themselves will fall to fighting, with Shia children saying they do not accept the other Rightly Guided Caliphs. When the finality of prophethood is taught, Ahmadis will raise questions. To avoid these conflicts it is better to keep education and religion separate, because religion should have no role in the state. The state should be secular, since many religions and sects live in the same place. Whenever the state becomes religious, sectarianism grows, as each school of thought fights to prove its own belief correct. How can the state prove itself Ahl-e-Sunnat, Ahl-e-Sunnat wal Jamaat, Deobandi, Ahl-e-Hadith and Shia all at once? A different method should be devised for Islamiyat as well. Teach a comparative study of religions covering the important features of each, or teach in a way that gives no religion or school of thought preference over another.

Every kind of prejudice should be removed from the curriculum: Religious, sectarian, gender, linguistic and ethnic prejudice should be removed from the curriculum and the textbooks. So should the mania for war, which is present in the 1971 curriculum in particular. The values of militarisation should be brought to an end. If you wish to teach the history of wars, teach it accurately and from both sides. What caused

the dispute, how the war followed, and what its effects were on life and property. Populations are wiped out. The atom bomb was not used against soldiers; it was used on a civilian population. War of this kind benefits only the ruling class. We take pride in the bomb at all times. But how much did the atom bomb help in this Covid pandemic? How much did tanks, guns and artillery help in solving that problem? Spend on health instead. Remove class, religious, linguistic, gender and racial prejudice from the textbook along with all the rest, because every human being is equal and holds equal rights. Pro-peace values should take their place: living together, tolerating difference and difference of opinion, forbearance and patience. We should indeed take pleasure in that difference. If everyone in the world shared the same appearance, colour and race, the world would be extremely boring. Different colours, races, beliefs and religions should be understood and valued, since it is from these that the world takes its colour.

The most important recommendation is that the teacher should have complete autonomy in the class. If she wishes to explain the idea of a home, she should not be tied to the conventional method. She should tell the children in her own way what a home actually is. She should be made economically secure. She should also be given further education and training in teaching method, group work and the running of activities. She should also be free to choose how she teaches: she may write the lesson plan in the conventional manner, but the manner of teaching should be her own. Suppose she has to teach the idea of a tree. One teacher may take the children into a garden or the school courtyard and show them the parts of a tree. Another may teach from pictures in books. A third may have the children draw a tree and then discuss it. Autonomy gives the teacher control over her own work. Without it she is told to follow the conventional method laid down from above, which reduces her to a computer. Three things matter most for improving teaching: the teacher's autonomy, her education and training, and her economic security, which means a good salary. A teacher on a low salary will have no motivation to work hard or to teach creatively. Only a contented and financially secure teacher can adopt new and creative methods. In America and other developed countries teaching is among the highly paid professions, which gives the teacher respect in society and allows her to take pride in her work.