

Original Article

**Mythic Content as a Rhetoric in Government-aided
School Textbooks of Nepal**

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Abstract

This paper offers a critical and political reading of the excerpts of myths included in government-sponsored school-level language textbooks of Nepal, and looks at how the content is more prone to instilling particular values than to teaching skills of language competence. Drawing on insights and postulations from Critical Discourse Analysis in general, and dispositive analysis in particular, it examines values embedded in the excerpts as a discursive site for the practice of knowledge-making and power. Given that textbooks are a cultural production at large, and therefore textual, the paper explores how the reproduction of mythical content has given rise to the pedagogy that serves the teleological purpose of producing the desired type of possible citizenry by keeping the essentialities of modern education such as critical engagement, linguistic and cognitive skills, the questioning attitude and critical thinking at the disposal. The paper concludes that the particular way of designation of the content is likely to halt the basic aim of producing the learners as active and critical social agents for the broader social transformation and calls for a revisit to mitigate the gap between the professed objectives and their materialization in language textbooks and make the learning content more goal oriented.

Keywords: *Myths. Critical discourse analysis. Learning content. Ideology. Critical Pedagogy.*



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ISSN: 2717-5081 (Print); 2738-9529 (Online)

Journal Webpages:

1. <http://www.kusoed.edu.np/journal/index.php/jtp>
2. <https://www.nepjol.info/index.php/jrtp/>

A Short Prelude

Despite some changes in school textbooks and curricula of the government schools of Nepal in recent years, content of myth has been an integral part and parcel of teaching and learning resources in government-sponsored school textbooks. For example, unit 10 of *Nepali Class- 6* tells a mythological story of "Yumadeviko Avataran" in which King Mabohang tries to hunt a deer but mysteriously gets lost. Despite the rigorous search facilitated by the ministers and soldiers, the deer is lost because it was consequently saved by Yumadevi, a supernal being. After meeting Yumadevi, though the king possesses might, he does succumb to the greater power. Yumadevi praises the king's complete devotion and his respect for power. He is delighted to have seen the supernal being and is determined to be a complete devotee of the goddess and continues the rule. The story implies learning some values: respect to the greater power, obedience to God, the symbol of power, *bhakti* as an important virtue and the like. The learning content deems these values as the *right* values to be learnt.

This is an instance of how moral socializing has been aimed at through the mythic content in the textbook that entails specific commonplace topics such education, wealth, might, morality, duties and so on. Through teaching the mythic content, a particular kind of civic learning and moral socialization is seen viable through content of textbooks because school textbooks in Nepal are received as a major means of standardization of curriculum and *educating* the students and school textbooks to a greater extent are the primary aerial of learning content. In short, a textbook the learning material potentially functions as a teacher, a map, a resource, a trainer, an authority, and plays a crucial role in presenting content knowledge and instilling sociocultural values in students. However, this article proposes that the excerpts of myths as textbook content cannot be taken as value-neutral, but as discursively charged with an intention to orient students to be a particular type of citizenry.

In the light of recent critical studies on textbook contents (Rogers, 2017; Dardar et al., 2017; Lindsay, 2003), learning through the content of the textbooks can contribute to the reproduction of the existing socio-political order and, thus, to the adaptation to or insertion of individuals into this order, and those forms of civic learning that contribute to political subjectivity and agency. Moreover, it is equally possible that "subjects [Textbooks] are presented from an establishment point of view" (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 12). While treating myths as learning sites and discourse, educational discourses condensed and mediated by the textbook compilers not only "reproduce" but may have the potential for transferring the dominant discourses and practices (Lee & Yi, 2000, p. 5). Therefore, patterning of learning content in the textbooks cannot be adjudicated as a neutral enterprise but a contested terrain.

However, the available corpus of literature on government-sponsored school textbooks of Nepal involves only linear study on textbooks. Most of the projects concentrate on identifying the pedagogical practices (Jones & Basyal, 2019), and few of them try to explore the gap between objectives of the curriculum and their reflection in learning contents, both lessons as well as exercises. The current body of research on school textbooks of Nepali government schools ignores the possibility that "textbooks thus textbook contents [can be] highly politicized" to serve the needs of power (Lee & Yi, 2000, p. 5), and selection of content is part of "of selective tradition, someone's selection, some group's vision of legitimate knowledge" and are produced out of "the cultural, political, and economic conflicts, tensions, and compromises that organize and disorganize people" (Apple, 2000, pp. 1-2). Such educational materials, therefore, uphold significant power in shaping students' choices, worldviews, learning, and thought patterns. Keeping this perspective as the locus of analysis,

this paper concentrates on how the mythic content has been perpetrated as a discursive site¹ — the general principle that forms a way of thinking and producing meaning and seeks to govern the subjects [the students]. Specifically, the present paper has twofold objectives: first, it identifies the specific values embedded in the mythic contents; second, it explores what ideologically charged discursive practice the values have given rise to.

A Review: Mythopoesis and Textual Cultivation of Myths

"Mythopoesis", a composite of "myth" and "poetics", traditionally refers to myth-making. Scholars of myth such as Campbell (2011), Cassirer (1974), and Eliade (1963), contend "myth" as a source of knowledge and "poetics" as a means of vivid expression (Garman & Holland, 2008, p. 15). The poetic expression used in myth may include metaphors, symbols, phrases, words, or any other means of articulation. Having acknowledged its epistemological status, there is the difficulty of describing mythical knowledge because it differs so radically from the knowledge of science and reason. However, myths do not mean untruth. Mythopoetic power represents a force that guides the reader to a vivid understanding through expression, poetics. The mythopoetic expression "catches you, there is such a feeling, from one or another of these traditions, of information of a deep, rich, life-vivifying sort that you don't want to give it up" (Cambell, 2011, p. 13). This very understanding of the myth designates an integration of traditional mythological themes and archetypes into the contemporary practice of knowledge-making by incorporating them into the textbooks as learning materials. Despite the criticism that myths are incommensurate with empirical or scientific truth for both critical theorists and interpretivists, myths have ever become an integral part while designing curriculum.

While theorizing curriculum, demystification and demythologizing are two possible ways of adoption, suggest Holland and Garman (2008). Alluding to Palmer (1969), they write, demystification refers to an approach that seeks to destroy the traces (or symbols) of myth as the representation of false reality. Demythologizing represents the notion of treating the symbols respectfully to recover meanings hidden in them" (Holland & Garman, 2008, p. 16). The demythologizers take a more submissive stance and treat mythic content as sacred reality while the demystifiers take a more critical stance and treat myths as a false reality that must be shattered (Ricoeur, 1979 as cited in Holland & Garman, 2008, p. 16). While demystification seems to be a critical practice, demythologizing is a submissive practice that requires not the critical insights but conformation to what the particular excerpt of myth is trying to teach. The later standpoint calls for an interventionist and more critical approach in the study of textbooks. This article will also see which ways the method of selection of myths aligns more with. Unfortunately, critical scholarship on the *political reading* of school textbook contents in Nepal is in its nascent phase. However, a few critical studies have identified that learning content has been a means of disseminating the establishment's point of view. Bennike's (2015) study on textbooks of Panchayat era to 2009 reports on how textbooks were "only a medium for transmitting the Panchayat state's discursive representations of national space" (p. 58). Bennike argues that Panchayat used textbooks for nationalizing the brave past, portraying Nepal as an organized and harmonious space with the slogan of "Four castes and thirty- six sub-castes", and waves of development (p. 59). However, Bennike does not touch upon how the designation of the content is itself a power discourse and how it operates in the learners' minds. In fact, Onta (1996) had already critiqued how the textbooks were politically designed to serve the making of *rashtriya itihās* (national history). With especial reference to a historical

¹ See more in chapter 5, "Discourse, Power and Resistance." in Weedon, C. (1987). *Feminist practice and Poststructuralist theory* (2nd ed.). Wiley-Blackwell, p. 108.

icon, Balbhadra Kunwar, he contended that textbooks of the Panchayat era were veined to serve the politics of and concluded that textbooks compilers "drew upon extant narratives of certain events but *carefully* pruned to make the final versions reproduced for school books fashion a *bir* and virile image of the nation" (emphasis is original) (p. 231). Upadhyaya (2010) argued that the textbooks exhibited two important agendas: textual cultivation of religious agenda, and obsession with the nationalist discourse that mainly protrudes from the saga of brave history. He concludes that textbooks maintained homogenized nationalistic characteristics of Nepali people as a method of systematic omission, or denial (p. 116).

Despite these attempts, how the textbooks are the contested site for discourse creation and how the reproduced, disguised, and *designed* learning content serves to shape the learning has not still received sufficient attention. Concerning this gap, this paper tries to explore the politics underneath the textual treatment of excerpts of myths. Also, it looks at what kind of values the textbook compilers, from their ideological standpoints, are trying to inculcate in the students and what particular kind of citizenry has been envisioned.

The Study: Discursive Entanglement with Mythical Content

The primary objective of the paper is to identify the *political* use of mythic content in textbooks. For this, this paper has used CDA as method since it attempts "to *uncover, reveal or disclose* what is implicit, hidden or otherwise not immediately obvious in relations of discursively enacted dominance or their underlying ideologies [. . .]" and "focuses on the strategies of *manipulation, legitimation, the manufacture of the consent* and other discursive ways to influence the minds (and indirectly the actions) of people in the interest of the powerful" (emphasis is original) (Dijk, 1995, p. 18). Since textbooks are the cultural artifacts— an object of analysis shaped by political and historical forces, and any language use is a "form of social practice", thus, discursive² practice, they "may have major ideological effects — that is, they can help produce and reproduce unequal power relations . . ." (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 258). In addition, knowledge making or accrediting something as knowledge has ever been an enterprise of power or the powerful. Similarly, CDA "recommends also an analysis of power with functionalist strategy" (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 9), and treats discourse as "an institutionalized way of talking that regulates and reinforces action and thereby exerts power" (Link, 1983, p. 60).

The basic purpose of using CDA in this study is to intervene in the way of content selection for the textbooks whose qualitative stature is likely to bring transformation in learning. For CDA strives "to identify through analysis the particular linguistic, semiotic and "interdiscursive" features of texts [of any kind], which are a part of processes of social change, but in ways which facilitate the productive integration of textual analysis into multi-disciplinary research on change" (Fairclough, 2012, p. 453). Unless educational materials "help students critically engage the politics and ideologies [. . .] to understand themselves as both a product and producer of meaning", qualitative transformation in learning is a myth (McLaren, 1995, p. 16). Learning materials, as a crucial part of education, should orient the learners toward "using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience to guide future action" (Mezirow, 1996, p. 162).

This paper particularly engaged Jäger 's (2009) method of dispositive analysis to identify "discourses and/or dispositive, to explore the respective concrete context of

² "Discourse" and its adjective "discursive" have been used in Foucauldian sense. Discourse is more than a way of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them. See, Foucault, M. (1969). *Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*. (trans. AM Sheridan Smith, 1972), 135-140, and 49. See also Foucault, M. 'The Order of Discourse' in R Young (Ed) *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader* (1981).

knowledge/power, and to subject it to critique" (Jäger, 2009, p. 33). 13 individual lessons from 6 coursebooks³ of Nepali Subject (Grade 4-10) ("discourse planes") constitute "discourse fragments", the teaching-learning activity a discursive context, and education as a system, where the discursive context and events are the "structure of discourse" (Jäger, 2009). The discourse fragments are the excerpt summary from the text, and discourse strands in this study are the inductive inferences drawn from discourse fragments. I purposively selected the lessons that involved myths as the learning content.

The process of data analysis first began with exploring the content — excerpts of myths. Next, the learning activities/exercises were analyzed to check if they possibly engage learners to understand the socially constructed meaning of the values. Therefore, identification of implications and insinuations, symbols, and figurativeness of the language were major spots for consideration. Similarly, dispositive analysis primarily concentrates on the triangular relationship between discourses, non-discourses, and materializations (Jäger, 2009). Under this, my discussion centers on mythical content (discourse), the relationships that exist between the textbooks, teachers, authors, and the readers (non-discourse), and the possible construction of knowledge (materializations). The three components can methodologically be termed as "evolving context of knowledge, action and manifestations/materializations (Jäger, 2009, p. 58).

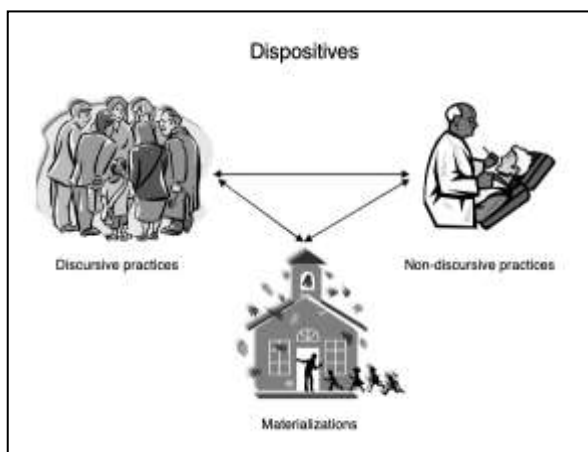


Figure 1: Dispositive

Mythic/Discursive Strands in the Textbooks

As stated in the prefaces of the selected language textbooks, the specific and primary objective of teaching Nepali as a school subject is to enhance their linguistic competence at four levels: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. However, the reproduction of the myths as the learning lessons prescribed in the textbooks impute more to teaching certain values that lead learners to conceptualize certain socio-political order of Nepali societies. Table 1 demonstrates those values, in other words, discourse fragments and strands for this study.

Table 1

Themes Summarizing the Main Findings

Grade/Unit	Discourse Fragments	Discourse Strands
4/5	"The Leaf of Neem" ⁴ The prince was willful and proud and always enjoyed insulting the elders. However, the king was very much upset with his son's behavior, and after Buddha knows his problem, he was summoned. Buddha asked the king to send the prince.	Propriety of respecting elder; suppression/suspension of resisting will; No questioning to the elders even if they are wrong; Supernal values.

³ All textbooks were published by Curriculum Development Centre, Ministry of Education, Government of Nepal.

⁴ All textbooks analyzed are in Nepali language. To maintain the uniformity the basic content of excerpts taken for analysis except the names was translated by the author.

The prince was asked to eat the leaves of Neem (which tastes bitter). After the prince knew that the leavers were bitter, he uprooted almost every plant, and when he was asked why he did so, he replied that when the leaves are young, they are much bitter, how bitter and sharp they will be when they mature.

The Buddha replied: "You are young like the leaves, and your manners and behaviors are such that people do not like them. What will happen if the people behave that way you behaved with the (Neem) plants". The Prince suddenly realizes and improves his demeanors (pp. 19-21)

4/20	<p>"Determination of Satyakaam" Maharshi Gautam provides an opportunity to a fatherless child, Satyakaam, to get a lesson. Maharshi, looking at the child's passion for learning, remarks, "The child, who wishes to get an education will be a good person; this child will definitely be a good person; I must educate him". Later he became a scholar and erudite. To be talented and scholar, a person should get an opportunity. Everybody can be so if he/she gets an opportunity. One should pay attention to labor, perseverance, and duty (pp. 104-5).</p>	<p>Education, a selfless service, a great asset of human; Values related to duty, labor, and opportunity; supernal values.</p>
4/2	<p>"The Pride of Wealth" features Kuber, a wealthy person, who boasts of his wealth. Ganesh is displeased with Kuber's stupid pride and wants to teach a lesson. In feasting, Ganesh eats up everything that Kuber had, and still hungry, Ganesh chases Kuber to Kailash, where Kuber meets Shankar, and reported to him. Ganesh clarifies that he was invited to a feast but Kuber could not satisfy his hunger. Shanker replies: "You are not supposed to chase the rich person like Kuber; you should respect the rich person. You should stop chasing him. Go inside, and ask with your mother to satisfy yourself fully" (pp. 5-7).</p>	<p>Wealthy people should be respected; Wealth is not integral to life. Supernal values;</p>
5/21	<p>In "Greatest Devotee", Naarad wants to confirm that he is the greatest devotee of Lord Bishnu. "I worship the name of Bishnu day and night. I always sing his glory. I have spent whole my life in this. Who could be a greater devotee than me? But, I want to listen to this from Bishnu's mouth." To test this, he climbs down to earth and takes shelter in a poor farmer's house, and the farmer</p>	<p>Propriety of treating guests as gods; The utmost devotion to the gods irrespective of the difficulties one can suffer; supernal values.</p>

	<p>serves the guest with utmost priority because he believes that the guest is the god. The farmer remembers the god three times a day even if he is immersed in his daily livelihood chores.</p> <p>Naarad says, "God, I understand your precept. He/she is the greatest devotee who still remembers the god even if he/she is completely engaged in the worldly mess." (pp. 151-56)</p>	
6/2	<p>The fable "Might cannot Stand Wit" dramatizes a contest between might, represented by Chaturdant, and wit, represented by Lambakarna, in which Lambakaran shows the power of his wit, and becomes able to chase Chaturdanta away from his abode, restoring peace for him as well for his fellow dwellers (pp.7-15).</p>	<p>the binary between might and wit.</p>
6/12	<p>An adapted mythological story "Ordeal of Yudhisthira" illustrates some famous "ethical" dictums popularized by Hindu religion: "truth always wins; patience is the friend during danger; happiness is sure to come after sadness" (pp. 86-89).</p>	<p>Patience: a virtue; Obedience to superpower is religion; supernal values.</p>
6/20	<p>Son of Shur and daughter of Devaki got married magnificently. Dewak satisfied his son-in-law by giving elephant, horse, gold, and chariot while sending his daughter away. Kansha was wicked though he was a prince. He heard a supernal voice that he would be killed by the eighth child of Dewaki. Kansha threatened his own sister with death, and left with the condition that she would give every child that she would give birth to Kansha. Kansha jailed his own father and became the king. He killed all the other children of his sister. While the eighth one was being born, he witnessed a violent dream in which he was killed by serpents. He immediately deduced that it was the result of the eighth child of Dewaki, and wanted to kill it. No sooner he had picked up the child in the air, the child released itself from the clutches of Kansha. A supernal being spoke: "Wicked Kansha, I am not your death. Instead, I am only a cause of your death. Atrocity cannot sustain in the world and rule of creation is never wrong"(pp. 139-146).</p>	<p>Values strengthening dowry system; Values related to cosmic power; Values related to good-bad binary; Supernal values.</p>
7/10	<p>"Gold Laying Rooster"</p>	<p>Binary between might and wit; Supernal values.</p>

	<p>When there was a shortage of living resources, the King (of Kirant ethnicity) resorts to Paaruhang (god of Kirant), and is gifted with a rooster that lays a ball of gold. After a while, the rooster is lost, and the King appoints three persons to fetch it back with the reward that the successful one will be appointed as General Commander.</p> <p>The first two use force and tactics to get it back while the last one uses wit– a combination of music, song, and rooster's bait to get it back closer to him.</p> <p>With sweet speech, tongue, and behavior, one can convince others on his/her side (p. 81).</p>	
7/14	<p>"The Story of Bodhisatwa" recounts a sacrifice made by the eponymous character. He sacrifices his life as a supply to a hungry tigress, who in turn becomes able to feed her child. The person is supposed to have reincarnated as Siddhartha Gautam Buddha (pp. 103-106).</p>	Altruistic, kind people land in heaven; deserve happiness, in the next life.
7/16	<p>"Anger and Monster" deploys the characters from the epic of Hindu mythology, <i>The Mahabharata</i>, and shows a fight between Saatyaki and a monster, and later Balaram and the monster. Monster has a mysterious characteristic– the angrier he becomes the more gigantic he grows. Balaram understands this mystery and tries to keep him happy so that the monster is reduced to a toy-size thus easily capture (pp.117-120).</p>	Anger is self-destructive and is only possessed by the creatures like monsters.
8/6	<p>"Friendship"</p> <p>Drona does not take time to learn the education of arms and weapons.</p> <p>Drona becomes happy when he knows that his childhood friend Drupad has been enthroned as king. Drupad, while studying together in childhood, had promised to give half of the property to Drona. He unburdens his burden to Drupad.</p> <p>But, Drona replies: "it is impossible to be so because he is the king and Drona is just poor brahmin. And, the friendship always takes between them who are equal in terms of position, wealth, knowledge, and power."</p> <p>Drona demonstrated a strange arms skill to fetch the <i>dandi</i> (stick) and ring back.</p> <p>Drona later serves King Bhimsen, and educates Kaurava and Pandava. As a reward for his teaching, he asks Kaurava and Panda to</p>	Binary between Knowledge/wisdom/education versus materialism; supernal values;

bring Drupad from his throne. Kaurava becomes unsuccessful but Pandava. Drona retaliates not with the arms but with words and sets Drupad free (pp. 37-42).

10/1	<p>"Birthplace" recounts an episode after Ram-Laxman's victory over Lanka with the aid of Vibhishan.</p> <p>Laxman and Vibhishan believe that Ram should be the king of Lanka as it was earned with the bravery of him. However, Ram is reluctant because he cannot leave Ayodhya, the birthplace, though Lank is much more affluent (pp. 1-5).</p>	<p>Values related to birthplace; Binary: material quest vs love of the birthplace.</p>
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The Rhetoric: From Mythic Content to Discursive Materialization

The analysis shows that the content of the myth has been treated as discourse (in a Foucauldian sense). The mythic content should be viewed as "regularity (an order, correlations, positions, functionings, and transformations) between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices" (Foucault, 1972 p. 38). In other words, the content is a mediated site, an assortment of the statements of representations through which knowledge is perpetrated and specified and intended values are channelized. Of the two ways of deploying myths in textbooks—demystifying and demythologizing, the analysis demonstrates that the selection of mythical context conforms to the second way. The rhetoric of demythologizing, a reconstruction of content, tends to cultivate three successive possible archetypes⁵ (manifestations) in the mind of the readers.

Archetype 1

The values inherent in the texts are put into action through practice and representations, and are tried to create a symbiosis— a mutually beneficial relationship, between learners and knowledge makers. The authors conceptualize "myth as a source of knowledge that shapes our routine actions" and use "the expressive powers of language" to communicate the pedagogical function (Holland & Garman, 2008, p. 14). In short, a congenial picture is created for learners to learn and adapt the learning that leads them in the path of socialization. For example, the contents maintain the existence of supernal values and cosmic divine power as readily accepted things. Despite the scientifically and technologically challenged current social condition in which these textbooks are produced, the content rarely induces students to check and question the possibility of divine existence. In other words, the learners are asked to take the preaching with absolutism. The existence of Drona, Bishnu, Bodhisatwa, and so on is readily established as ultimate reality, and the "lessons" to be learned from their activities are approved irrespective of their relative importance — the possibility that the learners can adapt the learning according to his or her situatedness. This endorsement facilitates the learners to be more conformist and

⁵ Archetype here has been used to denote the mental layer or mindset that values identified try to inculcate.

Philosophically, an archetype refers to recurrent narrative designs, patterns of action, character-types, themes, and images which are identifiable in a wide variety of works of literature, as well as in myths, dreams, and even social rituals. See Frye, Northrop. "The Archetypes of Literature." *The Norton Anthology: Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Vincent B. Leitch. New York: Norton, 2001. 1445 - 1457, and see also Jung, C. G. (2014). *Four archetypes*. Routledge.

compromising to the learning content. Falsely neutral textbooks "train students to observe things without judging, to see the world from the official consensus, to carry out orders without question, as if the given society is fixed and fine (Shor & Freire, 1987, pp. 12-13).

By capitalizing on the consequential benefits of certain values, their supposedly practical use and urgency to learn them, the importance of learning is validated and legitimized. For instance, King's devotion to Yumadevi, a greater power, is rationalized and prized; similarly, the farmer's praying and servility is justified and rewarded as primeval devotional virtue. Such lessons are preached as the truth and reality and legitimized social truth. The way myth is treated is important because it contributes to the knowledge-making process of the individual. This mode of pedagogic treatment of myths can be termed as Goodman's (1978) "world-making" by poetics. It symbolically portrays some truth of human experience, or it may be the exercise of a socializing function, the setting forth of norms for belief or behavior both for the holder and the bearer of myth. In either case, myth functions as usable knowledge and promotes one's commitment to action. Similarly, the mythical excerpts time and again reinforce values of propriety like elders should be respected, power should be worshiped and guests are like gods. The values are comprehensively conveyed with the strategic handling of "poetics". This is defined as "mythopoetic power" that holds "reflexive, moral, controlling, and evocative powers that flow between the author and the reader" (Holland & Garman, 2008, p. 26).

This archetype relates more to discursive and ideological socialization—the promotion of complacency and the absence of defiance and critical attitude. Such type of socialization shaped by the textbooks serves the "hypothesis of the purely mechanistic literacy program" and rejects "the problem of teaching adults to read about the awakening of their consciousness (Freire, 2005, p.38). A commonly understood objective of education imbibes transformation. That is to say, any literacy program should be "an introduction to the democratization of culture, a program with men [learners] as its subjects rather as patient recipients/ a program which itself would be an act of creation, capable of releasing other creative acts, one in which students would develop the impatience and vivacity which characterize search and invention" (Freire, 2005, p. 39). However, the content under analysis defies this possibility.

Archetype 2

The mythic narratives in the textbooks continuously and consistently cultivate textual binary oppositions and aim at inculcating dichotomous thinking in learners. Cultivation of binary takes place at two-levels: the characters (persons) and the *character* (attributes attached to the persons). The examined lessons create binary oppositions like might-wit, education-wealth, virtue-vice, and knowledge/wisdom-materialism. Meaning making through a binary opposition works politically in that an element is always prioritized through contextual rationalization, and the other is treated as subordinate. A congenial context is created in the content to endorse a particular set of values in that what is prioritized is rewarded. For example, in "Friendship", Drona's acts are justified because he took material condition just as a means of sustenance, and imbibed himself with skills of archery, which is treated as a higher value in the text. Likewise, Drupad is disgraced for his craving for materialism, which is rendered as one of the lower levels of values (p. 37). These two values are speckled with stark contrast and absolutism: one is prioritized and the other is degraded. This cultivation of binary thinking ignores the situatedness of the learners: they are expected to take either side.

Another repeatedly subordinated item in the excerpts is physical might. Having might has often been mortified and criminalized in the textbooks. The fable "Might cannot Stand Wit", for example, disapproves the virtue of being physically strong, and this virtue is inferior to wit and intelligence. This patterning of dualistic values is mediated as normative ideas, neglecting the possibility of the type of learning this patterning might induce. The claim that

learners will not have the effects of this type of divinization and criminalization is hard to accept. "Because human beings are as fundamentally social in nature [. . .] because the forms of our sociability are chosen and cultural rather than programmed and genetic, ethical and moral considerations inevitably arise within the social nexus" (Gregory, 1988, p. 197). Rather than cultivating an aptitude and skills to question, analyze and deconstruct such perennial normative concepts, the textbooks are designed to reinforce learning such concepts.

As myths are posited adjacent to human social and cultural relations, they are powerful tools to contribute to the process of knowledge and behavior making. Such binary "metaphors may create realities for us [the learners], especially social realities"; they can be a guide for future action, and "such actions will, of course, fit the metaphor; this will, in turn, reinforce the power of the metaphor to make experience coherent" (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008, p. 5). Formation of such archetype can sunder the contextual thinking— what is right and wrong viewed from learners' situatedness. Deprivation of learners from contextual thinking betrays the project of modern education to inculcate critical consciousness— the ability to comprehend "things and facts as they exist empirically, in their causal and circumstantial correlations", and asks the learners to conform to the established thinking and status quo (Freire, 2005, p. 39).

Archetype 3

The dichotomy — divinization and degradation of certain values — promotes the culture of propriety, conformity to conventionally accepted standards of behaviors, also known as morals, through *bhakti*. The characters depicted in the learning content are tied down to this value, and overall context is made felicitous to promote devotion to the powerful, wealthy, so-called great. This ethics of propriety pins down middle-class social order and the same cultural consciousness. It asks the students not to be defiant to the powerful, and not to cross the limit, not to go beyond the given space of social and cultural freedom. For example, a farmer in "The Greatest Devotee" is tied down by the restraint of social order; he legitimizes his own predicament, and questioning his predicament is beyond his cultural propriety. The story makes a moral story of proper and acceptable, and is based on the tendency of being leniently compliant to the existing culture and the social order. Similarly, Yudhishthira in "Yudhishthira's Ordeal" succumbs to the greater power, and this attribute is configured as a virtue. Moreover, his obedience is rewarded with the promise of being protected by a greater power.

Such designation — an urge to succumb to the power — echoes the propriety in consumption or the middle path for cultural reproduction. The ethics of "propriety" and "suitability" dominates the psyche, thus, learning. This logic is the effort to secure the unique [middle] cultural space through negotiation between the high and the low class in the Nepali society (Liechty, 2003, pp. 37-38). In short, teaching the values of propriety and suitability gives rise to a community that is "consuming" instead of having an agency to spend and create and be critical. This is one of the fundamental characteristics of the South Asian middle class⁶. By highlighting *bhakti*, the worshiping of the power, as one of the most important civic virtues, the textbook compilers treat the targeted learners as the passive receiver of the information, who are likely to "consume" whatever is produced in the textbooks, rather than active learners, who refrain and critique.

This cultivation of propriety of consumption in learners denies one of the prominent concerns of (post)modern education: to prepare the learners as "active social agents" (McLaren, 1995, p. 15). Living as a critical social agent means knowing how to live contingently and

⁶ Singh, N. (2005) theorizes the idea of South Asia in global context, and also highlights the dominant characteristics of idea of middle class. See more at Singh, N. (2005). The idea of South Asia and the role of the middle class. *Univ. California SCCIE Working Paper*, (05-08).

provisionally without the certainty of knowing the truth, yet at the same time with the courage to take a stand on issues of human suffering, domination, and oppression (McLaren, 1995, p. 16). But, the cultivation of middle-class propriety and its endorsement in the learning content defies the learners to involve in the process of being active social changes, for children socialized within this propriety will be entrenched between the ethical fetters of the proper and improper. But, this distinction of proper and improper is mediated through the textbooks while, in reality, the notion of proper and improper comes with relative value. Truth about proper and improper is constructed throughout the textbooks by endorsing other values. For example, there are values associated with the teacher that whatever the teacher or the textbooks convey is true. The learners are encouraged to take the learning content as embodiment of "legitimate educational knowledge [. . .] to be actively transmitted in schools" [;] however, they are "an embodiment of dominant ideas, values, and identities" (Lee & Yi, 2000, p. 5). Therefore, they are subject to "multiple readings"— in dominant, negotiated, or oppositional ways (Apple, 1996).

Coda

Though the primary objective of language textbooks is to enhance language competence on the part of learners, incorporation of excerpts of myths serves as a rhetoric to foreground the expressions that facilitate creating a congenial atmosphere of teaching the middle-class values: be less critical, less defiant; be more respectful, and consent to the power and the powerful and thus conform to the existing social order. Mythical content is presented in such hegemonic way that puts the convivial pictures at the front and rival ideas and values at the back. The project of creating middle-class value is practiced through the reproduction of the mythical content. In other words, the overall narrative form constructs a kind of moral world that is ready to serve what is official, powerful and what is considered proper from the textbook writers' ideological standpoint. The overall designation of textbooks has worked to produce the citizens nurtured and nourished with the nutrition of official knowledge and discourses that ask students to be obsequious citizens. In this light, mythic content incorporated in government-aided textbooks fails to impart, to use Campbell's expression, "rich and life vivifying" force for the learners. In short, a commonly held contemporary stance that curriculum must be a process-contained and should serve to cultivate the potentiality of the learners has been denied in these textbooks. The overall content of the textbooks is hegemonic and swims against the view that education should foreground "cooperative learning structures, high self-concept, and student's motivation and interest in learning all are related to greater academic achievement" (Kirschenbaum, 1982, p. 25). The discourses reflect Marxist postulation that education as ideological-produce reflects existing social order, and the learning contents are instrumental to produce the desired type of citizenry. Therefore, current content patterning in the school textbooks of language calls for a revisit; in fact, a transformation, making a clear distinction between *education*— the process of giving expressions to something latent in a human mind or helping it grow and flourish with an aid of valid instruction methods, and, *indoctrination*— the process of inculcating certain enterprise by pouring some interests and values into a human mind as one may pour a liquid into a vessel. To materialize this, textbook writers and curriculum designers should consider the methods of making curriculum that are instrumental to develop students' perspective, a critical consciousness in their social milieu while improving their language skills.

Acknowledgments

I would like to extend my immense gratitude to Prof. Dr. Anirudra Thapa, Tribhuvan University, Nepal, for his theoretical insights in shaping this article. Similarly, many thanks to

Prof. Dr. Ramchandra Poudel, Dean of Faculty of Social Sciences, Nepal Open University, for his consistent guidance in shaping this article. My better half, Laxmi Adhikari, and dear friends, Binod Sapkota and Rocky Maharjan, also deserve many thanks for their continuous encouragement.

Funding

I have received no funding for this article.

Conflict of Interest

I declare no conflict of interest regarding this article.

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Suggested Citation:

GC, S. (2021). Mythic content as a rhetoric in government-aided school textbooks of Nepal. *Journal of Transformative Praxis*, 2(1), 32-45. <https://doi.org/10.51474/jrtp.v2i1.522>