

HISTORY CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA SINCE 1947

MANSINGH CHOUHAN

University of Wroclaw, Wroclaw, Poland

ABSTRACT

In present time history is a main subject in Indian school curriculum and it has its own importance. It is obvious that any country, any society, which doesn't take an interest in its past losses roots or it has not got deep roots¹. It has been an important aim to teach history in Indian schools to make students aware of nationalistic values after independence from British rule. All government in India, beginning with the colonial rule, has been alive to the importance of textbooks as a means to ensure their future interest by hegemonising the young. In other words, the textbooks carried in them political purpose of creating consent in the mind of the subjected².

Kothari commission explained the aim of Social studies curriculum as "That is a combination of history, political science as civics, geography and economics. The aim of teaching social studies is to help the students to acquire knowledge of their environment, an understanding of human relationship and certain attitudes and values which are vital for intelligent participation in the affairs of the community, the state, the nation and the world. An effective program of social studies is essential in India for the development of good citizenship and emotional integration"³.

KEYWORDS: Curriculum, Colonial, Commission, Contemporary, NCERT, SCERT NCF

INTRODUCTION

In Indian schools history is included in curriculum from class VI to class X (age group 11-16) as social science or social studies. The idea of social studies as a subject was proposed by the Mudaliar commission report as "Thus it is psychologically preferable to present subjects centering round the study of the social environment and human relations under the comprehensive heading of "social studies" than to teach a number of separate subjects like history, geography, civics and economics in water tight compartments"⁴.

In primary schools from class 1st to V (age group 5-10) a very little introductory history is taught. In class XI and XII (age group 16-18) history is taught as a main subject, who opts to choose humanities branch. Other branches are Commerce and Science: students of these branches don't study history. In Indian schools history textbooks were always neglected by students.

Textbook are not the only source of knowledge in school nor the only way of encouraging the development of a critical mind, although if sufficiently sensitively written (and this is rare), they can perform both functions.

¹ The study of History, Nehru, 1965, Nehru on society, education and culture, Sita Ram Jayswal, p.85.

² History textbooks in India: narratives of religious nationalism, K.N Panikkar

³ Education and national Development, Report of the education commission, 1964-66, Vol.2, School Education, NCERT 1970, First Edition 1966.

⁴ Report of the secondary education commission, Mudaliar commission report, October 1952 to June 1953, Ministry of Education, Government of India.

The accepted function of textbooks is to provide a framework for the student to access knowledge in a particular subject. We generally don't remember textbooks triggering off creative ideas in our school going youth⁵.

CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK

India got its freedom in 1947 from British rule after a long struggle led by Indian National Congress, a political party formed by middle class English educated Indians. They form the first government led by Mr. Jawahar Lal Nehru as Prime Minister.

The new government was quite alive to the colonial character of the Education and urgent need to reform it, as evident from several education commissions it had set up. The report of these commissions recommended steps for evolving a national policy of education, which would help decolonize the education system. The production of new textbooks replacing the ones in circulation during the colonial rule was a necessary precondition, if education were to meet the demands of the new nation.

With this in view the government set up the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) IN 1961, entrusted mainly with the mission of preparing school level textbooks. Among the textbooks prepared by the NCERT the history books had attracted considerable attention, both from academic and political reasons⁶.

The preparation or revision of textbooks undertaken by the successive governments was part of their larger educational and political vision. For instance, the educational system that the post-independent government led by the Indian National Congress tried to bring in to being was integral to its commitment to secular-democratic polity and society. Such a commitment evolved out of the struggle against colonialism and from a perception of multi-cultural and multi-religious national identity⁷.

Professor D.S Kothari expressed his desire for an innovative curriculum in his letter addressed to than education minister Mr. M.C Chagla on June29,1966 as "If I may say so, the single most important thing heeded now is to get out the rigidity of the present system. In the rapidly changing world of today, one thing is certain: yesterday's educational system will not meet today's, and even less so, the need of tomorrow"⁸.

The overstatement of the case for Hindu-Muslim amity in the Nehruvian textbooks gave the Hindu nationalist their opening as they began to gather strength during the 1970's. The first hints of a stirring against the existing orthodoxy took place in the aftermath of India's Emergency of 1975. When the Congress party was defeated in the election that followed losing power for the first time since Independence, Nehru's daughter Mrs. Gandhi was replaced by Morarji Desai, an old fashioned Brahmin who famously used to begin his day with drinking a glassful of his own urine. The RSS found Desai's Government more receptive to their ideas than Congress had ever been, and Desai indicated that he was prepared to withdraw from circulation several history textbooks that the RSS objected to though his government fell before it could do so⁹.

⁵ National curriculum framework and social sciences, Romila Thapar, The Hindu, Sep.5,2005.

⁶ History textbooks in India: Narratives of religious nationalism, K.N Panikkar.

⁷ History textbooks in India: Narratives of religious Nationalism, K.N Panikkar.

⁸ Education and National Development, Report of the education commission, 1964-66, Vol.2, School Education, NCERT, 1970, First Edition 1966.

⁹ India: The war over history, William Dalrymple.

Parallel with this there has been a concerted attempt by politicians of the Hindu far right to rewrite history textbooks used in Indian schools and to bring historians and the writing of history under their direct control¹⁰.

In 1996 the proportion virtually doubled, and the BJP became the largest party. After the 1999 general election, with 179 seats, they were finally able to take the reins of power firmly in to their hands. The new government moved quickly to take on India's historical establishment, and lost no time removing left – leaning historians from position to power. On November 13, 1999, less than three months after the election victory, Romila Thapar was blocked from renewing her place on the Indian Council for Historical Research (or ICHR). Soon afterwards she and several colleagues were removed from the Prasar Bharati, where they had overseen the historical content of what was broadcast on state – run Indian Media. They were replaced by non-Historians political appointees from the ultra-nationalist far right, who also took over India's major academic funding bodies. One of the appointees, K.S Lal, was quoted as saying, "People who were labeled communalist are now in power. Now it's our turn to write the history"¹¹.

Changing the textbooks was intrinsic to a reorientation of education, which the new government headed by Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP), the political wing of Hindu fundamentalist forces, was contemplating. The reorientation was intended to inculcate political and cultural values, which would impart ideological legitimacy for a Hindu nation. The Discipline central to this project was history, because a nation's identity is inevitable enmeshed with its historical consciousness¹².

The National Curriculum Framework for School Education design by BJP led central government in November 2000 proposed an indigenous history curriculum as "Study of Indian civilization and its rich cultural heritage along with other world civilizations and their inter connection may be the major area of study drawn from history. It ought to include the different cultural movements and revolutions in the life of the country and also the spread of its culture in other lands"¹³. The Europe-centered view of the world must change. This would render topics like the discovery of India or America by Europeans irrelevant for Indian students"¹⁴.

The underlying assumptions and the interpretative structure of the textbooks prepared by the NCERT thus impart an unmistakable religious character, privileging the Hindu as the embodiment of the nation on the lines of ideas and arguments earlier advanced by communal ideologues like V.D Savarkar and M.S Gowalkar. This is inspired by the political project of Hindu fundamentalism, to transform the multicultural and multi-religious Indian nation in to an exclusive Hindu state¹⁵.

In May this year(2004), to the amazement of everyone, and in defiance of every opinion poll, the BJP were narrowly voted out of office, and the Congress returned to power for the first time in six years. One of the first action of the new government was to sack J.S Rajput, the man who has supervised the production of the BJP's textbooks, and to authorize schools to return to the old textbooks if they wished, pending a full review¹⁶.

¹⁰ India: The war over history, William Dalrymple.

¹¹ India: The war over history, William Dalrymple.

¹² History textbooks in India: Narratives of religious nationalism, K.N Panikkar.

¹³ National curriculum Framework for school education, page 63, NCERT, November 2000.

¹⁴ National curriculum framework for school education, page 64, NCERT, November 2000.

¹⁵ History textbooks in India: Narratives of religious nationalism, K.N Panikkar.

¹⁶ India: The war over history, William Dalrymple.

In India, Education is an item in the “concurrent list” which means that both the states and the Union/Federal government can enact legislation in the Education sector¹⁷.

India is divided in to 28 states and 7 so-called “Union Territories”. The states have their own elected government while the Union Territories are ruled directly by the Government of India. There is a national organization that plays a key role in developing policies and programs, called the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) that prepares national curriculum framework. Each state has its counterpart called State Council for Educational Research and Training (SCERT). These are the bodies that essentially propose educational strategies, curricula, pedagogical schemes and evaluation methodologies to the states department of education. The SCERT generally follow guidelines established by the NCERT. But the States have considerable freedom in implementing the educational system¹⁸.

India has a multi party system of democracy. At national level Congress and BJP (Bhartiya Janta Party) are two parties which generally led the Center Government. Though Congress ruled India more than six decades but in many states they never formed the government and regional parties are very important if it concerns state assembly elections. When BJP or other regional party forms government in a state they tried to change textbooks according to their ideology as according to Indian constitution, state government has power to make law about education.

The move to unify, standardize and homogenize came up against a series of barriers; it was subverted at various levels. Production of textbooks became a site of negotiation and political battles¹⁹. So in India, there are many types of history books and certainly there are variations in the content.

In fact the textbooks produced by the NCERT are used only in three percent of schools. The textbooks used in the remaining schools suffer from the same malady, perhaps they are much worse²⁰.

As Romila Thapar noted historian comment on NCF 2005 and stated the problem of variations of the history textbooks. “The NCF favors a plurality of textbooks. We seem to forget that such a plurality already exist, in the textbooks being used in state and private schools. The plurality runs the gamut from quality textbooks to a complete negation of quality. Currently being used as textbooks are the old NCERT history books, SCERT books in Delhi, the books used in the states such as those used in Gujarat, and the books used in a variety of private schools as well as Mission schools, Madarsas, Shishu Mandirs and such like.

Some teach good quality history, others have replaced history by fantasy with pernicious implications. If all these books claiming to be textbooks are currently prescribed, than who is to judge the legitimacy of these books, specifically as textbooks²¹.

Professional history writing had developed in India since the beginning of the twentieth century, but school textbooks continued to be written by non-professionals. Neeladri. We talk about analytical and critical judgment of history by the students but we don't have even quality textbooks. India has a huge population and Education for all is still an aim even today. In India history teaching never translates itself in to a concern for the children who are at the receiving end.

¹⁷ Federalism and education in India, Dr. Venkataraman Balaji.

¹⁸ The education system in India, Dr. V. Sasi Kumar.

¹⁹ Teaching history in schools: The politics of textbooks in India, Neeladri Bhattacharya, History Workshop Journal, issue 67, Spring 2009, p. 99-110.

²⁰ History textbooks in India: narratives of religious nationalism, K.N Panikkar.

²¹ National curriculum framework and social sciences, Romila Thapar, The Hindu, Monday, Sep5, 2005.

In system which neglect even basic areas like literacy and innumeracy, which would bother how well history is taught²². A textbook in history should provide the infrastructure of the subject: reliable information about the past, an explanation of how the information can be analyzed and what this tells us implicitly or explicitly about aspects of the society in which we live. The range selected would vary according to the syllabus requirement. As more data become available and causal connections are enlarged, the analyses can change²³.

NCF 2005 which was constituted by the NCERT on the indication of Congress government formulated the guidelines for curriculum and history textbooks were written again. At present these history books are being used in Center government schools. The guidelines mentioned by the NCF 2005 about history curriculum are as follows. At the same time, Indian history should not be taught in isolation, and there should be reference to developments in other parts of the world²⁴.

The focus will be on contemporary India, and the learner will be initiated in to a deeper understanding of the social and economic challenges facing the nation. In keeping with the epistemic shift proposed, these will be discussed from multiple perspectives, including these of the SC and ST and disenfranchised population. Efforts should be made to relate the content as much as possible the children's everyday lives. In History, India's freedom movement and other aspects of its modern history can be studied as well as significant developments in other parts of the world. History should be taught with the intent of enabling students better understand their own world and their own identities came in to being as shaped by a rich and varied past. History should now help them discover process of change and continuity in their world, and to compare ways in which power and control were and are exercised²⁵.

After more than five decades of independence, the Indian system of education has not been able to introduce the history of post-independent India in the school curriculum. In certain states like Uttarpradesh, the history textbooks offers in a few pages a sketchy run of the main events that have occurred since 1947, but this kind of coverage is essentially a listing, not history. For the majority of school-children, the history of India starts in Ancient times and comes to an end in 1947²⁶.

CONCLUSIONS

Though the efforts have been done and authorities are very much concerned but the aim to prepare standard and homogeneous history textbooks is still not achieved. In present scenario one History curriculum for all Indian schools is not possible until India would be governed by a single party at center and states level both. Until this not happened there will be always conflict on history textbooks. In 2014 there is general election in India and in case present government could not repeat itself, NCF 2005 would be withdrawn by new government and History textbooks would be re-written. It's the job of politicians and academicians to reach on an agreement to have the same history textbooks for whole India.

²² Prejudice and Pride, Krishna Kumar, 2001, p. 2.

²³ National curriculum framework and social sciences, Romila Thapar, The Hindu, Monday, Sep5, 2005.

²⁴ National curriculum framework 2005, p.51.

²⁵ National curriculum framework 2005, p.53.

²⁶ Prejudice and Pride, Krishna Kumar, p.74.

REFERENCES

1. Jayswal, Sita Ram, 1965, *the study of History*, Nehru, Nehru on society, education and culture.
2. Education and national Development, *Report of the education commission, 1964-66, Vol.2, School Education*, NCERT 1970, First Edition 1966.
3. Report of the secondary education commission, Mudaliar commission report, October 1952 to June 1953, Ministry of Education, Government of India.
4. Thapar, Romila, Sep.5, 2005. *National curriculum framework and social sciences*, The Hindu.
5. Panikkar, K.N, *History textbooks in India*: Narratives of religious nationalism.
6. Education and National Development, Report of the education commission, 1964-66, Vol.2, School Education, NCERT, 1970, First Edition 1966.
7. Dalrymple, William, *India: The war over history*.
8. National curriculum Framework for school education, November 2000.
9. Balaji, Dr. Venkataraman: *Federalism and education in India*.
10. Kumar, Dr. V. Sasi: *The education system in India*.
11. Bhattacharya, Neeladri, Spring 2009, *Teaching history in schools: The politics of textbooks in India*, History Workshop Journal, issue 67.
12. Kumar, Krishna: Prejudice and Pride (2001).
13. National curriculum framework 2005.