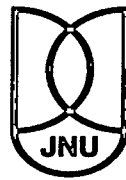


Communalization of Education: The NCERT Textbook Controversy

Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of

Master of Philosophy

Vikas Sabharwal



Center for Political Studies
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi – 110067
India
2005

To My Parents



Centre for Political Studies
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi - 110067, India

Tel. : 011-2670441
Fax : 011-2671760
Gram : JAYENU

Dated: 21 July, 2005

Certified that the dissertation entitled "Communalization of education: The NCERT Textbook Controversy", by Vikas Sabharwal in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, is an original work of his own. This dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree in this university or any other university.

We recommend that this dissertation may be placed before the board of examiners for evaluation.

Professor Vidhu Verma
(Supervisor)

Professor Sudha Pai
(Chairperson)

Chairperson
Centre for Political Studies,
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110067

Contents

Chapters	Page Nos.
Introduction	1- 8
I Policies of Education During the British Period: A Historical Overview	9 - 28
II Evolution of the Concept of Secular Education In Independent India	29 - 51
III The Revised Textbooks : An Analysis	52 - 68
IV A Critique of the Rewriting of History Textbooks	69 -86
Conclusion	87 - 91
Bibliography	92 - 96

Acknowledgements

This dissertation would have never been completed without the help of a number of people. I am glad to have an opportunity to express my gratitude towards some of them.

I would first of all like to acknowledge the help of my supervisor, Professor Vidhu Verma. It was only because of her constant support, guidance and motivation, throughout the course of this study, that I was able to finalize this work. Her comments, criticisms and patience on each draft of this dissertation were invaluable. I am indebted to her for helping me out at each stage of this project.

I would also wish to express my gratitude towards my friends Sumit, Srividya, Malavika, Bhawna, Areesh and Dharmaraj, the discussions with whom provided me with critical inputs that proved invaluable for my study.

My friends Shahid and Rakesh were a constant source of motivation, who never let me feel low, whenever I faced any problems during the course of this project.

Finally, I would like to thank Mrs Karuna Singh, Section Officer NCERT Library, who helped me in making available, a number of crucial references required for my study.

Abbreviations

BJP	Bhartiya Janata Party
BJS	Bhartiya Jana Sangh
CABE	Central Advisory Board on Education
CBSE	Central Board for Secondary Education
HRD	Human Resource Development
NCERT	National Council of Educational Research and Training
NDA	National Democratic Alliance
NDC	National Development Council
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh
UT	Union Territory

Introduction

Every modern state sets up a formal system of education, and those who direct and formulate the educational system and policy have to decide its prime goal at the very outset. Imparting education for the promotion of knowledge, for the development of the mind, soul and body of the builders of the nation's future is undoubtedly the prime goal in any political system. Apart from this, another significant role of education is to cater to the socio-economic goals of a nation. For this, it is essential, that the policies on education are free from any sectarian and partisan ideologies, and vested interests of a particular party in power.

India gained independence from the colonial rule on August 15, 1947. To embark on the path of development and modernization, and to get rid of problems like poverty, backwardness, socio-economic disparities between the rich and the poor, casteism, communalism, and regionalism, it decided to adopt socialism, secularism and democracy as the basic ideals.

The Indian Constitution accepts the goal of 'justice, social, economic and political; liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and

worship; equality of status and of opportunity; and to promote among them all fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the nation.’¹ Rights to civil, political, and social equality are guaranteed, among other things in part III of the Indian Constitution and the goal of socio-economic justice befitting the concept of a welfare state is enshrined in part IV of the constitution. Equal treatment to all religions, and equality of status and opportunity to people of all religious faiths, in consonance with the ideals of secularism, are enshrined in the preamble of our constitution and are guaranteed in part III. The entire constitution is, therefore, the manifestation of the establishment of a democratic polity in India.

The education policies that were framed in the post-independence India were naturally in consonance with these ideas.

Indian Discourse on Education

The Indian discourse on education under the direction and control of the state begins in the late eighteenth century, when India was a British colony. Before this period, religious leaders in the villages provided elementary education. Owing to political expediency,

¹ Preamble, *Constitution of India*

the British government decided that education imparted to the students would be strictly non - religious in character. Thus, the British followed the policy of 'religious neutrality' in education, and this laid the foundations of secularism in education in India. The policy of religious neutrality gave a negative meaning to the concept of secular education, as no education about religion was to be imparted to the students.

The present study attempts to trace the foundations of secular education in India during the British period, and its evolution into a positive concept in post-independent India. In consonance with the ideals of secularism enshrined in the constitution, the government of India decided to give a positive meaning to the concept of secular education. The government decided to include education about religion as a part of curriculum after much deliberation and discussions by various education commissions. Imparting this kind of education, about the best elements of all religions, was aimed at building a spirit of tolerance and mutual respect for all religions among the student to further the goal of national cohesion and communal harmony. Taking into account the significance of education in a multi-cultural and multi-religious country like India, the theme of the study is to link up the

educational discourse and the national council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), whose one of the multifarious tasks is to undertake preparation and publication of school textbooks.

Textbooks play an important role in shaping an educated citizen's attitude towards society. They serve an important tool for imparting education. Thus while writing a textbook meant for school children, the author needs to be very careful about what kind of conclusions about society the child may draw from the narrative presented in it. To ensure that the school textbooks are free from any ideological bias, the NCERT was, from time to time, instructed by the government to prepare curriculum framework that set the parameters within which school textbooks were to be written. These parameters were defined in conformity with the national policy on education - 1968 and later National Policy on Education - 1986(revised in 1992). Both the policies laid stress on the important role of education in promoting the goal of national integration, and thus secularism was one of the main features of both the education policies

The NCERT played an instrumental role by bringing out curriculum frameworks that gave a concrete shape to the government's

policy on education. The history textbooks prepared by the NCERT had secular narratives, as the best elements of all the major religions of the world were included in them.

But in the year 2000 the NCERT brought out a new *National Curriculum Framework for School Education* that talked about 'indegenising' the curriculum. The history textbooks prepared under this framework attempted to show the Hindu religion as being superior to all other religions that exist in the country.

It is in this context that I use the term 'communalization' of education. By 'communalization' of education, I mean, the reflection of ideological bias of one particular religion in the school textbooks that tries to establish the superiority of one particular religion over the others.

The publishing of these textbooks, lead to a controversy in the academic as well as political circles, over whether such textbooks should have any place in the education system of a secular, democratic polity like India.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are, first, to examine the changes in the government policy on education since the British period. Second, to critically examine the origin of the textbook controversy, and, third, to examine the changes brought about in the textbooks and present an analysis of those changes to find out if there was any ideological bias in these textbooks

Research Methodology

My methodology for research in the present study would be an examination of the discourse and critical analysis of the government's policies on education since the British period for which I have referred to the primary sources.

I propose the hypothesis that the rewriting of the NCERT history textbooks under the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government was an attempt at communalization of education. To test the hypothesis, a sample of two revised NCERT history textbooks would be examined to find out if

there exists any ideological bias pertaining to any particular religion in the textbooks.

In the present study, my first chapter looks at the policies on education during the British period in India, in a historical perspective.

Chapter two traces the evolution of the concept of secular education in India, that emerged out of the recommendations of the different commissions on education constituted by the Government of India in the post – independence period. The chapter also discusses the formation of the NCERT and different curriculum frameworks brought about by it under the National Policies on Education –1968 and 1986 (revised in 1992).

Chapter three presents an analysis of a sample of two revised history textbooks.

Chapter four presents a critique of the revised textbooks through the debates in the academic circles on the controversy.

Summing up the arguments and undertaking a critical appraisal of the textbook controversy would conclude the study.

Limitations of the Study

The scope of the study is limited to a critical examination of policies regarding exclusion/inclusion of religion in education in India, in order to explore the political motives behind such moves.

For the purpose of study, where primary sources were unavailable, secondary sources have been referred to.

Chapter 1

Policies of Education During the British Period:

A Historical Overview

When the East India Company embarked on its political career in India, in 1757, there was no education system organised and supported by the state. Both Hindus and Muslims, however, had their own indigenous systems, each deeply rooted with a tradition of learning and scholarship about them. Elementary education included religious teaching. The Hindu teachers in the village *pathshalas* and Muslim maulavis in *maktabs* played a major role in providing elementary education. The two systems of indigenous education followed parallel streams.¹ Higher education also had an orientation toward religion, as it was confined to the study of classical Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic texts. From the battle of Plassey onwards, as the British started acquiring their empire in India, they were soon faced with the question of what should be their policy and attitude towards Indian institutions and practices. The initial attitude of the British was to have as little interference as possible, even to the extent of supporting the indigenous system of education. The East India

¹ Keay, F E, *Indian Education in Ancient and Later Times*, Oxford University Press, 1942, p.110

Company had no intentions of imposing a westernised system of education on its Indian subjects. Its lack of interest in education was not surprising, since its primary motive was trade. However, the British 'could not long evade the traditional duty of an Indian ruler to patronise the classical learning of the country.'²

It was Warren Hastings who showed great interest in the revival of Indian learning. He established the Calcutta Madarsa as the centre of Islamic studies in 1781. It is argued that 'the attempt was made to conciliate the Hindu and Muslim population of the newly acquired territories of the Company'³. However it had some far reaching effects on the intellectual life of the Indian people because many educational institutions emerged.

Sir William Jones established the Asiatic society of Bengal, in 1784, with the aim of promoting classical studies. Similarly with the aim of cultivating Indian literature, religion and laws, the Benaras Sanskrit College was established in 1792. In 1797, Charles Grant, who had been associated with the East India Company's administration in London and Calcutta, submitted his 'observation',

² Nurullah, S and Naik, J P, *History of Education in India*, McMillan and Company, New Delhi, p. 110

³ Ghosh, M, *The Concept of Secular Education In India*, BR Publishing Corporation, N Delhi 1991, p.49.

in which he described the condition of Indians as being utterly low and wretched.

He believed that Britain had a mission of regenerating the Indian society and it must be done through the English language. The company did not pay much attention to Grant's observations, yet, they played a major role in influencing the contemporary opinion in England on this subject; in making the Parliament recognise the urgent necessity of the administration to organise education of the Indians, and in clearing the path for the provisions on education by the Charter Act of 1813.

In 1813, the Charter Act was passed, according to which, the company accepted its duty and responsibility for the education of the Indians on the doctrines of secularism. It was the first acknowledgement by the British Parliament that the education of the Indian people was one of the duties of the state. The Charter Act of 1837 thus laid the foundations of a modern system of education in India.

In what follows, I first examine the role of Christian missionaries and British administrators in formulating a policy on education in India. Second, I discuss the link between the spread of English education and the socio-religious reform movements in the

nineteenth century. Finally, I look at the discourse on education policy during the nationalist movement in India.

Role of the Christian Missionaries

The present system of English education in India finds its roots in the activities of early Christian missionaries. Scholars writing on this area maintain that ‘the earliest to enter the field of missionary work were the Portuguese and the Roman Catholic missionaries who took lead in establishing elementary and secondary schools in Madras and Bengal.’⁴ Gradually a large number of missionary societies started working throughout the country and founded numerous educational institutions including colleges. The education that was provided in most of these missionary schools and colleges was on western lines and the medium of teaching was English. The government provided them the grant for their educational work. Education in this early stage under the British government was under the influence of foreign religious organizations, which assumed that the knowledge imparted to pupils in India would help prepare them to accept Christianity. Thus according to them, ‘the introduction of history and geography

⁴ ibid p.50

taught in the light of western knowledge, made possible an attack upon the cosmography of the Hindus and so helped to weaken the faith of the students in their traditional superstitions'.⁵ Thus an indirect approach to the goal of peoselytisation was followed. Nevertheless, the contribution of the missionaries was remarkable in laying the foundations of English education in India. It also helped in eliciting the Government's response. Thus it is possible to argue that 'the missionary agencies in Indian education are important not for their achievement though that was too considerable, but for the impetus they gave to government enterprise.'⁶

In 1813, the East India Company's charter was renewed and the Parliament directed that Rupees 10,000 be set apart each year for the improvement of Indian literature and also for the introduction and promotion of knowledge of science among the inhabitants of the British territories in India. These early initiatives paved the way for the further development of English education in India – a development that was to have a deep and far reaching effect.⁷

Macaulay's Minute

⁵ Kenneth, Ingham, *Reformers in India*, University Press, Cambridge, 1956, p.59-60.

⁶ Law, N N, *Promotion of Learning in India: By Early European Settlers*, Orient Longman and Company, 1918, p.20

⁷ Majumdar, RC, *An Advanced History of India*, McMillan And Company, 1950,p.70

The Parliament's direction granted financial aid to both oriental and English education. In 1823, a Committee of Public Instruction was appointed in Bengal, which decided to establish a Sanskrit college in Calcutta. The issue led to a controversy over the relative merits of Oriental and Western learning as the liberal Hindus, like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, and Christian missionaries protested against the move who even suggested that the amount set aside for oriental education instead be used to instruct the Indians in Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, Chemistry, Anatomy and other useful sciences. Although the Government had its way and the Sanskrit College was established but the controversy could not be set aside. The Committee of Public Instruction got divided into two – the Oriental Party and the Anglicist Party. The Oriental party was in favour of encouraging oriental learning while the Anglicists urged the adoption of liberal education on western lines, through the medium of the English language. In 1834, Lord Macaulay was appointed as the president of the General Committee of Public Instruction. Lord Macaulay was a staunch supporter of imparting Western learning to the Indians as he despised almost all that was Indian - whether language, culture, philosophy or religion. In his famous Minute of 1833, he asserted 'it was the duty of England to

teach Indians what was good for their health and not what was palatable to their taste.’⁸ Macaulay’s decision thus went in favour of the Anglicists who were of the opinion that ‘a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia.’⁹ Also indicating the political significance of introducing western education for the growing British empire in India, he said, ‘we must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern, a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and intellect.’¹⁰ Lord William Bentinck got convinced of his stand and decided that though Oriental education would continue but with reduced grants, and henceforth emphasis would be levied on imparting knowledge of English literature and sciences.

Historian K. M. Pannikar, commenting on this decision of Macaulay says, ‘it is the genius of this man, narrow in his Europeanism, self satisfied in his sense of English greatness, that gives life to modern India as we know it’¹¹. ‘The transformation’,

⁸ Ghosh, M, *The Concept of Secular Education In India*, BR Publishing Corporation, New Delhi 1991, Pg 52

⁹ Nurullah, S and Naik, J P, *A History of Education in India*, McMillan and Company 1950, Pg140

¹⁰ Sharp, H and Richey, J A, (eds), *Selections From the Educational Records of the Government of India*, Calcutta, 1920-22, p.107.

¹¹ Quoted in Ghosh M, *The Concept of Secular Education in India*, BR Publishing Corporation, N Delhi, p. 53

according to Prof Kabir 'began with Macaulay's famous minute...'¹²

It can be thus safely asserted that secularism in Indian education was firmly established in its initial stage. For, Macaulay was convinced that western political ideas based on constitutional government, rule of law and individual liberty, were values that should be introduced in India. He was also a great believer in western scientific method and held, that with the spread of western education in India, a scientific temper would gradually develop among the people. Thus ideas of liberty, economic expansion and constitutional and legal government would bring about a transformation of India.¹³ He was convinced that imparting of western education would also help the British consolidate its power in India, as it would create *babus*, who would be the link between the British and the masses.

Policy of Religious Neutrality

Throughout the history of development of education system in India, the British government followed a policy of religious neutrality. It was an important policy stand on the part of the British government that consolidated the foundations of secular education in India. Before he left India, in 1935, Lord William Bentinck

¹² Kabir, H, *Indian Philosophy of Education*, Asia Publishing House, 1961, p.193

¹³ Masni, RP, *Britain in India*, Oxford University Press, 1960, p.32

reaffirmed this policy. While replying to a farewell address by the missionaries, he said, 'the fundamental principle of British rule, the compact to which the government stands solemnly pledged, is strict neutrality. To this important maxim, policy as well as good faith has enjoined upon me, the most scrupulous observance. The same maxim is peculiarly applicable to general education. In all school and colleges supported by government, this principle cannot be too strongly enforced. All interference and injudicious tampering with the religious belief of the students, all mingling of direct and indirect teaching of Christianity with the system of instruction ought to be positively forbidden.'¹⁴ This policy of religious neutrality, found a definite expression in the Despatch of 1854, popularly known as the Wood's Despatch. Government institutions were meant for the benefit of the whole population and therefore the education imparted in them was to be exclusively secular. However, the government did not want to prevent or discourage religious instruction of any kind, but it could be given out of school hours and inspectors were not expected to take notice of it in their periodical visits.¹⁵

¹⁴ Howell, A, *Education in British India*, The office of the Superintendent, Government of India Press, Calcutta, 1872, p. 34

¹⁵ Nurullah, S and Naik, J P, *A History of Education in India*, McMillan and Company, N Delhi, 1950, p.210

The Despatch of 1854 had another important feature that provided for the grants – in – aid system. Aids were sanctioned to private schools started voluntarily by Hindus, Muslims and Christian missionaries. It was secular instruction only to which government's aid was confined, thus abstaining from interference with religious instruction. Despite protests by the missionaries in England, this policy of religious neutrality was affirmed by Queen Victoria's famous proclamation, that stated: 'Firmly relying ourselves on the truth of Christianity, and acknowledging with gratitude the solace of religion, we disclaim alike the right and desire to impose our convictions on any of our subjects. We declare it to be our Royal will and pleasure, that none be in any ways favoured, none molested or disquieted by reason of their religious faith or observances, but that all alike shall enjoy the equal and impartial protection of the law; and we do strictly charge and enjoin all those who may be in authority under us that they abstain from all interference with the religious belief and worship of any of our subjects, on pain of our highest displeasure'.¹⁶

It was not that there were no repercussions of this policy. The missionaries were particularly agitated as a result of this policy.

¹⁶ Johnston, J, *Our Educational Policy in India*, Maclaren and Sons, Edinburg, 1950, p. 36

They pointed out that education given in government schools and colleges was a complete failure as it had led to irreligion, discontent and disloyalty and uprooted religious beliefs, and unsettled moral and social principles.¹⁷ A majority of Indians and Europeans also shared the same opinion.

As a result of a strong agitation, a commission was formed in 1862 under the chairmanship of William Hunter. But the commission too did not depart from the policy as it had worked well in the past.

Protests continued by the Indians and the English but the government did not change its stand. It adhered to the principle of strict religious neutrality. It was said, 'the existence in India of different creeds differing widely from one another and from the faith of the ruling power has made it essential for the state to assume a position of strict religious neutrality in its relations with public instruction.'¹⁸

A final stamp of authority was put by the Government of India Resolution on India's educational policy in 1904, which said

¹⁷ Shrimali, K L, *The Wardha Scheme*, Vidya Bhawan Society, Udaipur, 1949, p.125

¹⁸ Mitra, S M, *Indian Problems*, J Hurry Publishers, London, 1908, p. 140

‘in Government institutions the instruction is and must continue to be exclusively secular.’¹⁹

Education and Reform

As the system of English education got well established in India, there was a phenomenal progress in India especially in Bengal. Industry, roads, railways etc. progressed but the material condition of the people deteriorated. In the midst of these changes, Dr. Karan Singh points out that ‘No single act of the British policy has had a more lasting influence on the evolution of modern Indian thought, as the decision, in 1835, to use Government’s funds to support education in English language and to adopt the curriculum prevalent in English schools.’²⁰ Many Indians began to hold the opinion that elements of modern western thought had to be inculcated for the regeneration of their society. The rationalizing effect of modern western culture through the medium of the English language manifested itself in religious and social ideas and gave birth to a new awakening in India.

¹⁹ Government of India Resolution on Indian Educational Policy 1904, p.81

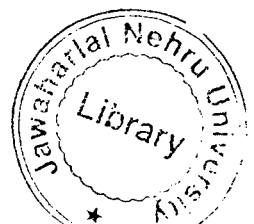
²⁰ Singh, Dr Karan, *The Prophet of Indian Nationalism: Sri Aurobindo*, Allen and Unwin, 1990, p.35

One of the central figures in this awakening was Raja Rammohan Roy. He was pained by the corruption and stagnation of the Indian society, which was dominated by caste and convention. He believed that modern western culture would help regenerate the Indian society. He spoke highly of the English education and was of the opinion that it had the capacity to bring about a change in the social and religious outlook of the Indians, by instilling into their minds, a spirit of rational inquiry into the basis of their religion and society.

TH-12767

In the task of evolving a new India, Raja Ram Mohan Roy stood firm as a reformer. He attempted to correct the misinterpretations of religious scriptures and social practices and rituals, which were not in consonance with the scriptures. He strongly protested against the blind faith people had in religion and in the authority of the priests. As a secularist, he emphasized more on the pragmatic aspects of the religion more than its spiritual aspect.

For Raja Rammohan Roy, as Prof. Bipan Chandra points out, different religions were national embodiments of a universal theism. As a true secularist, 'he was a defender of the basic and universal principles of all religions - the monotheism of the *Vedas* and the



Unitarianism of Christianity - and at the same time attacked the polytheism of Hinduism and the trinitarianism of Christianity.²¹

An ardent champion of women's rights, Raja Ram Mohan Roy actively campaigned against the inhuman practice of *sati*. He condemned the subjugation of women and opposed the prevailing idea that women were inferior to men in any sense. Thus, through a modern, rational, and secular outlook, he struggled to bring about reform in the Indian society.

Another important figure to appear on the Indian scene in the nineteenth century was Pandit Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar. Though he was a great Sanskrit scholar, his mind was open to the best in western thought and represented a blend of Indian and western culture.

He waged a long struggle in favour of widow remarriage and polygamy, and stressed on the role of education in the emancipation of women.

Amongst the Muslims, Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan was an important reformer, who was tremendously impressed by modern scientific thought and worked to reconcile it with Islam. He interpreted the *Quran* in the light of contemporary rationalism and

²¹ Chandra, Bipan, *India Struggle for Independence*, Penguin, New Delhi , 1998 , p.86.

science. He said that any interpretation of *Quran*, that conflicted with human reason, science or nature was in reality a misinterpretation. For him, no religious tenets were immutable or infallible. If religion did not change with time, it would become fossilised. Struggling against blind obedience to tradition, dependence on custom, ignorance and irrationalism, he urged the people to develop a critical approach and freedom of thought. He believed that the religious and social life of the Muslims could be improved only by imbibing modern western scientific knowledge and culture. For this he had many western works translated into Urdu. In 1875, he founded the Mohammadan Anglo Oriental College as a centre for spreading western sciences and culture. Later, this college grew into Aligarh Muslim University.

Thus, the reform movements in the nineteenth century focussed on inculcating a rational spirit and discarding the traditional outlook. Almost all major movements focussed on the role that modern western education could play in bringing out a change, and actively worked in a direction to make education reach the masses.

National Movement and the Policy on Education

The second phase of the history of renascent India starts with the thoughts and activities of Mahatma Gandhi while he was leading the nationalist movement against the British colonial rule. One of his missions in life was the unity of the Hindus and the Muslims and his ideas about the spirit of tolerance gave a new turn to the concept of secular education. Secularism in Indian education had its second historical landmark in the decision of Mahatma Gandhi to exclude religious education from the scheme of education advocated by him. The basic scheme of education that Mahatma Gandhi envisaged, laid emphasis on the fact that national education needs to consider the need of the common masses. According to him, any education that does not lead one to self-mastery and purity of heart and does not develop character had no value. This also is one of the essential ingredients of secular education.

Mahatma Gandhi advocated his Wardha scheme of education for the cultivation of moral virtues. The moral virtues did not receive sanction from religion at all, although he was always in favour of imparting knowledge about the tenets of truth and justice that were common to all religions. Commenting on his scheme of education he

said 'we have left out the teaching of religions from the Wardha scheme of education because we are afraid that religions as they are taught and practised today lead to conflict rather than unity. But on the other hand I hold that the truths that are common to all religions can and should be taught to all children. These truths cannot be taught through books - the children can learn these truths only through the daily life of the teacher. If the teacher himself lines up to the tenets of truths and justice, then alone can the children learn that truth and justice are the basis of all religions.'²²

The principles of secularism reached their high watermark in Jawaharlal Nehru. 'Essentially', said Nehru, 'I am interested in this world, in this life, not in some other world or in a future life.'²³ Marxism had a great appeal to Nehru. He looked at it as a rationally coherent science of society and history. Nehru had an enthusiasm for scientific education, technological institutes and national laboratories. He wanted to use science as an instrument to raise people's standard of living and to provide them with equal opportunities for growth. For him, the study of science contributes to the cultivation of a scientific outlook or temper, which was more

²² Quoted in Ghosh, M, *The Concept of Secular Education in India*, BR Publishing Corporation, New Delhi, 1991, p.65

²³ Nehru, JL, *The Discovery of India*, Meridian Book Company, 1946, p.11

important than mere acquiring scientific knowledge on its application.

Nehru also deeply appreciated Tagore's and Gandhi's philosophy, which was seen in his educational thought. According to him, all educational institutions should teach the values of charity and compassion to the students. 'Nehru expected all educational institutions to provide a kind of social sensitiveness to students illuminated by the values of charity, compassion and human understanding. He wanted all education institutions from the university to the primary school to discharge this duty. His insistence on the right objectives and values, which are certainly intellectual, but which also go beyond the intellect, characterises his approach to education at all stages'.²⁴ How Nehru's educational thought was founded on the principles of secularism can be gauged from his remark in the *Discovery of India*, 'God we may deny, but what hope is there for us if we deny man and thus reduce everything to futility.'²⁵

²⁴ Ghosh, M, *The Concept of Secular Education in India*, BR Publishing Corporation, New Delhi, 1991, p.111

²⁵ Nehru, JL, *Discovery of India*, Meridian Book Company, p.488

Conclusion

To sum up the entire discussion, it was during the British period that the concept of secular education in its negative sense, that is, non-religious education took root in India. It was a result of the policy of non-intervention or the principle of religious neutrality followed by the British government that gave rise to the concept. It got further confirmed by Lord William Bentinck in 1835 and later by Queen Victoria's famous proclamation in 1858. Since then in all Government institutions, the instruction was exclusively secular. This policy of the British government can be safely regarded as the first landmark in the development of the concept of secular education in India. Many Indians began to hold the opinion that the elements of modern western thought through the medium of English language needed to be imbibed in order to regenerate the Indian society, and this gave rise to various reform movements in the nineteenth century.

During the phase of the nationalist movement, the unity between the Hindus and Muslims was a major concern of the nationalist political leaders. Leaders like Gandhi and Nehru realised it and hence further stressed on the importance of secular education.

Thus, the concept of secularism was firmly established in the field of education owing to a wide range of factors as discussed above.

Chapter 2

Evolution in India of the Concept of Secular Education in Independent India

In the previous chapter, it was discussed how different policies of the British Government played a role in establishing the concept of secular education. The reason behind the policy of religious neutrality of the British Government was political expediency, as it did not want to stir a hornet's nest.

India gained independence from British rule on August 15, 1947. For a newly independent country like India, to embark on the path of development and modernization, it was necessary that it got rid of problems like poverty, backwardness, socio-economic disparities between the rich and the poor, casteism, communalism and other such problems that plagued the country. The framers of the Indian Constitution, therefore, adopted socialism, secularism, and democracy as the basic ideals that would guide the country on the path of progress.

As India gained independence at the cost of the partition of the country that was marred by communal riots, the framers of our constitution realized that it was imperative for a multi-cultural, and

multi- religious country like India to be a secular state. Thus it was decided that there shall be no state religion in India nor any special patronage will be conferred upon any particular religion.

According to the Constitution of India, 'Subject to public order, morality and health...all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practise and propagate (their) religion.'¹

The Constitution guaranteed to the people the freedom to manage their religious affairs, as it said, 'subject to public order, morality and health, every religious denomination or any section thereof shall have a right-

- a) to establish and maintain institutions for religious and charitable purposes;
- b) to manage its own affairs in matters of religion
- c) to own and acquire movable and immovable property; and
- d) to administer such property in accordance with law.'²

As far as the question of imparting religious education is concerned, the Constitution of India explicitly mentioned that, 'No religious instruction shall be provided in any educational institution wholly

¹ *Constitution of India*, Article 25

² *ibid*, Article 26

maintained out of state funds'³ and 'No person attending any educational institution recognized by the State or receiving aid out of state funds shall be required to take part in any religious instruction that may be imparted in such institution or to attend any religious worship that may be conducted in such institution or in any premises attached thereto unless such person or, if such person is a minor, his guardian has given his consent thereto.'⁴ Thus the Constitution of India firmly laid the foundations of a secular state, which had its reflection in the field of education as well.

For national integration what was needed was to bring the people of different religions castes and communities in a common democratic system of public schools along with a common curriculum that would inculcate the feelings of mutual respect and tolerance amongst them. Even after independence, the policy of neutrality was followed for a few years, as 'it was felt that religions would stand in the way of the free intellectual development of a child.'⁵

However some educationists and thinkers had been feeling the necessity for a positive content of secular education ever

³ ibid, Article 28(1)

⁴ ibid, Article 28(3)

⁵ Shrimali, KL, *The Wardha Scheme*, Vidya Dhawan Society, Udaipur, 1949, p.33

since independence. To them interpreting secular education only in the negative sense was a fallacy. Education should rather have a positive content in a democratic polity and this could be done without compromising with the ideals of secularism enshrined in the Constitution. Views on this issue are reflected in the Reports of the different Education Commissions in the post – independence period.

University Education Commission

The University Education Commission was constituted under the chairmanship of Dr SV Radhakrishnan to study the problem of imparting religious education along with various other problems that afflicted the system of education in India. Chapter VIII of the report discusses the problem of religion in education in detail. According to the report, it is the dogmatic approach with different religions that leads to conflicts. A spirit of intolerance had been created by the different sects and creeds by interpreting religions in a wrong manner. Religion was the source of disharmony as it had lost its true essence in the hands of narrow-minded people.

Secondly, the Commission argued that a secular state was the only alternative in a multi-religious country like India, which had to grapple with the problems of communalism and religious strife. The

idea incorporated in this argument of the report was that though secularism had to be accepted as the state principle but with certain modifications. 'We do not accept a purely scientific materialism as the philosophy of the state. That would be to violate our nature, our *swabhava*, our characteristic genius and. ...though we have no state religion, we cannot forget that a deeply religious strain has run throughout our history like a golden chain.'⁶ The above argument of the Commission suggested that though Indian secularism was supposed to be non-religious but not against religion.

Thirdly, the commission argued that the state should provide for the teaching of a Universal religion. It also said that there was no Constitutional bar on it for 'the adoption of the Indian outlook on religion is not inconsistent with the principles of Indian Constitution'.⁷ The Report thus suggested a syncretistic approach. The Report even supported the principle of neutrality, but in an entirely different manner, when it said that 'the absolute religious neutrality of the state can be preserved, if, in state institutions, what is good and great in every religion is presented and what is more essential to for the unity of all religions.'⁸

⁶ *Report of the University Commission*, 1948-49, Government of India Press, 1949, p.94

⁷ *ibid*, p.95

⁸ *ibid*, p. 302

Finally, an important point in the Report was that it mentioned that ‘a reverent study of the essentials of all religions would be uniquely rewarding as a step towards harmony between religions long divided. This is in consonance with the spirit of our country.’⁹ This task could be undertaken by the state in three different ways. By establishing one particular religion, or by providing teaching in all religions practised in the country or by incorporating in the curriculum what was great in every religion. The first alternative was inconsistent with the provisions of our Constitution. The second one was bound to be rejected because of its impracticability in implementation. The third emerged out to be the best solution as it was in perfect consonance with the rich traditions of India. But this recommendation could not be given effect, owing to certain ambiguities in the manner of its implementation i.e. the committee did not explicitly point out whether there should be a separate subject dealing with it or if it could be introduced indirectly as apart of some other related subject. This was dealt with in a more detailed manner by the Committee on Moral and Religious Instruction twelve years later.

⁹ *ibid*, p. 301

Report of the Secondary Education Commission, 1952-53

Although the recommendations of the University Commission were not implemented in toto, but it raised various important questions that were still being debated. There was a growing demand for the inclusion of religion in education in the school curricula from various quarters. As a result of this, the Secondary Education Commission was formed to look into the different problems in the field of secondary education. But unfortunately the Commission only dealt with the problem tangentially. It referred only to the nature of the secular state, as it existed in India, the provisions of the Constitution and the problems of imparting moral and religious education in the classrooms. The Report stated that 'It must be left to the people to practise whatever religion they feel is in conformity with their inclinations, traditions, culture and hereditary influences'.¹⁰ The Commission stressed on the influence of the family as the dominant factor in imparting religious instruction to the children. A. N. Basu, one of the members of the committee was of the opinion that a child's family was the best place where religious instruction could be provided. If at all it was to be provided

¹⁰ *Report of the Secondary Education Commission, 1952 October to June, 1953* Ministry of Education, 1953, p.03-104

in schools, it should be on a voluntary basis and outside the school hours. In view of the provision of the Constitution of the secular state, religious instruction cannot be given in school except on a voluntary basis and outside the regular school hours. Such instruction should be given to the children of the particular faith and with the consent of the parents and the management concerned. All these suggestions show that this committee played safe by trying to avoid any controversy and suggested measures, the implementation of which would be more practicable in the schools of a strictly secular state.

The Committee on Religious and Moral Instruction

The Committee on Religious and moral instruction, was constituted in 1959 under the chairmanship of Shri Prakash, the then Governor of Bombay. It was set up to study the problem of religion in education comprehensively and suggest measures to untangle the problem of providing religious and moral instruction.

The Committee did not agree with the suggestion of the Secondary Education Commission that religious instruction should be left entirely to the family. According to the Committee, this suggestion was not satisfactory. It opined that teaching of moral and

spiritual values was desirable and specific provisions for doing so were feasible though with certain limitations. According to the Committee a comparative and sympathetic study of the lives and teachings of the great religious leaders could form the content of such education. At later stages, their ethical systems and philosophies could be made a part of the curriculum. As regards extra curricular activities the Commission recommended that experienced persons could be invited to deliver speeches on inter-religious understanding. During the morning assembly in schools, the Commission recommended, there could be an occasional reading of inspiring passages from great literature, religious as well as secular, pertaining to important religions and cultures of the world. It also suggested that certain periods could be set aside every week, exclusively for moral instruction.

The most important suggestion of the Commission, which is relevant to the present study was that there should be suitable books prepared for all stages from the primary school to the University which should describe briefly, in a comparative and sympathetic manner the basic ideas of all religions and the essence of the lives and teachings of the great religious leaders, saints and philosophers of the world. This should be done according to the needs of the

various age groups, and the whole programme of publication should be under the control of a central agency set up under the auspices of the Union Ministry of Education.

The recommendations of the Commission were well balanced and essential for character building and the making of responsible citizens without compromising with the principles of secularism on which the Indian state rests. The Commission hoped that these recommendations would be effectively implemented and a proper atmosphere in the educational institutions be created so that 'they may train not only technicians or professional experts but also humane and balanced citizens who can contribute to the happiness and well being of their countrymen and humanity as a whole.'¹¹

Report of the Education Commission

1964-65(Kothari Commission)

The Kothari Commission was constituted by the Government of India in 1964. The objective of setting up the Commission was to advise the Government on the national pattern of education and on the general principles and policies for the development of education at all stages and in all aspects. The report of the commission

¹¹ *Report of the Committee on Religious and Moral Instruction*, Ministry of Education, 1960, p.20

appraised the existing educational system in the country and presented an overall programme of educational development through the cultivation of social, moral and spiritual values. The commission recommended that the central and the state governments should adopt measures to introduce education in such values in all institutions under their direct control. The commission also expected the privately managed institutions to follow suit.

The commission observed that it was not the sole responsibility of the family or the community to impart religious education to the children. Instead, it suggested that there should be definite syllabus, giving well chosen information about all major religions of the world which may be included in the general education course introduced in the schools and colleges upto the first degree. The syllabus, according to the commission, 'should highlight the fundamental similarities in the great religions of the world and the emphasis they place on the cultivation of certain broadly comparable moral and spiritual values'.¹²

A significant contribution of the commission was that it concretely differentiated between 'religious education' and 'education about religion'. The Commission observed that for a

¹² *Report of the Education commission (1964-66)*, p.19-20.

multi-religious society like India, it was the latter that was more appropriate. For a democracy like India to thrive, it was essential that a tolerant study of all religions be promoted. The commission also recommended that the Government of India should issue a statement on the National Policy on Education, which should provide guidelines to the state governments and the local authorities in preparing and implementing educational plans in their areas.

Formation of NCERT

The common thread running through the recommendations of all the commissions was that though religion should be studied as a part of the curriculum but it needed to be done in the proper perspective. If that was done it would help in developing a spirit of tolerance and open mindedness amongst the students, which would not compromise with the principles of a secular state. Instead it would only strengthen and make the pluralistic society of India, more vibrant.

In 1968, a National Policy on Education was formulated and the recommendations of these commissions and committees formed its major base. The policy stressed the unique significance of education for national development. It said, that the Government of

India was convinced that a reconstruction of education on the broad lines recommended by the education commissions was essential for economic and cultural development of the country and for national integration. A sustained effort was needed, according to the policy, to raise the quality of education at all stages with due emphasis on the development of science and technology along with the cultivation of moral and social values. The education system must create a sense of common citizenship and strengthen national integration. The policy dealt in detail about providing free and compulsory primary education, development of regional languages, correcting regional imbalances in the provision of educational facilities etc. these aspects of the policy will not be discussed here as they are not relevant to the present study.

Regarding the textbooks, the policy was in favour of having a few basic textbooks common throughout the country. It is in this context that the role of National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) comes into play.

The NCERT was set up by the Government of India in 1961, as an autonomous organisation registered under the Societies Registration Act (Act XXI of 1860) to advise and assist the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India and

Departments of Education in States/ UTs in formulation and implementation of their policies and major programmes in the field of education, particularly for qualitative improvement of school education. For the realisation of its objectives, the NCERT and its constituent units:

- Undertake, aid, promote and coordinate research on areas related to school education;
- Organise pre-service and in- service training of teachers;
- Organise extension services for institutions that are engaged in educational research, training of teachers or have extension services to schools;
- Develop and disseminate improved educational techniques, practices and innovations.
- Collaborate advise and assist State Education Departments, universities and other educational institutions;
- Act as a clearing house for ideas and information to all matters relating to school education;

- Undertake the preparation and / or the publication of books materials, periodicals and other literature to achieve its objectives.¹³

After the declaration of the National Policy on Education in 1968 the NCERT was entrusted with the task of preparing a curriculum framework for school education. The *Ten Year School System – A Framework*, was brought out in the year 1975 by the NCERT. The document provided the necessary thrust to teaching of science and mathematics as part of general education curriculum from the primary level, which ultimately resulted in a national movement for popularising science among school children. As mentioned earlier, amongst its multifarious tasks, one of the most important ones entrusted to the NCERT was the preparation and publication of textbooks for school children. These textbooks were to be prepared in accordance with broad guidelines provided by the National Policy on Education so as to strengthen the cause of national integration without compromising with the principle of secularism. For achieving this goal the Kothari Commission had already differentiated between religious education and education

¹³ NCERT, *NCERT Annual Report 2002-2003*, p.2

about religions and observed that it was the latter that was more appropriate for a multi-religious country.

Keeping this and recommendations by the Commission on Religious and Moral Education in mind, the NCERT started preparing and publishing textbook for schools in all subjects including history. The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) adopted some of the textbooks prepared by NCERT for classes IX And X for the first set of candidates appearing the secondary public examination held by the board in April 1977.¹⁴

The history textbooks included the basic ideas of all major religions of India. It was done in such a manner so as to make the student appreciate the unity in diversity that existed in India. Since the entire exercise was done in an unbiased manner, without showing any religion as being superior or inferior to the other, it helped the student inculcate a spirit of tolerance towards different religions. Thus, the debate on whether to include religion as a part of curriculum was settled. The way it was done also helped preserve the secular fabric of the country, thus giving a positive meaning to the concept of secular education.

¹⁴Aggarwal, J C, *National Policy on Education- 1985 A Framework*, Doaba House Publishers, Delhi, 1985, p.2.

A review of progress every Five years was stipulated by the National Policy on Education- 1968. Such a review was overdue. There had been a change of government at the centre in the meanwhile and the Janata Government came to power. The Janata government decided to frame a new policy on education. For this purpose, the government issued a Draft National Policy on Education 1979. However, as this government could not survive for long, the policy could not be finalised and thus abandoned.

In 1985 the NCERT prepared a National Curriculum for Elementary and Secondary Education –A Framework. The then Prime Minister Mr. Rajiv Gandhi in his broadcast to the nation on January 1, 1985 declared a new education policy would be framed to equip the country both scientifically and economically to enter the 21st century. Stressing on the positive content of education he reiterated that parochial and communal interpretations of our composite should be curbed by the curricula and textbooks¹⁵.

In 1986, a revised document ‘National Policy on Education – 1986 - a Presentation’ was brought out and was discussed in meetings of the State Ministers of Education, the National Development Council (NDC) and the Central Advisory Board on

¹⁵ *ibid*, p.5

Education (CABE). In the light of the discussions, the document was revised again and the Draft National Policy on Education 1986 was tabled in the Parliament. After debates, it was finally adopted by the Lok Sabha on may 8th and Rajya Sabha on May 12th 1966. Thus the National Policy on Education - 1986 emerged.¹⁶

The National Policy on Education 1986, revised in 1992, forms the base for the formulation of curricular frameworks or any other decision related to the field of education, even today. This is why a discussion of this policy is of utmost importance. According to the policy, 'education has an acculturating role. It refines sensitivities and perceptions that contribute to national cohesion, or scientific temper and independence of mind and spirit –thus furthering the goal of socialism, secularism and democracy enshrined in our Constitution'¹⁷

The policy envisaged a National System of Education with a common structure, that is, 10+2+3 structure. The National System of education would be based on a national curricular framework. According to the policy, 'objectivity will be reflected in the preparation of textbooks and in all school activities, and all possible

¹⁶ Aggarwal, J C, *Education Policy in India 1992: Retrospect and Prospect*, Shipra Publications, Delhi, 1995, p.7

¹⁷ *ibid*, p.15

measures will be taken to promote an integration based on appreciation of common national goals and ideals, in conformity with the core curriculum'¹⁸.

On the issue of imparting value education the policy stressed on the cultural plurality of the Indian society and said that education should foster universal and eternal values that are oriented towards the unity and integration of the people. According to the policy, value education should help eliminate obscurantism, religious fanaticism, violence, superstition and fatalism.

In 1988, based on National Policy on Education the NCERT brought out A National Curriculum for Elementary and Secondary Education. All NCERT textbooks were published under this framework until the year 2000.

National Curriculum Framework- 2000

In 1999, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government came to power. The Minister for Human Resource Development Mr.Murli Manohar Joshi appointed Mr. J .S. Rajput as the Director of the NCERT. Soon the NCERT came up with a *National Curriculum Framework for School Education- A Discussion Document*. The Document

¹⁸ ibid, p.20

announced that it was written in a hurry. The preface of the document refers to ‘certain compelling circumstances’¹⁹, which meant that it could not afford the luxury of taking a very long time. It was not mentioned at all, what exactly were the compelling circumstances. At the very start of the document, certain ‘facts of history’²⁰ are noted. For example it talks about the ‘fact’ that the worlds first universities were in India, that the ‘*Chhandogya Upanishad* mentions eighteen different subjects to study including areas such as natural disaster management...’²¹ and the like. Based on the discussion document, the NCERT brought out the curriculum framework called the *National Curriculum Framework for School Education- A Framework*. This document also talked about the ‘worldwide recognition of the indigenous knowledge system’²², and that it was only the Indians who have failed to recognise it. It said that, though children in India knew about Newton, they did not know about Aryabhata. Thus the document stressed on the need to bring in an ‘indigenous Indian curriculum’²³ that would ‘celebrate

¹⁹ *National Curriculum Framework for School Education-A Discussion Document*, NCERT 2000, Preface.

²⁰ Sarangapani P M, *Seminar*, Feb 2003, p.17

²¹ *National Curriculum Framework for School Education-A Discussion Document*, NCERT 2000, p.1.

²² *National Curriculum Framework for School Education-A Framework*, 2000, NCERT, p. 1

²³ *ibid*, p.13

the ideas of the country's thinkers'.²⁴ From Indian system of medicine, to Indian mathematics, astronomy, linguistics etc., the document talked about everything that was Indian. Prof. Sarangapani, criticising the framework says that, 'there were articulations, in the framework, 'akin to dangerous political discourse that feeds off Indian chauvinism.'²⁵

As hurriedly as it was brought out, in equal hurry it was tabled in the parliament and passed without a debate in November 2000. Nor was it placed before the CIBE of which education Ministers of all states are members. In August 2001 Education Ministers of several states after a convention, asserted that since education was a subject in the concurrent list, any changes in the National Curriculum Framework should have been done only after a national consensus was evolved.

A number of eminent historians like Prof. Arjun Dev, Prof. Romilla Thapar, Prof. Bipan Chandra, Prof. Mushirul Hasan, Prof. K M Pannikar, along with many others raised their voice against the move. But the national curriculum was passed, and on the basis of it, the NCERT textbooks were supposed to be rewritten. Thus, as Prof. Nalini Taneja points out, 'this new curriculum (had) simply been

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ Sarangapani, P M, *Seminar*, Feb 2003, p. 17

thrust on the nation despite protests and disapproval within a significant section of the academic as well as political community across a broad spectrum.’²⁶ Most of the voices of dissent talked about the rewriting of history textbooks, as history was the most potent weapon through which education could be communalised. In response to the protests, Mr Murli Manohar Joshi said, ‘...my Marxist friends are interested only in history textbooks because it is they who have distorted history’.²⁷ He claimed that the discipline of history had become controversial because the left intelligentsia had ‘enslaved’ it. The NCERT Director, Mr J S Rajput also alleged that the authors of the previous history textbooks furthered their ‘narrow political agenda’²⁸ and took the institution (NCERT) ‘for a ride’²⁹. He also suggested that the authors were ‘elements out to destabilize the nation.’³⁰ The Rashriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) *sarasanghachalak*, Mr K S Sudarshan said that those who were resisting the revisions of the NCERT textbooks were ‘anti Hindu, Euro Indians.’³¹

²⁶ Taneja, N, *The Saffron agenda in Education*, in *The Saffron Agenda In Education: An Expose*, SAHMAT, New Delhi, 2001, p. 12

²⁷ The Indian Express, December 9, 2001

²⁸ *The Hindu*, October 23, 2001.

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ *Organizer*, November 4, 2001

Conclusion

To sum up, the policy of religious neutrality continued to be followed even in the post independence period for over a decade. But since there were demands from various quarters to include religion as a part of the educational curriculum, the government constituted various commissions to suggest measures to accommodate this demand. On the basis of these recommendations it was decided that religion should be studied as a part of the curriculum. This decision was given a concrete shape in the National Policy on Education – 1968 and was later reaffirmed in the National Policy on Education 1986. The NCERT was entrusted with the task of preparing the curriculum frameworks on the basis of which the school textbooks were to be written. The NCERT brought out curriculum frameworks from whenever there was a need to revise the curriculum. In the year 2000, during the regime of the BJP led NDA government, a National Curriculum Framework was brought out. Four new textbooks, dealing with history were written on the basis of this framework two of which are analysed in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

The Revised Textbooks: An Analysis

In September- November 2002, the NCERT released four textbooks dealing wholly or in part with history, in line with its new curriculum framework. These books are –

1. Makkhan Lal, et al: *India and the World*, for class VI.
2. Hari Om, et al: *Contemporary India* for class IX.
3. Makkhan Lal: *Ancient India*, for class XI.
4. Meenakshi Jain: *Medieval India*, for class XI.

A thorough analysis of the contents of two of these textbooks was done and the content of the textbooks was found to be communal in character. The two textbooks analysed are the first and the fourth one by Makkhan Lal and Meenakshi Jain respectively. This section seeks to present the objectionable portions in these textbooks which are not in consonance with the National Policy on Education and can be detrimental to the goal of strengthening and preserving national integration that was being done with utmost care over the last more than five decades since independence.

In the book ‘India and the World’, the Social science textbook for class VI, the objectionable content is analysed as follows. With reference to ancient India, the book says:

The discovery of the wheel made a significant difference. It was used to spin cotton and wool and weave cloth. Sometime after it was used in making transport vehicles like bullock carts and chariots.¹

The fact is that the spinning wheel was not in ancient India and its use, even in China, where it originated, is much later than the cartwheel. Wheel, at that time was not used in weaving at all.²

Zoroastrianism was wiped out as a major religion of that area (Iran) by the spread of Islam in the seventh and eighth century A.D. and later. However, its tradition continues in faith and practice of Parsis who left Iran and came to India to save their faith and religion³

This kind of statement is made only to prove that Islam being intolerant of any other religion wiped Zoroastrianism out in Iran. The fact is that Zoroastrian communities in Iran survive to present day.

People also worshipped Shiva in the form of linga, which is done also today.⁴

¹ Lal, M, *India and the World*, NCERT, 2002 pp.54-55.

² Habib, I, Jaiswal, S, Mukherjee, A, (eds.) *History in the New NCERT Textbooks: ...A report and Index of Errors*, Indian History Congress, Kolkata, 2003, p.3

³ Lal, M, *India and the World*, NCERT, 2002, p 87.

⁴ Ibid, p. 84

The stone cones found in archaeological excavations are the basis on which such a claim is based as they have been assumed to be 'Shiva lingas' by the author. There is no proof that the stone cones found are actually phallus stones and that they were in any way related to Shiva worship.

The seal of a deity sitting in a yogic posture and surrounded by animals has been identified with god Pashupati which is another name of siva.⁵

The statement refers to the archaeological findings of Harrappan Civilization. The system of yogic postures cannot be traced beyond 200 B.C., which was much later than the Harappan Civilization. Hence calling the posture of the deity as being 'yogic' is uncalled for. It is surprising how the figure of the seal has been called called god Pashupati when the Harrappan Script has not been deciphered till date.

The Vedic Civilization⁶

During the age of the *Rigveda*, no towns existed. Hence the use of the word 'civilization' is untenable. Vedic 'culture' was the most suitable term. The use of the phrase 'Vedic civilization' is misleading.

⁵ ibid, pp. 85-86

⁶ ibid, p. 88

Vedic Literature does not signify any individual religious work like Koran or Bible.⁷

The sentence is as vague as it is misleading. The existence of the Old and the New Testaments in Christianity are not mentioned as is that of *Hadeath* which is another significant book in Islam.

Vedas Prescribe punishment for injuring or killing (the) cow by *expulsion from the kingdom* or by *death penalty*, as the case may be. [Emphasis as in original]⁸

The phrases ‘expulsion from the kingdom’ and ‘death penalty’ are shown in italics in the textbook to invite the student’s attention. It is not mentioned, precisely which of the four Vedas prescribe such a punishment. The fact that cattle were slaughtered on a large scale during the Rig Vedic times has been well established, with the archaeological evidence of the ample remains of ox-bones.⁹ This does not find a mention in the textbook.

⁷ *ibid*, p 88

⁸ *ibid*. p. 89

⁹ Habib, I, Jaiswal, S, Mukherjee, A, (eds.) *History in the New NCERT Textbooks: ...A report and Index of Errors*, Indian History Congress, Kolkata, 2003, p. 13

Child marriage was unknown. One could marry the person of his or her own choice.Father's property was inherited by all his children.¹⁰

Such baseless statements are added in the textbook only to project the Vedic period as an ideal age. There is no evidence whatsoever that the daughters also inherited the father's property.

The Upanishads are the works of most profound philosophy in any religion.¹¹

The statement intends to show that Hinduism is superior to all other religions. The use of the words 'in any religion' after 'philosophy' is uncalled for. Later, on page 134 the statement is reaffirmed by saying that the Upanishads are the greatest work of philosophy in the history of humankind.

They (the Vedic people) also knew that the earth moved on its own axis...¹²

The first astronomer in India to put forward the hypothesis that the earth moved on its own axis was Aryabhatta. He came much later than the Vedic period. Hence the knowledge of Vedic people about such scientific facts is false.

¹⁰ Lal, M, *India and the World*, NCERT, 2002, p 90

¹¹ *ibid* p.91

¹² *ibid* p. 91

Here, (in the Ganasanghas i.e. republics), the rulers were chosen by the people of the kingdom like we choose our government today.¹³

This is a misinterpretation of facts. The statement is made with reference to ancient India (600-100BC) during the age of the janapadas and the mahajanapadas. The republics in this age were tribal aristocracies, the chiefdoms being largely hereditary.¹⁴ We choose our government democratically by universal adult suffrage, which clearly did not exist in that age.

In no other period of Indian history do we find so many types of officers as in the Mauryan period.¹⁵

The Mughal empire is likely to have maintained a much larger bureaucracy than the Mauryan empire.¹⁶

Sanskrit language, Indian names and religion also spread widely (in South East Asia).¹⁷

It is quite clear that the author, through such statements aims at passing off Hinduism as the only 'Indian religion', since Sanskrit is the chief language associated with it. The sentence is misleading

¹³ *ibid*, p. 93

¹⁴ Habib, I, Jaiswal, S, Mukherjee, A, (eds.) *History in the New NCERT Textbooks: ...A report and Index of Errors*, Indian History Congress, Kolkata, 2003, p. 16

¹⁵ Lal, M, *India and the World*, NCERT, 2002, p 101

¹⁶ Habib, I, Jaiswal, S, Mukherjee, A, (eds.) *History in the New NCERT Textbooks: ...A report and Index of Errors*, Indian History Congress, Kolkata, 2003, p. 18

¹⁷ Lal, M, *India and the World*, NCERT, 2002, p. 109

as it gives the impression that there was only one Indian religion, which was Hinduism.

Hinduism laid great stress on varnashrama dharma. ...these four stages of life were meant to be followed by all individuals irrespective of their caste ,creed and belief.¹⁸

The excerpt is from the chapter on Hinduism. The statement that all individuals were to follow the varnashrama dharma is false as the fact that the *chandalas*, the *shudras* and women could not do so is well established. Also in the entire chapter on Hinduism the caste system is not made a mention of.

The army chief Pushyamitra Shunga killed him (last Mauryan ruler, Brihadratha) in 187 B C. This is the only incident in the history of India till the twelfth century AD when a king was killed and replaced.¹⁹

The author here is trying to show that it was only the Muslims who indulged in regicide whereas there are a number of instances of regicide in the history of India. 'In the Buddha's own lifetime Prasenjit, the king of Kosala was dethroned and killed by his son Vidudabha; and Bimbisara the king of Magadha was founded by its founder after murdering the last ruler after murdering the last ruler of the Shishunaga dynasty .A strong tradition developed that

¹⁸ ibid, p.134

¹⁹ Ibid, p.102

Chandragupta II (c. 381-414 AD) killed his elder brother Ramagupta and married the latter's widow (vide Devichandraguptam), showing that such an act was by no means considered unthinkable or necessarily immoral. For the murders of kings there is evidence enough in Kalhana's Rajatarangini as well: Unmatthavanti (937-39) killed his father Partha (931-35). Parvagupta (949- 50) slew the child king Sangramadeva(948-49)to install himself on the throne . Putting king Bhimagupta (975-81) to death, Queen Didda (981-1003) herself ascended the throne.Uchchala(reigned, 1101-11) overthrew and killed king Harsha to be himself slain by Radda ,who then crowned himself.(1111)”²⁰

Thus it shows that the statement made by the author in the textbook is false and is designed to create a good image of the 'Hindu' kings in India. As opposed to it at a number of places in the textbook the author has tried to show how the Muslim rulers indulged in regicide.

Similarly the history textbooks for class XI, medieval India also had content that was objectionable as it was biased towards Hinduism. The content of the textbook is analysed as follows:

²⁰ Habib, I, Jaiswal, S, Mukherjee, A, (eds.) *History in the New NCERT Textbooks: ...A report and Index of Errors*, Indian History Congress, Kolkata, 2003, p.20

Buddhism was for all practical purposes absorbed into Hinduism and virtually ceased to lead an independent existence in the country.²¹

In the book, the author makes this statement on the basis of the fact that there was a similarity of ideas between the *upanishads* and the Mahayana Buddhism. But by no means can it be claimed that Buddhism went out of existence as a result of this.

After Yakub's seizure of Kabul, the Hindushahi's shifted the capital to *Udabhandapura*, a small village on the right bank of the Sindhu.²²

The river is called Indus in English. There was no need to use the Sanskrit form.

Meanwhile, another slave, Bakhtiyar Khalji began raiding the province of Bihar. In one such expedition he reached as far as Uddanapur Vihara, a university town inhabited by monks. It was destroyed, as were the famous monasteries of Nalanda and Vikramasila.²³

²¹ Jain M, *Medieval India*, Class XI, NCERT, New Delhi, 2002, p.3.

²² *ibid*, p.26

²³ *ibid*, p.30

Only one Vihara is said to have been destroyed by Bakhtyar Khalji (vide Minhaj Siraj). The author has made it three without basis. Infact, a Tibetan monk visited Nalanda soon afterwards.²⁴

The establishment of the Delhi Sultanate in A D 1206 was a landmark in Indian history. The state now established departed from the previous polities of the subcontinent in several ways. For the first time the rulers professed a fath different from that of the populace. They also.... effected an exploitation of the peasantry unparalleled in the annals of India.²⁵

In this statement the author first tries to highlight the fact that the rulers of the Delhi Sultanate professed a faith (i.e. Islam) that was different from that of those whom they governed and then makes an attempt to show how barbaric and autocratic were the Muslim rulers. Whereas the fact is that, the condition of the peasantry were no better before the regime of the Sultans. There is no proof to establish that the peasants were any less exploited before the regime of the Sultans.

²⁴ Habib, I, Jaiswal, S, Mukherjee, A, (eds.) *History in the New NCERT Textbooks: ...A report and Index of Errors*, Indian History Congress, Kolkata, 2003 p.62

²⁵ Jain M, *Medieval India*, Class XI, NCERT, New Delhi, 2002, p 62.

The rate of taxation in pre-Islamic India was usually one-sixth of the produce and appears to have been far less than the exactions under the Delhi Sultans²⁶

This is a characteristic piece of attributing ideal conditions to ancient India and presenting medieval India in dark colours. No serious historians suppose the burden of taxation to have been just 1/6th of the produce in pre-Islamic times.²⁷

He [Firuz Tughluq] then blockaded an island near the sea coast, where nearly a hundred thousand inhabitants of Jajnapur (Orissa) had taken refuge and converted the island into a basin of blood by the massacre of the unbelievers.²⁸

This is a false statement as there is no island off Orissa coast, which can possibly contain that number of people.²⁹

Vir Ballala III, often described as the champion of Hindus in the south...³⁰

The statement does not describe as to who describes Vir Ballala III as the champion of Hindus. The inclusion of phrase ‘

²⁶ *ibid*, p.75

²⁷ Habib, I, Jaiswal, S, Mukherjee, A, (eds.) *History in the New NCERT Textbooks: ...A report and Index of Errors*, Indian History Congress, Kolkata, 2003, p.65.

²⁸ Jain M, *Medieval India*, Class XI, NCERT, New Delhi, 2002, p. 84.

²⁹ Habib, I, Jaiswal, S, Mukherjee, A, (eds.) *History in the New NCERT Textbooks: ...A report and Index of Errors*, Indian History Congress, Kolkata, 2003, p.66

³⁰ Jain M, *Medieval India*, Class XI, NCERT, New Delhi, 2002, p. 91.

champion of Hindus' is an attempt to portray the Muslims as being against the Hindus.

Bukka I has been described as a vigorous warrior and statesman, who freed practically the whole of the south from foreign domination.³¹

The statement tries to show Muslims as foreigners. It projects the Muslims as 'the other' as opposed to the Hindus.

It was only after the British arrived that the idea that Islam fosters social as opposed to religious equality was first floated.³²

The statement is as one sided as it is misleading. It has not been made clear as to what the author means by 'social equality'. Men and Women under the Islamic law are not distinguished on the basis of birth to judge crime and punishment. There is nothing, formally according to the Islamic law, akin to, caste hierarchy. Even if it is agreed that social inequality, in practice existed in Muslims, the author should have made sure to mention the social inequalities that existed amongst the Hindus as well. Nowhere does the book mention the practice of untouchability in Hinduism or the treatment of the dalits in the caste hierarchy.

³¹ *ibid*, p.92

³² *ibid*, p.123

Such statements are bound to portray a negative image of Islam to the students. It is clearly yet another attempt to instil in the mind of the student the superiority of Hinduism over Islam.

The sites (for Babur's mosques) were carefully selected...Sambhal was where the tenth and last avatar of Vishnu was to appear at the end of the *yuga* (era), and Ayodhya was revered as the birthplace of Lord Rama.³³

It is highly ridiculous how Babur knew that the tenth and the last avatar of Vishnu was to appear at Sambhal at the end of the *yuga*. "As for Ayodhya it was then the headquarters of a large province, and there is no indication from the Babri Masjid inscriptions that any particular desire to build a mosque in a Hindu holy place was being entertained".³⁴

The attempt is clearly at trying to prove that Babur, a Muslim ruler, wanted to destroy Hinduism and put Islam in its place. Such communally charged place in a textbook meant for school students.

The overwhelming, majority of the beneficiaries of such (*madad-i-maash*) grants were Muslims.³⁵

Although it is true that the "majority of the beneficiaries were Muslims but Akbar and his successors also gave large grants to

³³Jain, M, *Medieval India*, NCERT, 2002, p.134

³⁴Habib, I, Jaiswal, S, Mukherjee, A, (eds.) *History in the New NCERT Textbooks: ...A report and Index of Errors*, Indian History Congress, Kolkata, 2003, p. 73.

³⁵Jain M, *Medieval India*, Class XI, NCERT, New Delhi, 2002, p.153.

Hindu temples and divines”.³⁶ This fact finds no mention in the book. The inclusion of facts, such as the grants given to the Hindus would have helped the student get a better view of the picture, as it would have proved how different religions have co-existed in India. But no such attempt has been here, and only half of the story is told to the students.

The shift in the imperial (Shahajahan’s) attitude was reflective of the growing ascendancy of revivalist force within the wider Muslim community.³⁷

Not only in this statement but at other places also in the book, the author has used the words ‘ revivalist’ and ‘orthodox’ with reference to the Muslims alone. It goes without saying that how this can influence the minds of the students.

Groups like the Marathas, Sikhs and Jats took on the mighty and Mughals and splintered and shattered their domains. ³⁸

The Iranians under Nadir Shah and the Afghans also played a major role in weakening the Mughal Empire.³⁹ The author in this

³⁶ Habib, I, Jaiswal, S, Mukherjee, A, (eds.) *History in the New NCERT Textbooks: ...A report and Index of Errors*, Indian History Congress, Kolkata, 2003, p.76.

³⁷ Jain, M, *Medieval India*. Class XI, NCERT, New Delhi, 2002, p.166

³⁸ *ibid*, p.186.

³⁹ Habib, I, Jaiswal, S, Mukherjee, A, (eds.) *History in the New NCERT Textbooks: ...A report and Index of Errors*, Indian History Congress, Kolkata, 2003 p.81.

statement has deliberately of Nadir Shah and the Afghans just because they were Muslims.

Shahjahan forbade the construction of Hindu temples and destroyed several others, as for example, the temple constructed by Bir Singh at Orcha.⁴⁰

On page number 164 and 166, this fact has already been mentioned by the author in greater detail. There was no need for a repetition here. The only purpose such a repetition can serve is to constantly remind, lest s/he forgets, the student how Muslim rulers destroyed Hindu temples; how Muslims were anti-Hindus.

Aurangzeb destroyed several Hindu temples like the Keshav Rai temple built by Raja Bir Singh Mathura, the Vishwanath temple constructed by Raja Man Singh in Benaras, besides several others in Kuch Bihar, Udaipur, Jodhpur and other centres in Rajasthan. In place of the Keshav Rai temple, Aurangzeb built an Idgah on its foundations. It may be noted that Mathura was then a city of secondary importance, and should not logically have engaged the emperor's attention.⁴¹

On the very next page of the book (p.216), the author once again talks about another Muslim ruler, destroying Hindu temples. And even this has dealt with in even greater detail on page 173 of

⁴⁰ Jain, M, *Medieval India*, Class XI, NCERT, New Delhi, 2002, p.216

⁴¹ *ibid*, p.217

the book. The repetition is uncalled for already been mentioned, again, in greater detail, on page 173 of the book. The only purpose such a repetition can serve is to remind the student, once again, that the Muslim rulers destroyed Hindu temples.

Conclusion

The national Policy on Education 1986, revised in 1992 forms the base of any decision concerning education that is taken by the central government or any of the state governments. The policy has evolved out of a long process, as has been discussed in detail in the previous chapter as well as in the present one. The policy has explicitly identified one of the unique roles education can play in acculturation and refining the sensitivities and perceptions of the students, which can contribute to national cohesion. The policy, therefore, asserted that education should be dedicated to furthering the cause of national integration. The policy also said that religious fanaticism had no place in the system of education. Instead education was to be imparted in such a manner so as to root out ills from the society. The NCERT was identified as one of the major national institutions, which would help in furthering the goal of national integration, through its multifarious activities.

But the new textbooks that were brought into circulation by the NCERT, under the BJP led NDA government hardly followed the guidelines provided by the National Policy on Education. There is an attempt to show Hinduism as a religion superior to all other religions. The facts in the rewritten textbooks were either selectively reproduced or were distorted, thus giving them a communal bias. Even myths have been tried to be reproduced in the name of facts. Such a presentation of myths and distorted facts can have a negative imprint on the minds of the students and can lead to communal disharmony in the country.

Chapter 4

A Critique of the Rewriting of History Textbooks

The analysis of the content of the rewritten history textbooks shows how history has been fabricated to constitute a communal sensibility. The problem is not with the rewriting of history per se. 'History as described by E H Carr many years ago is necessarily being rewritten all the time'¹ What is objectionable is not the act of rewriting history itself. But not all forms of rewritings are the same. Infact, rewriting is essential for historical knowledge to grow. What needs to be looked at is 'the assumptions that underlie the arguments, the questions that are posed the mode in which knowledge is authenticated 'the structure of the story that is elaborated. And in scrutinizing the process we need to differentiate between ways of rewriting that are legitimate and productive and those that are problematic and intellectually unacceptable.'²

Even as far as the acts of omission, deletion and omission are concerned; history in school textbooks has to be naturally selective. Everything- persons, groups, practices, events or processes –has a past.

¹ Sarkar, S, *The Limits of Nationalism*, Seminar, Feb 2003, p. 19

² Bhattacharya, N, *The Problem*, Seminar, February 2003, p.12

Countless items in the world can become objects of historical knowledge. Therefore, historians must select and do so on the basis of their understanding of what is generally significant and deserving of cognitive attention. The writing of history is necessarily replete with absences and omissions.³ History helps in shaping collective consciousness and defines the present. It helps in shaping goals for the future. Hence, what kind of history is prescribed for the younger generation depends on judgments about what kind a society is needed for the present and the future.

Hence selection as such is not the issue. What is actually at stake is whether the grounds on which it is done are justifiable. And as far as the teaching of history in schools is concerned the issue is whether the selection is done within the parameters defined by the national policy on education? Does it promote communal harmony and national integration? Does it help strengthen the plural fabric of the country? These are a few questions that need to be considered, while discussing the controversy over the rewriting of history textbooks.

The political motives aimed at rewriting history do not reveal a will to explore any new perspectives. 'They are declarations of a war

³ Bhargava, R, *Community Sentiment and the Teaching of History*, Seminar, 2003, p.35

against academic history itself, against the craft of the historian, against the practices that authenticate historical knowledge'⁴ And these political moves are also in contravention to the National Policy on Education. The present chapter seeks to discuss this point.

The entire controversy over the re writing of history has to be seen in the light of the fact that it was done under the BJP led NDA Government. The BJP is the 'political arm'⁵ of the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS), which was established by Dr. K B Hedgewar in 1925. In 1951, it floated a political party, The Bhartiya Jana Sangh (BJS). The BJS dissolved itself in 1977, in order to merge with the Janata Party. In 1980, it was revived as the Bhartiya Janata Party⁶. The RSS since its inception has been pursuing its idea of 'cultural nationalism' that is essentially based on the ideology of M S Golwalkar, who was a strong ideologue of Hindu nationalism. The reason why RSS was founded according to its ideologues was that 'a nation (i.e. India) with a glorious past which, indeed, was a 'Hindu

⁴ Bhattacharya, N, *The Problem*, Seminar, Feb 2003, p. 16

⁵ Term used in A G Noorani, *The RSS and the BJP*, Leftword, N. Delhi, 2000

⁶ A G Noorani, *The RSS and the BJP*, Leftword, N. Delhi, 2000, p.57

Rashtra' was being wiped out from the people and its interest was being ignored by the then political leaders.⁷

Thus RSS is the parent organization of which BJP is the political front, and carries forward its ideology in the political domain. The rewriting of the history textbooks is an aspect of the Hindu nationalist or 'Hindutva' project that the RSS has been aggressively pursuing since its inception. 'The dominant fundamentalism that menacingly threatens India today is an aggressive Hindu fundamentalism which is pugnacious in its tone and posture and wholly uncompromising in according a second class status to all other faiths and beliefs. Politically aligned to the concept of a newly invented Hindu India, Hindu fundamentalism physically and ideologically threatens those that oppose it or fail to accept its dominance.'⁸ The objective of rewriting of textbooks by a political party can apparently be looked at as an exercise done in pursuit of reaping electoral gains. This seems to be a valid argument because the entire exercise as has been seen, was done in such a manner so as to pander to the majority community in India. But that was not the only objective. The object of this entire exercise is not

⁷ Quoted in, A G Noorani, *The RSS and the BJP*, Leftword, N. Delhi, 2000, p.15

⁸ Dhawan, R, *Textbooks and Communalism*, The Hindu, Nov 30, 2001 p.10

just electoral gain but a deeper quest to establish a Hindu hegemony to subordinate all other faiths, beliefs and ideas. This sets up an awesome nexus between education politics and religion, which is contrary to the intrinsic secularism which holds a fragile India together.⁹ To suit the sectarian agenda, communalized statements, fiction, even myths have been passed off as historical facts. What history, in BJP's opinion, is, can be gauged from an excerpt from an article by Mr. K R Malkani, a senior BJP leader. He says, 'Our historian- friends think the HRD Ministry is interested in myths and not in history. The fact is that there is often more history myths and more myths in history.'¹⁰

He goes further to even cite an example of a historical 'fact', 'Rama and Krishna date back thousands of years. For millennia they were heroes...It was only when Shaka yavana, the Arab and Turkish invasions ravaged the land, and men felt the need of warrior Gods, that Rama and Krishna with his *sudarshana chakra*, replaced natural gods like *vayu* and *varuna*.'¹¹

The enormity of the situation can be gauged from the fact that the BJP leaders openly propagated such views about history. They did

⁹ ibid

¹⁰Malkani,K R, *History and Nationalism*, The Sunday Statesman, Dec 23, 2001.

not even hesitate to pass off pure mythology and mythological figures, such as Rama and Krishna as 'history's heroes'. Also worth noticing is the fact that even while talking about such 'heroes' Mr.Malkni emphasized upon their role against the Arab and Turkish 'invaders' who were Muslims.

Further, Mr. Malkani says, 'If you read the history of British science, you will find that most inventions are credited to Englishmen. The same is true for France, Germany, Russia, - you name it. Only a good true history can produce a good healthy nation. We are the only country where we run ourselves down'¹². Thus he provided the justification for glorifying India's ancient past, as has been done in the textbook *India and the World*. According to him, since there can be no objectivity in history writing, there is nothing wrong in the dispensations having it's turn in shaping history texts, in the light of more 'nationalists' values and attitudes.

Mr. Murli Manohar Joshi, commenting on the previous NCERT Textbooks said that the 'Marxist' historians who wrote these books

¹¹ ibid

¹² ibid

were 'writing biased and derogatory history of India'.¹³ He called them the descendents of American author of 'Mother India', Katherine Mayo, who 'saw all the bad things about India and was called by Gandhiji as a garbage inspector.'¹⁴ He asserted that he would consult the religious leaders on issues that were controversial and should not be included in the new textbooks.

'We should not think sadhus and mullahs are not scholars .We are not changing the country's history by writing anything new, instead we are just showing it in the right perspective ... Inclusion of objectionable material like consumption of cow meat during the Vedic period... would have a negative imprint on the minds of children having a lasting impact.'¹⁵

The HRD minister said that he was attacking the politics of academic patronage that was carried out in the past by those in power, and were close to the ideologies of the Congress or were 'leftists'. But as has been seen, in rewriting history, it was actually the BLP led NDA government that indulged in politics of patronage as the changes brought about were motivated by a sectarian ideology.

¹³ *The Asian Age*, Dec 8, 2001, p. 1

¹⁴ *ibid*

Since history writing is always a dialogue between the present and the past, it cannot be isolated from political concerns. It cannot be fully isolated from nation building politics.¹⁶ But when the nation that is sought to be built is a manifestation of cultural nationalism of the majority community and the blatant lies or myths are promoted to suit this design, it would only bring ignorance, prejudice and hatred.

The garb under which the entire rewriting project was undertaken was that of instilling a sense of 'pride' among the students about being 'Indian' as was explicitly mentioned in the National Curriculum Framework. But a sense of pride can only be generated when those writing history textbooks are true to the heritage and legacy of India and not working for partisan gains of a political organization.

Mr. Joshi again, commenting on the controversy remarked " I will teach correct history .I will teach Marxism, but I will also teach the failures of Marxism .Why should they (the historians opposing him) object to it? I have only an Indian agenda."¹⁷ The point worth noting in his assertion is that there is too much of "I" in it. It is not on the whims

¹⁵ ibid

¹⁶ Vanaik, A, *The Textbook controversy*, The Hindu, Dec 5, 2001

¹⁷ Quoted in Jaisingh, H, *History is Not a Pack of Tricks*, The Tribune, December 12, 2001

of an HRD minister, to teach school children what he wishes them to learn. This job is best left to scholars and academicians.¹⁸

According to Prof. Anjali Modi, “the BJP prefers diktat over debate since it’s marriage of mythology, fiction and faith does not stand up to the intellectual scrutiny.”¹⁹ The rewritten history textbooks have the capacity to erode Indian plural multi cultural and multi religious fabric. According to Prof. Amartya Sen says “it is futile to try to understand Indian art, literature, music food or politics without seeing the extensive interactions across barriers of religious communities. These include Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis, Christians...and even atheists and agnostics.”²⁰

Such views cannot be accommodated in the Hindu nationalist point of view. Its ideologues fear facts and this fear is rooted in ignorance, hatred of ‘the other’ and an inferiority complex about Indianness itself. This inferiority complex demands that everything about India’s past must be glorified and be presented as a continuous Golden Age only ‘interrupted’ by external ‘foreign invasion’. Thus the

¹⁸ ibid

¹⁹ Modi, A, *Delete and Control – The Parivars Mantra*, *The Hindu*, December 2, 2001

²⁰ Quoted in, Bidwai, P, *Censoring History, Defiling Reason*, *The Assam Tribune*, 5 December 2001

revised history textbooks talk about all other religions in this light and tries to show them as 'foreign' as opposed to the 'indigenous' and therefore truly 'Indian' Hinduism. 'This dogma runs counter to facts.'²¹

There is no doubt about the fact that ancient India had many remarkable achievements; in linguistics, literature, mathematics etc. but many other civilizations; the Arab, the Chinese, the Persians, etc also had great accomplishments. And there was always a process of exchange taking place between different civilizations. As against the achievements of the Indian civilization, there were certain displeasing aspects too; casteism, dalit oppression, deep social inequalities and hierarchies, rampant superstitions and gender discrimination. Understanding this means confronting the past and not censoring it. 'Such understanding is important if we are to have a future, even relate to our present. Hindutva makes this impossible. It suppresses all complexity'.²²

All nations are confronted by unpleasant truths of history that cannot be denied. 'Because the Hindutva nationalism denies the negative or egregious aspects of the past, it cannot reform what the

²¹ ibid

²² ibid

present inherits from it. It's glorification agenda ends up rationalizing and perpetuating past horrors."²³

For the cohesive functioning of the composite Indian nation, the Indian Constitution has envisioned a pluralist democracy as the most suitable form. The previous NCERT history textbooks sought to inform popular consciousness with this constitutional vision of the Indian society. For the empowerment of the traditionally oppressed sections of the Indian society, a critical appraisal of India's past is needed and not its exaggerated glorification. The changes brought about in the textbooks in contrast, attack the present constitutional vision of the ideal Indian society. The HRD minister, in defending the rewriting of history attacked the values of liberal democracy and secularism enshrined in our constitution. The point is not that textbooks are immutable or beyond revision. The issue is not that the textbooks are immutable or that they cannot be revised. The issue, instead, is whether the changes brought about in the textbooks sought to strengthen liberal democracy or to weaken it.

The ideologues of Hindu nationalism claimed, that the aim of rewriting history was to correct the 'distortions' that 'underplayed'

²³ ibid

India's rich cultural heritage. There could have been no problems with such a formulation. But 'it is the method of its implementation and the credo of cultural nationalism which shapes its content, that concern the liberals. India has maintained its unity in diversity owing to her pluralist ethos. And the propagation of an ideology which draws sustenance from any particular religion or orthodoxy not only undermines its ethos, it betrays a partisan approach.'²⁴

One of the objectives of rewriting history was to inculcate a sense of 'pride' in students about India's past. But the problem is that the changes brought about will inculcate a false sense of pride in a section of the students who belong to the majority community of this country. Worse, that false sense pride is sought to be instilled through myths and fiction. 'Pride is not conducive to understanding and enlightenment. These come through self-enquiry and sensitivity towards others'.²⁵

History serves many purposes. Amongst its most important purposes are, 'to develop an objective understanding of the processes that determine social and political dynamics, and to make us realize the

²⁴Gill, S S, *Faith, Reason and Fundamentalism*, The Hindu, 28 November 2001.

²⁵Tripathi, V K, *Revision not in Touch with Reality*, The Hindu, 2 April 2002.

fundamental contradictions that lie between masses and the ruling classes. History then becomes a liberating force from myth, prejudice and oppression.²⁶ However, the revised NCERT textbooks are just an antidote to it, because, in the textbooks, the emphasis is laid on glorifying the ancient past and suppressing the inbuilt contradictions. For instance, caste has been a dominant factor in India's polity and social dynamics over the millennia, as it continues to be so even to this date. Yet, it finds a marginal mention in the syllabus. There is hardly any mention of the caste oppression that was so blatant and rampant in ancient India. Without the mention of such caste contradictions, for instance, it will become very difficult for the teacher to explain why is there a system of Reservations in place for this country. Emphasis has been laid on the Vedic culture and the philosophy of the Upanishads and on myths like Aryans were the original inhabitants, but there is again, hardly any mention of the Sufi or Bhakti movement that influenced Indian social life so immensely for centuries, bringing religion to the doorsteps of the masses, taking people to unprecedented spiritual heights and loosening caste prejudices. The Sufis and the

²⁶ ibid

Bhakti movement developed and extraordinarily culture of synthesis of Hinduism and Islam. The Kabir Vani or the Guru Granth Sahib, is as revealing a text as the Vedas and the Upanishads. Our present day culture and social life are immensely influenced by the Sufi and the Bhakti movements. 'Ignoring this vital lifeline and other historical processes is to ignore the masses of the country'.²⁷ Instead the national curriculum as well as the revised textbooks have laid more emphasis on the Sanskrit language, which, no doubt, has a rich literature and is an ancient language, but had always been the language of the Brahmin elite. It never was the language – both in the ancient as well as modern times – that played any role in bringing the masses together, as they were denied any access to it.

The book on medieval India is a blend of topics that present only invasions by Turks, Arabs, Mughals and other Muslim rulers, and the rise of rebellion against them as the dominant history of that period. To add to that, there is a total silence on Muslim artisans, Fakirs, Sufis and synthesizing forces. Such a textbook can only serve one purpose – to strengthen the myth that Muslim's are aliens, oppressive and violent. The books are designed in a manner, so as to project the minorities as

²⁷ ibid

aliens, and Hindus as the true natives of this country. Such textbooks can only breed communal hatred.

A recent report of the 'Editors Guild Fact Finding Team' refereed to certain textbooks published and prescribed by the 'Gujarat State Board of School Textbooks'. Gujarat is a state that has been a BJP bastion since a very long time. The report said that some of the textbooks did substantial damage to the values of fraternity and secularism enshrined in the constitution.

Referring to the Social Studies book for class IX, the report points out 'Chapter 9 is on the 'Problems of the country and their Solution'. The very first section (Problem?) is 'minority community' (page93). Children are told that 'apart from the Muslim's, even the Christians, Parsis and other foreigners are also recognized as the minority communities. In most of the states, the Hindus are in a minority and Muslims, Christians and Sikhs are in a majority.....'»²⁸

In this manner, the very existence of the people of other faith in country has been portrayed as a 'problem' in the textbooks in Gujarat. To add to it, they are explicitly mentioned as being foreigners. In

²⁸ The Asian Age, 8th May 2002.

another section in the same textbooks on ‘ Problems of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes, the textbook, according to the report says, ‘they (the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) have not been suitably placed in our social order, therefore, even after independence they are still backward and poor. Of course, their ignorance, illiteracy and blind faith are to be blamed for lack of progress because they still fail to recognize the importance of education in life’²⁹ The sections on women and anti-social activities are no more inspiring according to the report.

These examples show that in a state where the BJP is in power with a majority, the school textbooks are prepared and prescribed by even more blatantly flaying the ethos of the constitution. It is no wonder that, in 2002, the state was a witness to the worst communal riots in the country since independence.

The RSS also runs its own schools. Infact it claims to be the single largest voluntary organization, with 17396³⁰ schools across the country. The schools are run by the RSS education wing, ‘ The Vidya Bharati Akhil Bharatiya Shiksha Sansthan’. These schools claim to

²⁹ *ibid*

³⁰ *The Hindu*, Dec 16, 2001.

run on the basis of the 'Hindu Philosophy of life'. ' They use educational materials (like the Sanskrit Gyan Pareeksha Workbooks) which pass off absurd lies as cultural truths and historical facts. For example, they claim Homer's Illiad is based on the Ramanayna, Jesus Christ lived in Kashmir, the Chaldean culture is based on the Vedas,Chinese warriors are descended from Kshatriyas"³¹.

The rewriting of the NCERT history textbooks, thus, smacks of a hidden agenda of Gujarat for the entire country. The entire project is guided by the fundamentalist ideology of 'Hindutva' of which the BJP is a staunch supporter.

Fundamentalist ideologies are essentially based on a myopic vision of religious truth. Consequently they run against the essential humanist message of all religions which stresses upon the brotherhood of mankind. 'They are particularly offensive to the pluralist, eclectic and inclusive ethos of Hinduism. And this is where the Hindutva ideologies make their greatest mistake. By projecting a narrow, bigoted and exclusivist view of Hinduism, and abstracting Hinduised' Cultural Nationalism' from India's civilizational mainstream, they are robbing their religion of its greatest strength. This reduces Hindutva to a

³¹ ibid

contrived ideology, as it goes against the very genius of the parent religion',³²

Thus the Hindutva ideologues, by misconceptualising and restricting their faith, have turned it into an ideology thus not only bringing discredit to their religion but also introducing elements of discord into a multi-religious and multi-cultural society.

The school history textbooks have an immense social impact. They shape an educated citizen's attitude towards religion and society. It is essential that academicians decide what it to be the content of the history textbooks rather than the politicians driven by their ideological biases. Objectivity, and not politics, has to be the key to writing history textbooks.

³²Gill, S S, *Faith, Reason and Fundamentalism*, *The Hindu*, Nov28, 2001

Conclusion

The Indian discourse on education under the guidance and control of the state, started during the British period. During this period, the concept of secular education in its negative sense, that is, non-religious education took root. The British policy of non – intervention, or the principle of religious neutrality, gave rise to this concept. It was further confirmed by Lord William Bentinck in 1835, and later by Queen Victoria’s proclamation, in 1858. The instruction in all government institutions, during this period was thus exclusively secular. With the spread of modern western education, many Indians began to hold the opinion, that the elements of modern western thought needed to be inculcated amongst the Indians, for the regeneration of the society, that was plagued by an unquestioned faith of the people in religion and in religious authorities. This gave rise to a number of reform movements in the nineteenth century.

During the phase of the nationalist movement, the unity between the Hindus and the Muslims was a major concern of the nationalist political leaders. The leaders like Gandhi and Nehru realized it, and thus further stressed the importance of secular education. Owing

to these wide ranges of factors, the ideal of secularism got firmly established in the field of education.

On August 15, 1947, India gained independence but at the cost of the partition of the country that was marred by communal riots between the Hindus and the Muslims, the framers of the Constitution realized, that it was imperative for a multi-cultural and multi religious country like India to be a secular state. It was felt that education could serve as an important tool, to further the goal of national cohesion. For this what was needed was to bring the people of different religions, castes and communities, in a common democratic system of public schools along with a common curriculum that would inculcate the feeling of mutual respect and tolerance amongst them.

The policy of religious neutrality continued to be followed for a decade till independence. But since there were demands from various quarters to include religion as a part of the curriculum, the government constituted various commissions to suggest measures to accommodate these demands. The recommendations of these commissions suggested, that it was possible to include religion as a part of the curriculum, thus giving the concept of secular education a

positive content, without compromising with the ideals of secularism enshrined in the Constitution.

The recommendations of these commissions found a concrete shape in the National Policy on Education - 1968 and were later reaffirmed in the National policy on Education - 1986 (revised in 1992). The NCERT was entrusted with the task of preparing the curriculum frameworks, as and when there was a need to for a revision.

In the year 2000, during the regime of the BJP led NDA government, the NCERT brought out a *National Curriculum Framework for School Education* which talked about 'indegenizing' the curriculum. Four new textbooks dealing with history were written on the basis of this framework.

A sample of two of these textbooks was analyzed in the study. The analysis brings to light, the fact that the new textbooks hardly followed the guidelines provided by the National policy on Education – 1986. There was an attempt to show Hinduism as a religion superior to all other religions. The facts in the rewritten textbooks were either selectively reproduced or were distorted, thus giving them a communal bias. Instead of promoting national

integration, such selective presentation of facts can lead to communal disharmony in the country.

In the words of D E smith, ‘secularism’s best hope for future in India lies in its classrooms’¹. Textbooks are an important tool used in the classrooms for imparting knowledge. They shape an educated citizen’s attitude towards the society. Thus, they have to be made to fit in the broad principle of secularism enshrined in the Constitution of India. Textbooks should be so scientifically oriented that a rational and scientific outlook among the students can take the place of irrational beliefs, communalism and superstitions.

Secularism requires integration of people belonging to different religions in the country. The textbooks writers need to have a scientific attitude while presenting and interpreting historical data. They need to encourage critical thinking amongst the students and cultivate an attitude of tolerance towards different communities, and develop an attitude of respect for a viewpoint different from one’s own.

Textbooks have to be free from communal and sectarian bias. For this, it is important, that politics should have minimum

¹ Smith, D E, *India as a Secular State*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, p.2

interference in the preparation of curriculum frameworks and the textbooks. The job should be best left to the academicians. Institutions like the NCERT need to be granted greater autonomy, so that they can function freely, without any political pressure. Only then can the goal of national integration through the instrument of education can be achieved.

Bibliography

Books

Aggarwal, J C, *Education Policy in India 1992: Retrospect and Prospect*, Shipra Publications, Delhi, 1995

Aggarwal, J C, *National Policy on Education- 1985 A Framework*, Doaba House Publishers, Delhi, 1985

Chandra, Bipan, *India Struggle for Independence*, Penguin, New Delhi, 1998

Constitution of India, Eastern Book Company, Lucknow, 1983

Ghosh, M, *The Concept of Secular Education In India*, BR Publishing Corporation, N Delhi 1991

Habib, I, Jaiswal, S, Mukherjee, A, (eds.) *History in the New NCERT Textbooks: ...A report and Index of Errors*, Indian History Congress, Kolkata, 2003

Howell, A, *Education in British India*, The office of the Superintendent, Government of India Press, Calcutta, 1872

Jain, M, *Medieval India*, Class XI, NCERT, New Delhi, 2002

Johnston, J, *Our Educational Policy in India*, Maclaren and Sons, Edinburgh, 1950

- Kabir, H, *Indian Philosophy of Education*, Asia Publishing House, 1961
- Keay, F E, *Indian Education in Ancient and Later Times*, Oxford University Press, 1942
- Kenneth, Ingham, *Reformers in India*, University Press, Cambridge, 1956
- Lal, M, *India and the World*, NCERT, 2002
- Law, N N, *Promotion of Learning in India: By Early European Settlers*, Orient Longman and Company, 1918
- Majumdar, RC, *An Advanced History of India*, McMillan And Company, 1950
- Masani, RP, *Britain in India*, Oxford University Press, 1960
- Mitra, S M, *Indian Problems*, J Hurry Publishers, London, 1908
- Nehru, JL, *The Discovery of India*, Meridian Book Company, 1946
- Nurullah, S and Naik, J P, *A History of Education in India*, McMillan and Company, N Delhi, 1950
- Sharp, H and Richey, J A, (eds), *Selections From the Educational Records of the Government of India*, Calcutta, 1920-22

Shrimali, K L, *The Wardha Scheme*, Vidya Bhawan Society, Udaipur, 1949

Singh, Dr Karan, *The Prophet of Indian Nationalism: Sri Aurobindo*, Allen and Unwin, 1990

Smith D E, *India as a Secular State*, Princeton University Press, Princeton

Taneja, N, *The Saffron agenda in Education*, in *The Saffron Agenda In Education: An Expose*, SAHMAT, New Delhi, 2001

Newspaper Reports and Articles

Bidwai, P, *Censoring History, Defiling Reason*, The Assam Tribune, 5 December 2001

Dhawan, R, *Textbooks and Communalism*, The Hindu, Nov 30, 2001

Gill, S S, *Faith, Reason and Fundamentalism*, The Hindu, 28 November 2001.

Jaisingh, H, *History is Not a Pack of Tricks*, The Tribune, December 12, 2001

Malkani, K R, *History and Nationalism*, The Sunday Statesman, Dec 23, 2001

Modi, A, *Delete and Control – The Parivars Mantra*, The Hindu,
December 2, 2001

Organizer, November 4, 2001

The Asian Age, 8th May 2002.

The Asian Age, Dec 8, 2001

The Hindu, Dec 16, 2001

The Hindu, October 23, 2001

The Indian Express, December 9, 2001

Tripathi, V K, *Revision not in Touch with Reality*, The Hindu, 2 April
2002

Vanaik, A, *The Textbook controversy*, The Hindu, Dec 5, 2001

Journals

Bhargava, R *Community Sentiment and the Teaching of History*,
Seminar, 2003

Bhattacharya, N, *The Problem*, Seminar, February 2003,

Bhattacharya, N, *The Problem*, Seminar, Feb 2003, p. 16

Sarkar, S, *The Limits of Nationalism*, Seminar, Feb 2003,

Sarangapani, P M, *Seminar*, Feb 2003

Government Reports and Documents

Government of India Resolution on Indian Educational Policy, 1904

National Curriculum Framework for School Education-A Discussion Document, NCERT, 2000

National Curriculum Framework for School Education-A Framework, NCERT, 2000

NCERT, *NCERT Annual Report 2002-2003*

Report of the Committee on Religious and Moral Instruction, Ministry of Education, 1960

Report of the Education commission (1964-66) Ministry of Education, 1966

Report of the Secondary Education Commission, 1952 –1953 Ministry of Education, 1953

Report of the University Commission, 1948-49, Government of India Press, 1949

