

Committee for Resisting Saffronization of Textbooks, Karnataka (CRST)

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FOREWORD

Any person with even a modicum of concern for the future of our children would be greatly dismayed at the ineffable goings-on in the vital field of education in our state of Karnataka. Especially in the primary and secondary sectors. By now it is well-known that despite the ambitious Sarva Shikshana Abhiyana project, enrolment of children in government (Kannada medium) schools is dwindling at an alarmingly fast rate. In recent years the situation has turned from bad to worse and several schools have been closed down. While on the one hand public schools are turning sick the number of private (English medium) schools charging enormous capitation fees is increasing by leaps and bounds. When politicians happen to be owners/co-owners of private schools too can we expect anything different? Many of the private schools are brazenly refusing to comply with RTE norms with the result children belonging to the weaker sections of society are gradually getting deprived of their rightful educational opportunities. It is an indication that class divisions are getting more acute and equity in education will still remain a distant dream, a mirage.

Coming to the subject of textbooks for the primary and secondary classes the situation is extremely distressing, to say the least. One observes majority of the textbooks mirroring the woeful lack of care in their preparation. A glaring example is the new tenth standard mathematics textbook. C.H. Krishna Shastry Balila, a retired teacher of repute has in a recent article (*Varthabharati*, 18 July 2014) listed the various stages in the preparation of a textbook which are designed to ensure a quality product fully conforming to NCF 2005 guidelines. A close look at the new tenth standard mathematics textbook leads one to conclude that hardly any inspections/corrections were carried out. It is worth mentioning here that an RTI application has bared the truth that most of the textbook committee members are either unqualified or under-qualified.

The second important point to be noted is the continuing influence exercised by Hindu fundamentalist groups over the contents of textbooks, especially the social science and language texts. Believe it or not, even science books sometimes do not escape their clutches! Dr Mahabaleshwara Rao, a practicing expert on education has publicly exposed some of the tall claims from Indian mythology found to have been inserted in the 2013 science textbook as scientific discoveries (*Udayavani*, 6 August 2013). Several such examples of hindutva influence in textbooks can be found in our previous reports for the years 2012 and 2013.

All these discrepancies, distortions and objectionable contents have already been brought to the notice of the various authorities including the honorable minister for primary and secondary education. Three letters apart from several articles on the subject in the media have only met with a deafening silence. There is absolutely no response. Neither is there any corrective action. Except for some vague promises made by the concerned minister. That the unedifying practices in textbook preparation are continuing despite the change of government is clear from this latest report prepared by the 'Committee Against Saffronization of Textbooks'.

The complete apathy and extreme lack of interest shown by the government is not only most shocking it is totally unpardonable. In the meanwhile whole generations of young pupils would be imbibing the wrong set of values thus dashing our fervent hopes for a more humanistic and secular society. The government would do well to heed Krishna Kumar's words (quoted in our report). The former Chairman of NCERT opines that the main reason for the re-surfacing of cultural revivalism is the failure of the state in reflecting the policy of secularism in education. We rest our case. The ball is in government's court.

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"A Report on the 7th and 10th Standard Textbooks in Karnataka"

July-2014

Objectionable contents found in the new 10th standard Social Science Textbook prescribed in 2014 and prepared in 2013 during the rule of Congress Government.

In history section, in the lesson entitled 'Folk History' (p 19), information is sought to be provided on history writing in India. This chapter too seems to justify inclusion of mythological events as historical facts as has been done in the case of earlier textbooks. In the introduction of the chapter there is an explanation regarding the influence exercised by the British over history writing in India: "Every incident was narrated in a way beneficial to the writers. For ex: the British writers projected all freedom struggles as mutiny or riots. But Indian writers rejected this and instead called them struggles for independence. After Independence, the events, descriptions and writings of Indians paved the way for a new history...." **This statement gives the**

impression that only history (one-sided) written by Indians is true and authentic. The statement appears to suggest that unlike the 'British historiography', the 'nationalist historiography' is fault-free. In this connection it is noteworthy to refer to Ranajit Guha's essay entitled, *On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India*:

The historiography of Indian nationalism has for long time been dominated by elitism- colonial elitism and bourgeois nationalist elitism - which "cannot explain Indian nationalism for us. For it fails to acknowledge, far less interpret, the contribution made by the people *on their own*, that is independently of the elite to making and development of this nationalism....the history of Indian nationalism ...written up as a sort of spiritual biography of the Indian elite (Ranjit Guha, 1988)¹.

Hence one can see that the lesson 'Folk history' in the present textbook does not acknowledge the mistakes committed by Indians while recording history of India.

The lesson 'Folk history' concludes by bringing forth the methodology of Indian history writing. It is stated that history writing is deeply influenced by the Westerners who followed the simple linear model. In this system, the events of the 18th century are recorded after the events of 17th century. In contrast to this western mode of history writing the lesson explains how Indian tradition is an exception. **"Indian system views time in a cyclic manner. This is also called *Kalachakra*. There is no end in sight for *kalachakra*. After one rotation of this *chakra* is completed, the second one starts. The completion of one cycle is called *yuga*. In this way, history is narrated as *tretayuga*, *dwaparayuga* etc. In such circumstances, many new incidents and events or avatars may merge. They undergo change from time to time... "** (p 21). Which again is a one-sided explanation of history writing in India. Here Indian oral history tradition is viewed only through Vedic time cycle. This explanation does not focus on the many alternative ways available in folk traditions or non-Vedic traditions for looking into the time in history.

Objectionable contents found in the new 7th standard Social Science and Science Textbooks prescribed in 2014 and prepared in 2013 during the rule of Congress Government.

Science, I Semester

In science section, under Chapter I entitled 'Food and its Constituents (p.1) there is a model conversation which takes place between teacher and the students in a classroom regarding their food habits. Answering a question put by their teacher, Rajiya, Gurmith, John and Ramu recall only the vegetarian food items they had for their breakfast before they came to school. **Significantly, though the students talk about *ragi mudde* and rice, they do not mention any non-vegetarian item such as**

meat and fish. This particular conversation seems designed to orient children towards vegetarianism in their food habits. Though there is no direct mention of *pakka* (vegetarian) and *kaccha* (non-vegetarian) food which is one of the major criteria in the practice of caste system, yet the conversation in the lesson seems designed to strengthen the same argument.

History and Civics, I Semester

In history section under the chapter entitled 'Religious Reformation' (pp.11-14) there are about four pages of explanation on the immoral behavior of Catholic Church. The lesson begins with a model conversation among Peter, Lily and their father John. Peter begins the conversation asking, are there denominations in Christians too? This question on the causes for divisions in Christianity seems quite unusual and unnecessary. For, from **1st to 10th standard no lesson (in the text books which are prescribed from 2012 to 2014) discusses the divisions or causes for the divisions in any other religion except Christianity. More over the history of immoral behavior of Catholic Church has already been prescribed in earlier 9th standard social science in the year 2013, pp 64- 65.**

Some lessons like 'Crusades', 'Immoral Behavior of Catholic Church', 'Invasions of Muslims' and so on are prescribed repeatedly in the text books. **The purpose could be none other than to permeate negative stereotypes. On the other hand many lessons glorifying Vedic Civilization, Harappan Civilization (to claim Aryan origin), Ramayana and Mahabharatha (or related stories) and persons like Kanaada, Swami Vivekananda, Ramachandra Rao and others appear many times in text books (from 1st to 10th standard)** traversing chronological sequences and generic boundaries to strengthen the ideology of cultural revisionism. Can we call it an appropriate use of 'Spiral Approach'?

In 7th standard civics section (p. 57), while talking about 'untouchability' only a short explanation is provided. To explain 'untouchability' no model conversation precedes the lesson. From 1st to 10th standard the textbook writers have not made any attempt to explain what is 'caste system'. Our text books have never attempted to explain why 'caste system' and 'untouchability' is practiced in India alone and the relationship of these practices with Indian religious texts. Whereas NCF 2005 guidelines clearly state: "India will be discussed from the perspectives of the adivasi, dalit and other disenfranchised populations and effort should be to relate the content much as possible to the children's everyday lives"(p.6). The textbook writers have not paid attention to the marginalized. Though model

conversations are provided in the lessons, they are far from the realities of everyday lives.

In civics section while explaining the nature of corruption, it is stated, "... it has spread from fodder scam to purchasing of defense equipment" (p.65). It is to be noted that in order to orient children towards social service and patriotism, writers of the text books carefully select local history and local 'heroes'. But when it comes to discussing *corruption*, it seems 'local corruption' does not enter their minds. It is quite obvious that 7th standard children are more familiar with corruption in Karnataka than corruption elsewhere in the country. Instances of corruption during BJP rule not finding any mention is a pointer to the fact that elements sympathetic to the Sangh Parivar continue to hold sway over some of the textbook committees.

History and Civics, II Semester

In history section, under the chapter entitled 'First War of Indian Independence' (p.13) under the subtitle 'Social and Religious Causes' an elaborate explanation is given about how missionaries used to convert Indians. K.N Panikkar, one of the most respected historians in India has noted that "... the colonial state never seriously considered evangelization as a possible political solution, the fear of the loss of faith was a distinct reality for many...." (K.N Panikkar, 2013)ⁱ. The lesson further explains that the British used to treat Indians as uncivilized by calling them 'black people' and 'pigs'. European hotels used to hang sign boards stating "No entry to Indians and dogs". The same lesson also states that they converted orphans to Christianity.

Though these factors are partially correct in our past, when the same lesson ('First war of Indian Independence') in standard 10th does not carry such an elaborate explanation while mentioning 'social causes', what is the need to provide such sensitive details to standard 7th children? In this lesson 'First war of Indian Independence' an attempt has been made to sensationalize the issue thus violating NCF 2005. **Whereas one can find ample material on dalit narratives regarding the upper cast oppression on dalits and adivasis in the pages of history, the lessons in our text books conceal them by glorifying oppression by Europeans alone.**

As Tanika points out in her work "Historical pedagogy of the Sangh Parivar":

"What is more of a problem for the Sangh is that most variants of historical scholarship, the world over are, despite considerable internal differences, concerned with understandings of various configurations of diverse kinds of power....The Sangh is deeply uncomfortable with the entire exercise,

since the only operation of power that it tries to identify is that of non-Hindus over Hindus ...It needs to possess the past..." (Tanika Sarkar, 2003)ⁱⁱⁱ.

Many textbooks prescribed since 2012 repetitively carry the popular narration that the non-Hindus victimized the rest in the past.

In page 115 while explaining the phenomenon of 'terrorism', from 1993 to 2013, six major terrorist attacks have been mentioned. **But significantly missing from that list are the blasts promoted by Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as a part of 'saffron terrorism', like Samjhauta Express blasts (February 18, 2007), Mecca Masjid blasts (May 18, 2007) and Malegaon blasts (September 29, 2008). The three blasts killed 87 people in total. All these instances have been reported in the media (archive.indianexpress.com, 2013)^{iv}.**

The above analyzed lessons and concepts of standard 10th and 7th text books carry the discourse of the previous text books prescribed in 2012 and 2013 and thus violate NCF 2005. Though the BJP government is out of power its ideology still continues in the textbooks. What is more alarming is 'right wing ideology' getting circulated through the present secular government thus causing immeasurable damage to the secular spirit in education. As Krishna Kumar observes, "The secular national identity that the state made an attempt to project received little substantive support from education. This was one of the many reasons why the endeavour did not get far, and why within less than half a century of acquiring independence, cultural revivalism has again surfaced as a major force in political life" (Krishna Kumar, 2005).^v Some lessons of 7th and 10th standard prescribed in 2014 and many lessons in 5th, 6th, 8th and 9th prescribed in 2012 and 2013 which is attached with this document seriously damage the quality of education in Karnataka. Deleting a few sentences from the text books does not make them conform to NCF 2005. Mythology getting dressed as history, glorification of wars between Hindu and non-Hindu rulers, recalling Protestant movement often, strengthening stereotypes on minorities, women and dalits, cautioning minorities using lessons in civics, claiming pre-Mughal era as the greatest time in Indian History and other related details can never be eliminated by some cosmetic changes in the lessons. The attached report on remaining objectionable contents in standard 5th, 6th, 8th, and 9th texts clearly reveal the reluctance of our government towards bringing macro changes in the text books and thus adhering to NCF 2005.

Notes:

ⁱ Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ed. : *Selected Subaltern Studies* "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India", OUP, New York, 1988, p 37.

ⁱⁱ K N Panikar, *History as a Site of Struggle* “Essay on History, Culture and Politics”, Three Essays Collective, Gurgaon, 2013, p 12.

ⁱⁱⁱ T a n i k a S a r k a r, “Historical pedagogy of the Sangh Parivar”, (2003) Seminar Issues, Viewed on 10 Oct 2013 (<http://www.india-seminar.com>).

^{iv} Suresh Bhat, “Kesari Bhayothpadane”, 2012, pp 2-15
See also, ibnlive.in.com and archive.indianexpress.com, (2013).

^v Krishna Kumar, *Political Agenda of Education* “A Study of Colonialist and Nationalist Ideas”, Sage Publications New Delhi Thousand Oaks London, 2005, p 204.