

Editorial

# India's "textbook culture" today - Myth-creation, BJP-RSS and textbook revisions

"Education must be Indianised, nationalised and spiritualised."

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## **Capturing young minds by inflicting political ideology through textbooks.**

History textbooks have often been at the centre of controversies, having had to carry the incredible burden of inculcating patriotism in students. Post independence, the project of nation-building all but spilled over into education, an ideal avenue to push the dominant ideology of the time, which was essentially that of the political party in power, the Indian National Congress. This set the precedent for the evolution of what a noted educationist has called "India's textbook culture," one which operates with the "assumption that all history is the history of the nation-state," as was stated by this journal in 2004.

The recent textbook revisions by the State Institute of Education Research and Training, Rajasthan, are the latest in a series of attempted ideological captures orchestrated by the powers that be. With one of the many such captures since the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power two years ago, the events engineered in Uttarakhand, it tried to enact a capture of power, and with the textbook revisions, a capture of the mind. It comes as no surprise that when asked as to the reason for the recent revision of school textbooks in the state, Rajasthan's Minister of State for Primary and Secondary Education, Vasudev Devnani, went on to remark that it was to ensure that "no one like Kanhaiya Kumar is born."

The bone of contention, here, is the "social science" textbook. After it was reported that Jawaharlal Nehru had merely been accorded a cursory mention following the revisions, the usual political blame game ensued. Disregarding India's—not just the Congress's —Nehruvian legacy, it has not even been stated in this textbook that Nehru was the first Prime Minister of independent India. It was later reported that a chapter on the Right to Information Act too was dropped. An aim much coveted by the BJP, that of a "Congress-mukt Bharat," is easily seen reflected in all of these orchestrations.

The BJP, along with its ideological parent the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), has long had a nation-building project of its own in mind. One can go back to when it was last in power at the centre, in 1998, to hear Murli Manohar Joshi say that "education must be Indianised, nationalised and spiritualised." One can go back even further to when the Janata Party first came to power, in 1977, to read what this journal editorialised:

*"It is amazing how the ruling classes in India have been taking recourse to myth-creation, both of the past, as in the case of the RSS, and of the future, as in the case of the Congress, in order to assure for themselves immortality. Till now the relatively simple device of erecting statues was considered adequate protection against the harsh judgment of posterity. But statues can be pulled*

*down; a much better way would be to doctor the material available for a future historian, and leave it to him to immortalise you ... But the ruling classes are even less masters of the future than they are of the past and the people of this land will finally consign both the RSS version of the past and the Congress version of the future to the dustbin of history."*

As is evident today, this hope is nowhere near realisation. With the Rajasthan government now on a face-saving/damage-control spree, there are reports in the media about their efforts to make Rajasthan government schools "the best in the country." Further, they have gone on to categorically state the number of times that Nehru's name has appeared in the revised textbooks. This, however, does not resolve the problem at hand. It merely limits the textbook issue once again to bickering over the matter of additions and omissions. In fact, there have been graver attempts in the history of syllabus and textbook revisions, inevitably when the BJP has been in power, by the so-called independent bodies trusted with the task, the favourite being the National Council of Educational Research and Training, not to speak of textbooks that have been used in RSS-run schools.

The outcomes of textbook revisions have invariably been riddled with inaccuracies of fact and grammar, apart from glaring lapses in language and research rigour. Add to this heady mix the political agenda of the day, and we have the paraphernalia for the indoctrination of the young. Not in the least an education. If these "independent" bodies cannot or will not demonstrate some semblance of non-partisanship, it does not bode well for the critical project of providing the young minds of this country with a balanced education that will help them think and opine for themselves. Revising textbooks at will to further one's political ideology, whatsoever that may be, does nothing but disservice, especially to the students on whom these are inflicted.

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\* "A Textbook Case". Editorial. The Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 51, Issue No. 21, 21 May, 2016:

<http://www.epw.in/journal/2016/21/editorials/textbook-case.html>