

SAFFRONISATION OF EDUCATION AN IRRESISTIBLE IDEOLOGY, DISPENSABLE EDUCATION

Tapan Kumar Sahu

Principal, Shivam College of Education, Sangrur, Punjab

Shikha Rani Pradhan

Asstt. Professor, Shivam College of Education, Sangrur, Punjab

ABSTRACT

Since independence, our country's lawmakers have been aware that education should aim at multi-faceted development in intellectual, physical, spiritual and ethical aspects. Each individual's virtues add up to values in the collective sense. If not nurtured, there is a danger of values deterioration. If that is unchecked, the breakdown of families, society and the nation is inevitable. So, not surprisingly, a number of high power panels on education, namely the Radhakrishnan Commission(1948-49), the Kothari Commission(1964-66), the Ramamurthi Committee(1990), the Central Advisory Board on Education Committee on policy(1992), the Planning Commission core group on Value Orientation of Education(1992) had highlighted the urgent need for making our educational system value-based. While other countries talk about Christian values or Islamic values, India enters the 21st century reiterating its faith in secularism. What is required today is not religious education but education about religions. But unfortunately whenever any attempt has been made to modernise education by upholding not only the deepest but forgotten values of Indian civilization and religion, then promptly dubbed it as "saffronisation" and even rubbished it as "Talibanization". And this charge was labelled against NCERT before 12 years ago. In this article an attempt has been made to find out biased contents and distortions of history, role of NCERT in the process as well as possible answer to the charges of saffronisation of education in the light of supreme court judgement.

INTRODUCTION

Indian secular tradition is deeply embedded in its history. It unites us as a people. Our young people have a sense of respect for divergent habits and customs. But one aberration needs correction. The Indian education system does not contribute anything substantial to the ideal of "**Sarva Dharma Sambhava.**" The feeling is that the religion is best kept out of secular teaching. This negativism has bred ignorance on the possibilities of tapping the good points in every religion. But Indians can not be denied the right to learn and imbibe their cultural heritage under the pretext of secularism or any other hangovers of the colonial raj, irrespective of whatever "Sacred" connotation they might have acquired in the post independence era.

Charges by the so called "Secular" political parties that Indian education is being "Saffronised" have gained momentum, not entirely without a reason, though there had clear indications of some people over reacted to every change in curriculum that has been proposed by the former NDA Govt. The extent of this proposal gave masala to the Newspapers & Media and also gave me a fillip to write an article on this controversial topic for which I have cut out many news papers clippings entitled - Delete and control — The Privar's Mantra, History vs Propaganda, Joshi launches new freedom struggle, will D.U. give lessons in karvachaut now, Has the Talibanisation of education begun, Sadhus. Maulvis to now vet NCERT history text books, Indianise education: demand academics, Govt. Talibanising

education Says MPs, Vedic Scholars join hands to clear misconceptions, After Paurohitya UGC is planning courses in all faiths are a few among them. And then not only “Saffronisation of Education.” but the word “Saffronisation” itself became a subject of heated controversy.

Incidentally, why should any body be allergic to saffron? I think the controversy lies in its terminology. Historically, Saffron is the colour of renunciation. Now the colour has taken away from the believing Hindu and given it a pejorative ring. Saffron is a symbol of **Indianess** as it occupies a place in our National flag. The congress flag committee had unanimously recommended Saffron flag in place of the tricolour in 1931. And its members included Nehru, Patel and Azad. It is a colour sacred of not only to Indians but also to Arabs. So the term “Saffronisation of Education” needs to be reconsidered. The term “Saffronisation” to describe politics of education is an indicative of an ideology that is grounded on an assumption that anything to do with saffron is necessarily responsible for the communalization of Indian polity. But without waiting for the NCERTS’ curriculum NCFSE 2000 to be developed some politicians promptly dubbed it as “Saffronisation” and even rubbished it as “Talibanisation”. Hence, the critical issue is that the controversy is ideological rather than academic.

A POSSIBLE ANSWER TO SAFFRONISATION OF EDUCATION:-

The debate on Education, knowledge and curriculum has acquired a new momentum in recent times. We had witnessed, what has been regarded as “Saffronisation of Education”. As academics, we however need to be careful, because our task is far more challenging. We need raise and respond to the deeper issues relating to the culture of learning, pedagogy and the vision of a sane society.

DISTORTIONS IN TEXT BOOKS:-

Six thousand schools with 1.2 lac children and 40 thousand teachers are reading the history. Even as the former BJP government hastily prescribes portions of NCERT’s history text books on the plea that they hurts the sentiment of certain communities, a different kind of history is being taught through the books published by the Sanskriti Jnan in the RSS-run **Saraswati Shishu Mandir** and **Vidya Bharti Schools**. This despite the recommendations of the National steering committee on Text books Evaluation asking for a ban on these books, nearly 20 years ago.

What they do teach at some schools are mentioned below:-

Children’s are asked to fill in the blanks:

1. Rivers of _____(Blood) is the means by which Prophet Mohammad spread Islam (Book No. 12)
2. What is the name of the Island in the south which touches the feet of Bharat Mother_____ and which was a part of our country at one time? (Sri Lanka)
3. Who got the first temple built on the birth place of Sri Ram in Ayodhya? (Sri Ram’s son Maharaja Kush)
4. How many devotees of Rama laid down their life to liberate Ram temple from 1528 A.D. to 1914 A.D. (3 lac 50 thousand)
5. How many times did the foreigners invade Sri Ram Janma Bhumi? (77 times) (Source: National Steering committee on text book evaluation recommendation and Report II)

Few questions of courses of History taught in the state of Assam are at the same time objectionable:-

1. Whether the calf in the womb is said to be slaughtered after slaughtering mother or not? Describe the opinion of the Imam if an animal is slaughtered without Bismillah?
2. Translate in to Arabic – Allah is one, has no partners.
3. What is Ihram? During the period of Ihram what are the things that can't be done? If anybody commits wrong during Ihram, then how to pay the penalty?
4. None has ever questioned the propriety of introducing such topics in high school level education in Assam.

will these courses do not vitiate the “secular spirit of the constitution”? If ‘no’ then why to make hullaballow about “Saffronisation of education?”

In the class 10th Hindi Text Book in Karnataka in a lesson titled “Bharatnari”, the contribution of great women leaders starting from Jhansi Rani Lakshmi Bai were described and a sentence added that Sonia Gandhi is working for the Emotional integration of the nation through “Rajiv Gandhi Pratisthan” which is a ‘office of Profit’ which can't be held by any elected representatives of the parliament, as per the constitutional provision of India.

In the class 5th Text Book published by Tata McGraw Hill publication company by Ms. Annie Koshi & two other teachers of St. Mary's school of Delhi write a chapter entitled “ A family tree”. The names of the members of Nehru Gandhi clan were given right from Moti Lal Nehru down to Priyanka, Robert Vadhera and Rahul Gandhi. The students were to collect pictures of these personalities and stick them in boxes provided against their names. What is the contribution of Priyanka, Rahul & Robert Vadhera to this country? Couldn't the author find any other family e.g. Chandra Gupta, Shivaji etc. to taken as example to teach pupils about family trees?

Laloo Prasad Yadav had introduced material about himself in one of the text books in Bihar during his regime as the CM of Bihar. But unfortunately the topic was deleted from the books after he loses in election and new government came into power.

In the same fashion during the tenure of P.V. Narashimha Rao as P.M. a topic on his name “Our Prime Minister” was introduced in the text books of Andhra Pradesh. But after finding him in different corruption charges & his involvement in various scams & scandals that topic was also deleted from the book.

In this way we generally find that, the politicians think that different agencies of education are the best medium to spread their ideologies as well as their popularity and capture the vote bank through any mean either Mandal or kamandal. So it is better to say Politicisation rather than saffronisation of education”.

DISTORTIONS IN NCERT BOOKS:-

A couple of examples alone could perhaps elaborate and illustrate the point that how many distortions are there even in the NCERT books.

“Akbar was keen to have friendly relations with the Rajputs. One of the ways in which he did was to enter into marriage alliance between his family and Rajput royal families. He himself married a number of Rajput princess.” (Romilla Thapar, Medieval India, class VII P.86)

There are those who find this was a one sided policy which Akbar continued and which really caused great humiliation to other communities who were never allowed to do what was doing to them.

On page 101 of *Prachin Bharat* by R.S. Sharma, it is mentioned that Lord Vardhman Mahavir, He kept on wondering for 12 years from place to place. He never changed his clothes during the long period of 12 years. In the same manner, the same book “Ancient India” doubts the historicity of the Jain Tirthankara(P.92). The jains have rightly a cause for concern in this kind of a description about one of the greatest religious personalities of their religion. The journey taken up by Lord Mahavir in spiritual quest can’t be called wandering “Bhatakana” which is all the more derogatory.

The most prominent among these new leaders were Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal, Lala Lajpat Rai & Aurobindo Ghosh. They came to be known as extremists. (Arjun Dev, *Modern India* NCERT. P-182)

Such highly respected leaders of Indian national movement as Lal, Bal & Pal besides sage aurobindo have been greatly disrespected by calling them “extremists”. Why the stereotypes which were sought to be created by the British are being surreptitiously inculcated into young minds in free India is deplorable, to say the least.

After the death of the 7th Guru, Aurangzeb tried to take advantage of the deference over the succession of the next Guru. Meanwhile, the power of the shikhs was increasing. In order to curb this power, the Mughal Administration ordered the execution of Guru Teg Bahadur in 1675. (Romila Thapar , *Medieval India*, class – VII. P. 107)

To reduce the responsibility of Aurangzeb the cruel murder of the Guru is converted into an execution order by a faceless Mughal Administration of Aurangzeb.

Ancient India by R.S. Sharma is a book of 245 pages, in which merely three & a half pages are devoted to philosophy, while another chapter of less than six pages is devoted to science & technology in ancient India. The author is stubborn to prove that there was nothing worth mentioning about the ancient Indian civilization.

NCERT text books have also succeeded in creating an avoidable controversy on beef eating & Pork eating through its history text book. People certainly ate beef but they did not take Pork on any considerable scale”. (R.S. Sharma, *Ancient India*, Class-XI P.45). It further deals with the non availability of bullocks: Enough bullocks couldn’t be available because of cattle slaughter in sacrifices.” (ibid P.80). This book attempts to expose their efforts to give antiquity to Jainism.

When a Shikh Guru sacrifices his life instead of compromising with an arrogant, tyrannical demand, he is setting an example in courage and championing a creed — an example that can inspire millions belonging to any of the defined faiths or to faith in human destiny alone. Here in lies the importance of the teacher how conscientiously he can lay stress on the human excellence transcending creeds and institutionalised faiths.

The Vedas are not a product of the modern logical mind. In the Vedas the term ‘Gou’ doesn’t mean the cow, it is light. A very different discipline is necessary to delve into the Vedic text. Bones of cattle discovered at an ancient kitchen site as proof of their eating beef is as valid as the non-discovery of wires ‘proving’ that they used wireless methods of communication. The early Aryans themselves were of several sects and some sects could very well be beef eaters. To school children, it simply doesn’t matter.

It is enough to present the Vedas to them as the dawn of our literary heritage. If the teacher narrates to them some legends from the Upanishads — he would have enriched the child with values that are sure to help her in some of the crucial moments in her life.

Prof. Bipan Chandra, the man who wrote the first set of history school text books more than 35 years ago said that, “Glorification of the past is a sign of backwardness. To progress, a people must view the past critically, only as much as it helps to build a better future.” But is it necessary for the child to bother about the Aryan Menu - whether those legendary ancestors ate beef or not? It is important for a child to know history, but it is equally important to determine how much of it he/she must know at that tender age. Let the school system arouse in them interest and quest if it can, let it not choke her memory.

ROLE OF NCERT IN THE PROCESS

Religions are a reality in India. The Indian State is secular, but society is largely religious. There is no contradiction between the two. Religious texts like the Koran, Gita, Upanishads, Bible and Zend Avesta make up the huge ocean of universal values. If children learn about these in different classes and also know that each one of them propagates values of peace, truth, non violence, righteous conduct & love, they could develop a respect for their own peers who may belong to religions other than their own.

The NCERT’s recommendations on values and religions in NCFSE are taken from the 81st report of the committee on value based education, appointed by the parliamentary standing committee of the HRD ministry. Mr. S. B. Chavan Sr. Congress leader, headed this committee which held discussions with state govts & considered the views of eminent educationists before submitting its report in January 1999. Truth, righteous conduct, peace , love & non – violence are the core universal values based on which , the Chavan committee suggested value education can be built up. They represent the 5 domains of human personality – intellectual, physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual and also correspond to the 5 major objectives of education, which are knowledge, skill, balance, vision and identity. NCERT had made exactly the same recommendation in its NCFSE 2000. Here, it is also pertinent to maintain that the Chavan committee report was submitted to parliament in Feb. 1999 & the NCFSE was released in November 2000. At no stage was any objection raised to the recommendations of Chavan committee in the intervening period, then why any objections was raised against NCERT’s stand. It is the role of opposition which only oppose for the sake of opposition in India.

The NCFSE-2000, states “One significant factor that merits urgent attention now is religion. Although it is not the only source of essential values, it certainly is a major source of value generation. What is required today is not religious education but education about religions, their basics, the values inherent therein and also a comparative study of all religions.” It adds that students have to be given the awareness that the essence of every religion is common; only practices differ.

The NCERT proposed that in a country with rich diversities of culture, religion & language, children must know the commonalities and at the same time, the differences wherever they exist. The commonalities would provide the strong thread for social cohesion & national integration. The skills & understanding will have to be developed to ensure that they also respect “differences.”

OBJECTIVE OF NATIONAL CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK:

The NCFSE 2000 aimed at correcting two well thought out flaws which are said to have crept into our education system before & after independence: -

1. Firstly, it is claimed that India had an “indigenous advance system” of education, which was based on its philosophy & religion. But the system suffered a set back under the colonial rule, when the educational system led to alienation of education from the wisdom, the beliefs & the value system of the people. It is further asserted that a sizable segment of the Indian society, has distanced itself from understanding past heritage. In this analysis it is obviously presumed that even the post-colonial system of education had not taken care of the problems, at least effectively and therefore the present curriculum framework focuses on the issue.
2. Secondly, the constant erosion of essential moral & spiritual values during five decades after independence is the major flaw, that the curriculum is geared to correct.

In the words of Prof. J.S. Rajput, Ex. Director, NCERT “It is the first ever honest attempt to modernise education by upholding not only the deepest but, forgotten values of Indian civilisation, but also the sagely advice of the founding fathers of our nation.”

But without waiting for the curriculum to be actually developed, some people promptly dubbed it as “saffronisation of Education” and even charged Prof. Rajput as R.S.S. man. Saffronisation is a charge levelled by Marxists & some Islamic activists. Infact it is yet another manifestation of the politics of knowledge or close affinity between ideology & curriculum.

NCERT as an organisation need not propagate any ideology through medium of text books. It is a public funded organisation and this has responsibility towards all sections of the society. NCERT lacks the statutory power to impose any curriculum proposals on unwilling state govts and school boards. NCERT’s framework is only recommendatory and even NCERT books are optional not compulsory.

ROLE OF JUDICIARY IN THE PROCESS:

At last all hullaballo about “saffronisation of education” comes to a stand still on 12th Sept. 2002 when Supreme Court rejects the allegation of “saffronisation of Education”. The Supreme Court categorically held that there was no attempt to saffronise education in the school syllabus in the National curriculum Framework of Secondary Education (NCFSE) - 2000. Rejecting a PIL filed by Aruna Roy, B.G. Verghese and Meena Radhakrishna Tybji regarding changing syllabus without consulting the CAGE and saffronisation of education, a 3 judge bench by 2:1 majority held that” non-consultation of CAGE can’t be held to be ground for setting aside the national curriculum.

Referring to the allegations of saffronisation of education, the Bench said: Education of religions have to be differentiated from religious education imparted in minority educational institutions. Terming the right to know about religions as a fundamental right of the students, the court said, “Study of religion is not prohibited by the constitution.” Any interpretation of article 28 to deprive the students of the education of religions would be a violation of their fundamental right.

Justice Shah Said “NCFSE nowhere talk’s of imparting religious education”. What is sought to be imparted is value education through teaching the essence of all religions which is based on the theme “love for all” the judge said. He again said that, dogmas and superstitions should not be propagated in the name of religion. There was no harm in teaching the universal values of truth, righteousness & non violence which was the essence of all religions.

While reiterating that “secularism” is the basic feature of the constitution, the court emphasised: “Religious education imparted to children should be one to make them aware of various thoughts and philosophies in religions without indoctrinating them & without curbing their free thinking, right to make choices for conducting their own life and deciding upon their course of action according to their individual inclinations.

Therefore, the court said: “Study of religions is not prohibited by the constitution and the constitutional provision should not be read so, otherwise the chances of spiritual growth of human being, which is considered to be the highest goal of human existence, would be totally frustrated”

DE-SAFFRONISATION INITIATIVES OR APPEASEMENT OF MINORITY

Again the controversy regarding NCERT’s curriculum change through NCFSE 2005 to include major political controversies in post-independence India in its textbooks becomes a matter of heated controversy. The congress led UPA Government has decided to include Gujarat carnage, demolition of Babri Masjid and the 1984 anti-sikh riots. But if the new books are to describe these riots they should not gloss over Meerut & Bhagalpur also where more than 1000 Muslims killed during congress rule. Here one of the most important question raise eyebrows is, during last 60 years more than 40,000 riots take place in India and the Kashmir imbroglio is one of them where about 10 lakhs Hindu (Kashmiree Pandits) left Kashmir before 20 years ago.

Can understanding of history will change with govt.? A non-partisan approach doesn’t stop at treatment of communal riots; it should extend to presenting a spectrum of opinion on the freedom movement or the reservation policy. Sixty years of independence should rid us of holy cows. For too long have we put up with black & white versions of Gandhi, Nehru, Sardar Patel, Ambedkar & Jinah. The post partition generation deserves a more real picture of events of that period, so that it can reconstruct the nation’s history through the lives of its leaders and ordinary folk. The insights provided by recent research into the partition & freedom struggle should be disseminated to a larger audience beginning with the young. As a frozen past unfolds in the minds of people, a new history is created. History books too would need to update themselves to this evolving reality. A 60 year-old democracy should be confident enough to respect plurality of opinion. Let’s recast our books against this perspective.

CONCLUSION

Finally if “Saffronisation of Education” means educating the students about religions and to make them understand that differences of opinions about religious practices should not lead to hatred against each other, this is the most desirable thing to do. So let us learn to appreciate various religious traditions. In this manner we will be able to fight against those powerful & aggressive forces, which try to transform knowledge as an instrument of domination & exploitation, and attempt to smother diversity for their self. It is certainly not a crime to have particular ideology. But when an attempt is made to impose it upon others, it has to be decried.

The people of India would urge the politicians of all hues to leave education free from politics. The eternal character of Indian civilisation is a precious treasure. Let no one forget the immortal lines of Iqbal, — **“Kuch baat hai ki hasti mit ti nahin hamari, sadion raha hai dushman daure zamana hamara.”**

There is something in the entity of our civilisation that has defied destruction despite persistent onslaughts by its enemies down the countries. All education ministers, academician must resist the dushmans/enemies of Indias Hasti i.e. the entity of Indian civilisation

REFERENCES

1. Rajput J.S. "Knowledge breeds respect" Times of India 10th Oct. 2002.
2. Das Manoj "Too much history chokes the child" Times of India 22nd Jan. 2002.
3. Jaitly Jaya "Religious Paranoid" Times of India
4. Chandra Bipan "Delete & control the parivar's mantra". The Hindu 2nd Dec. 2001. After Paurohitya UGC is planning courses in all faiths. Times of India 26th Jan. 2002.
5. Daga Mahesh, "History as End: Beginning of a new mythology" 11th Dec. 2001.
6. Times of India "Govt. Talibanising Education, say Mps" 24th Nov. 2001.
7. Khan S.Y. & S.D. sachdeva "Has the Talibanisation of Education Begun" Times of India 25th Nov. 2001.
8. Times of India, 10th Dec. 2001, "Sadhus, maulvis to now vet NCERT history text books.
9. Times of India, 4th Dec 2001 "Indianise Education, demand Academics.
10. Subrahmanyam S. "Legacy from the Past, two plus two = Bad history" 10th Jan. 2002. Times of India.
11. Times of India, 8th Jan. 2002, "Myths of History".
12. Text book 2010: whose history will prevail" Times of India, 9th Dec. 2001.
13. Ramachamran R "Joshi launches new freedom struggle. Target: Sons of Macaulay & Marx" Times of India 2nd Dec. 2001
14. Khan Y.S. "Counter query: Is this not one sided history, Dr. Joshi?" Times of India 2nd Dec. 2001.
15. Joshi M.M. "Take Hiss from History" Times of India 25th Jan. 2002
16. Bidwai P. "Right to secular Education" Times of India 20th Sept. 2002
17. Times of India, "SC nod for controversial school syllabus" 12th Sept. 2002.
18. The Hindustan Times "Saffron Shadow" 26th Aug. 2001.
19. Times of India "Vindication of stand: Joshi" 13th Sept. 2002
20. Bhatnagar Rakesh, "SC wants religious Pluralism" The Times of India, 14th Sept. 2002.