

The Saffronization of Indian Textbooks

A Study of the Extent and Implications of BJP Textbook Manipulation

2002 - 2018

Caitlin Westerfield

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1 Introduction

The emergence of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in response to a growing Hindu Nationalist sentiment in India has led to nation-wide policy changes as well as radical and violent conduct by its followers. This is in part due to the extraordinary effectiveness by which the BJP has been spreading its ideology of Hindu exceptionalism, Islamophobia, and Indian nationalism. One technique that the BJP has put to efficient use since beginning to gain power in an attempt to indoctrinate Indian youth into the Hindutva tradition has been the rewriting of government-issued textbooks. While “Government efforts to influence history-writing, and intellectual life in general, ... is [a] common practice, ... what does distinguish the BJP is the systematic, consistent, and generalised level at which it has been operating” (Sarkar 2002, 245). This exceptional prioritization of textbooks is used in part by the BJP to prompt the next generation to support the Hindutva movement, but is also focused on retrogressing their social justice mentality. By pushing for regressive mindsets on caste, gender, and religious acceptance, as well as encouraging an anti-Marxist and pro-authoritarian dogma, the BJP textbooks are graduating students who not only will not work to bring India into a more egalitarian society, but will be active agents in bringing about the reverse.

2 Case Studies: Textbooks in India from 1990s to Present

The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) has gone through several iterations of textbooks as the federal government in India changed party control. Since these textbooks are used in around 9000 “central schools” and serve as model textbooks for other school systems, the messages they portray carry a lot of weight in determining the historical perspectives and identity formation of children in Indian society (Banerjee and Stöber 2014, 46). There have been four iterations of NCERT books since the 1990s: the first, which were used up until 2002, were written when the Indian Congress Party was in control of the federal government; the second were published between 2002 and 2004 while BJP leader Atal Bihari Vajpayee was Prime Minister; the third were released between 2006 and 2008 when the Congress party regained control; and,

finally, now that the BJP is back in federal control and led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the current textbooks began to be introduced into schools in 2018 (Banerjee and Stöber 2014). The transitions between the NCERT textbooks are an excellent case study to compare the changes in methodology and messaging between the Congress and BJP party.

Another set of textbooks to highlight in this discussion are state-specific textbooks produced by local administration, of which particular media attention has been given to the Rajasthan textbooks released in 2016. The new books for Classes 1 to 8 spearheaded by Rajasthan's new BJP education minister Vasudev Devnani were written and released in only one year. This choice was unprecedented considering Rajasthan had only recently rewritten their textbooks, however, since the BJP had just swept Rajasthan elections in 2014, it follows the trend of rewriting history textbooks whenever government party control changes.

2.1 NCERT Textbooks: 1990s, 2002-2004, and 2006-2008

The 2002-2004 NCERT textbooks released during the era of BJP-affiliated Vajpayee as Prime Minister received a significant amount of backlash from academics and civilians alike. This critique was primarily in response to the changes made to historical events, information that was left out, and factual errors, all of which was compiled into a report generated by the Indian History Congress (IHC) in 2003 titled *History in the New NCERT Textbooks: A Report and Index of Errors*. According to Yogesh Snehi in his review of the IHC report titled, "History revisited, rewritten," the IHC makes the argument that "these textbooks are not just historically misleading but also infected by poor language, spelling and grammatical errors, infelicitous expressions and obscurities" and "what was earlier considered part of historical criticism is now built into history itself" (Snehi 2003). In *The Hindu*, it was reported that the "IHC feels that mere removal of linguistic and factual errors from the new history textbooks of the [NCERT] would not convert them into acceptable learning tools for the students" since "many of the mistakes stem 'from an anxiety to present history with a very strong chauvinistic and communal bias'" (Josua 2003).

In "Living in Harmony? 'Casteism', Communalism, and Regionalism in Indian Social Science

Textbooks,” Basabi Khan Banerjee and Georg Stöber complete an in-depth analysis of the NCERT textbooks released between the years of 1990 and 2014. Specifically, the authors analyzed “the various textbook narratives on caste and ‘untouchability’, communalism, linguistic diversity, and regionalism and related concepts” (Banerjee and Stöber 2014, 42). Banerjee and Stöber write that they focus on studying “untouchability” due to its particular importance in understanding how these textbook sequences relate themselves to Hindu nationalist ideologies and policies towards Hindu traditions. They write, “Casteism and untouchability are socioeconomic issues, but they also have their roots in specific Hindu practices and thus can serve as arguments against those claiming to build on a glorious Hindu past” (66). Thus, it is unsurprising to the authors that the 2002-2004 NCERT series produced by the BJP-led government “with its affirmative policy toward Hindu traditions, . . . omits most historical references to caste inequalities” (48). This is in contrast to the NCERT books released prior to 2002 and from 2006-2008 which both paint addressing the issues of caste inequality as a social and moral imperative. The second NCERT series does discuss the “‘social and cultural awakening’ of the nineteenth century,” however it centers on “revivalist tendencies within Hinduism and ‘religious awakening among the Muslims’ and does not touch on the social movements” (48).

Just as the 2002-2004 NCERT books barely touch on the topic of caste in the 19th and 20th century, they also “adopt a restrained approach to the importance of castes in today’s India” (51). The textbooks, Banerjee and Stöber argue, want the student to leave class thinking that “the real problem is not discrimination but the politicization of caste differences, an argument that seems mainly to be directed at lower caste movements” (51). Meanwhile, both the pre-2002 and the 2006-2008 NCERT series discuss caste and “untouchability” broadly. The first emphasizes that it is a “‘matter of shame that untouchability is still practiced in our country’” and the third has printed on its front page a social justice message on ending “untouchability” (52). This biased material on “untouchability” and caste are one example of the way that BJP textbooks are attempting to depoliticize the anti-caste movement as well as other social justice initiatives.

2.2 Rajasthan Textbooks in 2016

The original meeting that kicked off the textbook revision plan in Rajasthan was on July 20, 2015, where Rajasthan's education minister Vasudev Devnani requested the rewriting of textbooks for Classes 1 to 8. Shreya Roy Chowdhury reported, "Minutes of the meeting, accessed by *Scroll.in*, list precise instructions and decisions about what the textbooks should contain: a chapter on Vedic mathematics for every class, a focus on 'Indian culture' in the teaching of history, and 'primacy to new contexts and concerns at the state and national level'" (Chowdhury 2018b). Also included in the list of topics were "two government schemes introduced by the BJP-led Central government: the cleanliness campaign Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and the girl child programme Beti Bachao-Beti Padhao" (Chowdhury 2018b). The textbooks were modelled off of textbooks that had been released by the BJP parent organization Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). They were produced by a committee of 165 people of which only 30 of whom were women and none of whom had previous experience writing textbooks for children. One participant, himself a member of the RSS, was quoted by Chowdhury as explaining that "'where the previous group [of Rajasthan textbook writers] had included some Sangh members by accident, this time they picked only Sangh's people'" (Chowdhury 2018a). Additionally, unlike the previous set of textbooks which had been the result of over two years of deliberations, the 2016 edition rewriting was supposed to be compressed into just three months (although it ended up taking around a year).

According to Mahaveer Sihag of the Rajasthan Shikshak Sangh (Shekhawat), the "only government teachers' organisation that publicly opposed the introduction of hastily-revisited school textbooks": "A large number of teachers, particularly those aligned to the [RSS] ... support the Hindu majoritarian view of the textbooks" (Chowdhury 2018c). However, outsider critique among academics is forceful. Chowdhury reported that a group of education experts analyzed the books to determine both whether they fairly represented minority groups and if they were adequate tools of learning for students. She writes, "They checked to see if the textbooks equipped children to build knowledge independently or just broadcast information, whether the information itself was correct and the approach scientific, and whether they were sensitive to issues of gender, diversity

and marginalisation. On all counts, the books did not measure up.” The books were found to “all but erase minority identities” and “reinforce the Hindu majoritarian worldview.” Chowdhury writes that “science is explained through stories from Indian mythology and every maths textbook from Class 3 to 8 has a chapter on Vedic maths. The banned practice of sati is described in glowing terms, as are government schemes and initiatives. Books of practically every subject seek to instil nationalism and an unquestioning respect for the armed forces” (Chowdhury 2018a). Thus the Rajasthan state textbooks under BJP control are painting a version of history that is skewed towards an “unquestioning” Hindu Nationalist agenda.

2.3 NCERT Textbooks in Present Day

The new NCERT Textbooks also follow a similar pattern of Hindutva ideology and government schemes entering required syllabi, which can be seen in the 1,334 changes to the new editions, of which 316 changes were made to social science textbooks (Chopra 2018). The most prominent alteration is the inclusion of several new initiatives spearheaded by Prime Minister Modi – many of which were controversial when introduced yet presented in the textbooks as unbiased, and thus inarguably correct, political strategy. For example, in the prelude to a chapter titled “Money and Credit” in the Class 10 Economics book, the NDA-II government’s “controversial decision to demonetise all Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 currency notes in 2016” is now represented by:

In India, during November 2016, currency notes in the denomination of Rs. 500 and Rs. 1,000 were declared invalid. . . . This is promoted to reduce the requirement of cash for transactions and also control corruption. Students could be asked to debate on the process and the impact of demonetisation. They can be guided to make a collage of the major areas where people use digital and cash transactions which are legitimate and legal (Chopra 2018).

A *Washington Post* article that summarizes *The Indian Express*’ report emphasizes how this textbook’s depiction of the initiative “does not mention the chaos that followed the announcement to replace 80 percent of India’s cash, leading to long lines outside banks for months and huge losses for small businesses” (Doshi 2018). While textbook changes have been a debate in previous administrations such as under the Congress Party governments, Chopra told the *Washington*

Post that these textbooks were still “critical of past failures of the party” and only talked about political events and laws, not “missions launched by the government.” However, the most recent “changes to the textbooks are unbalanced and could skew children’s perceptions of politics and current events” (Doshi 2018). Thus, again in 2018 the BJP is replicating its work in Rajasthan in 2016 by using textbooks to turn hot button social justice issues into accepted, and unchallengeable, fact.

Where the 2016 and 2018 textbooks differ from their 2002-2004 counterparts is in the extent of the changes that focus on history versus on current policy. The explicit inclusion of Modi’s and other BJP politicians’ agendas in the books are not just about synthesizing a common national identity but also pacifying the public on social justice issues. In Rajasthan, “the Class 7 English textbook casually inserts Narendra Modi’s weekly radio show, Mann Ki Baat, into a discussion on the use of modern technology in communication.” In an environmental science chapter on water for Class 4, a passage reads, “Indian government’s Namami Gange scheme will have good, permanent outcomes and [the] Ganga will be clean again.” Meanwhile, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, the two initiatives that Devnani requested be included in the textbooks, “are both prominently featured in an illustration on urban India in the Class 1 Hindi textbook” (Chowdhury 2018a). In contrast to the 2002-2004 textbooks that primarily focused on rewriting the past, the new textbooks are rewriting, and tranquilizing, the present.

3 Hindutva Ideology Under Interrogation

One of the major critiques of BJP textbooks is that in an attempt to prove their agenda they are deviating from the facts. Texts such as the IHC’s Index of Errors for the 2002-2004 NCERT textbooks aim to methodically prove the missing, misconstrued, and biased depictions of particular events and historical hypotheses. Thus it is useful to consider several Hindutva ideological conjectures that appear in their textbooks and juxtapose them with work by non-BJP historians.

3.1 Tripartite View of History

Historian Sumit Sarkar writes in his book, *Beyond Nationalist Frames: Postmodernism, Hindu Fundamentalism, History* of the myth he calls the “tripartite division of Indian history.” He explains that Hindutva historians break Indian history into three sections: “ancient/Hindu, medieval/Muslim, and modern/British” (Sarkar 2002, 253). However, he writes that this method of thinking about history leads to “essentialised assumptions of Hindus and Muslims being homogeneous” (254), which he is clear was not the case. After all, during the Mughal era, there were Muslims who were peasants or artisans who were not a part of the “ruling elite” while at the same time “a large number of Hindus, particularly Rajput princes, held very high posts in the Mughal mansabdari bureaucracy” (254-255). He argues that the tripartite view of history ignores these outliers and leads to generalizations about Muslims today as all descendants of the Hindu oppressors.

The tripartite view of history, however, is quite clearly accepted by BJP historians and thus appears in their textbooks. One of the main goals of the new editions is to insist that “the rule of non-Hindutva communities was disastrous” in medieval times. Alex Traub reports that “the early Hindu era is depicted in the Rajasthan books as an unrivaled Golden Age.” Whereas Gujarat’s textbooks “take a more moderate line on ancient India” than their Rajasthan counterparts, they “still tend toward the view that ‘the most glorious and prosperous age of Indian history’ occurred before Muslim rule” (Traub 2018). Not only have history and social science textbooks been affected by this ideology, but also science textbooks. In the 2002-2004 NCERT textbooks, “all substantial scientific discoveries are attributed to the Vedic civilisation.” Additionally, the glorious first era is described as a time where the only people living in India were an indigenous Aryan race, “which is factually incorrect since this argument is not supported by linguistic data” (Snehi 2003). However, this is argued in an attempt to claim the purity of the “golden age” prior to Muslim rule as exclusively Hindu.

The BJP textbooks’ depiction of the second era also leads to an erasure of Muslim identity and culture. Traub writes, “One book reduces over five centuries of rule by a diverse array of Muslim emperors to a single ‘Period of Struggle’ and demonizes many of its leading figures” (Traub 2018).

Additionally, in the 2002-2004 textbooks, “every step has been taken to derecognise the role of Muslims in nation building” (Snehi 2003). This rewriting of Hindu and Muslim contributions to Indian society indoctrinates students into the belief that India is a nation for and by Hindus, whereas Muslims have only ever been a hindrance on Hindu success.

3.2 History has been “Wronged”

Another Hindutva conviction is that Hindu members of Indian society have been “wronged” by having their history incorrectly taught to them, and thus it is their prerogative to rewrite their history textbooks to give voice to Hindu history through a Hindu exceptionalism lens. Mushirul Hasan writes, “the [BJP textbook movement] starting in 1999 represents a strong body of opinion in the country that subscribes to the view that the ‘Hindus’ have been ‘wronged’, and that their histories have been distorted at the hands of the ‘secular fundamentalists’” (Hasan 2002, 82). The main charge levelled against these “secular historians” is that they fail to conform to the tripartite model. Hasan explains that the movement leaders feel the old textbooks are missing: “the achievement of Hindus during the Vedic period; that Muslim rulers deliberately kept Hindu farmers at subsistence level, forcing them to migrate as indentured labour to Mauritius and the West Indies; and that the Ayodhya problem existed during Wajid Ali Shah’s time” (82). Under the 2002-2004 curriculum, “students are told that Qutub Minar was constructed by Samudragupta; Alauddin Khalji imposed 50 per cent land revenue on the Hindus; women adopted jauhar to defend their religion and chastity; [and] child marriage, jauhar, sati and various superstitions were all due to the fear of the Muslims” (83).

This ideology is so ingrained that when authors stray from the Hindutva version of history they risk experiencing violence. On January 5, 2004, at the Bhandarkar Oriental Institute in the town of Pune, “around two hundred Hindu militants ... overturned the library shelves, and for the next few hours they kicked around the books and danced on them, damaging an estimated 18,000 volumes before the police arrived” including a first-century manuscript of the Mahabharata and an early copy of the Rig Veda. All of this was because the institute was thanked in the acknowledgements

of a book that appeared to insinuate that Shivaji, “regarded [as a] near-divine figure by many Hindu nationalists”, was “illegitimate” (Dalrymple 2005). This was not an isolated incident. As reported in *The New York Review of Books*, “Within India, mobs mobilized by the Hindu right have occasionally attacked art exhibitions, libraries, publishers, and movie houses for their alleged unpatriotic and anti-Hindu bias” (Dalrymple 2005).

3.3 The “Mythical” Cow

Another author who was threatened due to his supposedly anti-Hindu historical writings was D.N. Jha, author of *The Myth of the Holy Cow*, which uses considerable historical and archaeological evidence to prove that beef was routinely eaten during the Vedic period. After release, Jha “received many death threats” which led to the withdrawal of his book in India (Dalrymple 2005). This mythical cow and its divinity, however, is another axiom held by Hindu Nationalists that, as Jha’s book proves, may not be based in fact. Jha writes, “the sanctity of the cow has . . . been wrongly traced back to the Vedas, which are supposedly of divine origin and the fountainhead of all knowledge and wisdom. In other words, some sections of Indian society trace the concept of sacred cow to the very period when it was sacrificed and its flesh was eaten” (Jha 2002, 18). The cow and its protection has been “converted into a symbol of communal identity of the Hindus and obscurantist and fundamentalist forces” that has led to major rioting and violence towards Muslims throughout India. However, while Hindutva leaders claim that beef eating was first introduced to India by Muslims and other foreigners, in reality, “the cow was not always all that sacred in the Vedic and subsequent Brahmanical and non-Brahmanical traditions . . . and its flesh, along with other varieties of meat, was quite often a part of *haute cuisine* in early India” (20).

Makkhan Lal, who contributed to several of the 2002-2004 BJP NCERT history textbooks, writes in his book, *Educating to Confuse and Disrupt: The Defiling of History and Education System of India*, “One of the ‘eminent historians’ [(Jha)] has earned a great reputation and huge money by writing a fictitious book on this subject, full of incorrect and false references. From the RigVeda and Atharvaveda we know that some of the domestic animals like buffalo, bull, ox, and

male calf were eaten but NOT THE COW, which was held sacred all through” (Lal and Dixit 2005, 158). Dismissing Jha’s evidence, Lal is part of a group of historians who insist on writing textbooks for young students that only show one side of the cow protection debate. Now, the Rajasthan 2016 Class 5 Hindi textbook “contains a letter in which the cow declares herself a purveyor of ‘strength, wisdom, longevity, health, happiness, prosperity and glory’, enjoins children to serve and protect her, and signs off with ‘Yours, Kamdhenu Gaumata’” (Chowdhury 2018a). Ignoring the evidence to the contrary and refusing to include any mention of the debate in their books, Lal and his colleagues feed the flame of cow protection-based communal violence.

3.4 Revolutionaries or Violent Nationalists

A final area in which BJP textbooks are promoting a Hindutva agenda is in who they deem Indian revolutionaries. In Gujarat and Rajasthan, emphasis is placed on “figures of notable ‘manliness,’ such as Bhagat Singh, whose activities during the independence movement included killing a British policeman and bombing the Central Legislative Assembly of the British Empire.” In a Rajasthan’s Class 10 book, it is written, “‘The revolutionary martyrs wrote the history of Indian independence through their blood,’ ... a rather far cry from Gandhian nonviolence” (Traub 2018). The *Hindustan Times* reported that the Rajasthan 2016 textbooks have “erased” Gandhi and Nehru from their historical timelines: “A social science text for class 8 does not mention who India’s first Prime Minister was. It also does not say anything about Mahatma Gandhi’s assassination by Nathuram Godse. New textbooks for Class 10 and 12 has a passing reference to Mahatma Gandhi but no mention of Nehru” (Correspondent 2017).

Instead, a growing amount of textbook space is being devoted to Vinayak Damodar Savarkar. Rajasthan’s Grade 10 books “hail him as a ‘great revolutionary, a great nationalist and a great organizer.’” However, Savarkar actually “pledged loyalty to the British Empire ... and encouraged his followers to cooperate with the British war effort. Savarkar’s legacy comes from his theoretical and political contributions to Hindu nationalism—not from participating in the independence movement.” Despite this, the textbooks only mention Savarkar’s alleged patriotism and make no

mention of his writing on Hindutva (Traub 2018).

4 Social Justice Regression

In addition to his critique of Hindutva's tripartite theory of history, Sarkar argues that the BJP's version of history is extremely anti-reformist in its methodology. He writes that Hindutva "seems to have something of the nature of a roll-back operation, or more often perhaps a pre-emptive strike against possible advances by lower-caste groups, women, and oppressed people in general." As an example, Sarkar points to the "utter silence in the writings of ideologues like Savarkar or Golwalkar about questions of mass poverty could not have been accidental" (Sarkar 2002, 261). This section looks at the ways in which Hindutva textbooks are "fundamentally Right-wing" and regressive in their policy suggestions (261).

4.1 Marxist Ideology

In the 1990s during Congress control of the national education system, there was a change in educational standpoint from the belief that "conflicts within India, especially the violent ones, [should] be dealt with mostly by silence so as not to disturb young minds" to "arguing that conflict-related questions must also be addressed in schools" (Banerjee and Stöber 2014, 45). While a shift of this sort provided space for discussion about social justice issues and critical thinking in the classroom, "the discussion of internal conflicts ... qualifies notions of national unity and homogeneity. From the point of view of identity politics, such discussion might seem counterproductive, and is only of use if directed against an 'internal other'" (45). This is why Lal, a staunch BJP and pro-unified Hindu identity historian, writes that these "conflict-related questions" in schools are no longer focused on what he deems important: the Hindu national identity (Lal and Dixit 2005, vii).

Lal believes that the conflict-based educational approach is instead advocating a Marxist historical agenda. He explains: "In Marxist philosophy history is not treated as a discipline simply to study the past. It is treated as a vehicle for inducing the desired change in society. ... For them

the concern is ‘how to change the world’ using history” (Lal and Dixit 2005, 8). Thus, now that the BJP is rewriting textbooks, “The Marxists or ‘pseudo-secularists’ historians, whose ‘intellectual terrorism’ [BJP Politicians] attacked recently, have been excluded from academic bodies and replaced, without any consideration for merit, with a fresh breed of intellectual managers cum-BJP-RSS ideologues” (Hasan 2002, 86). By equating all social justice-minded ideologies with Marxism, the BJP is able to firmly argue against what is actually just a more inclusive and critical thinking-focused set of textbooks.

4.2 Fascist & Authoritarian Ideology

In the attempt to completely eradicate the Marxist agenda in textbooks such as Sarkar’s, the BJP textbooks end up imposing authoritarian and fascist ideologies onto their impressionable students. For example, self-sacrifice for the sake of the nation is embedded throughout the textbooks. In the Class 3 Hindi textbook in Rajasthan’s 2016 textbooks, “seven year-old Maina ... is burnt to death by the British because she wanted ‘independence for the country.’” The textbook writes that she “went to her death ‘laughing’” and at the end of the chapter “children are asked what they would do if they were in Maina’s place and were asked to plunge into fire” (Chowdhury 2018a). This troubling message to children offers an example of the devotion Hindutva leaders expect from Indian citizens towards the mission of Hindu nationalism. There are also many lessons in discipline. One lesson in an Class 8 Gujarat textbook “insists that ‘awareness regarding co-operating with the security agencies has to be developed.’ Social harmony should be pursued even at the expense of individual rights.” For example, one “Rajasthan’s seventh-grade book recommends, ‘We should refrain from negative acts like strikes’” (Traub 2018). Traub writes that these messages contain a “whiff of authoritarianism” due to “these proposed limits on autonomy and dissent” (Traub 2018).

However, even more troubling are the explicit endorsements of fascism. One Class 12 Gujarat textbook, after elaborating on the limits of democracy, begins with “surprisingly frequent criticism of the Treaty of Versailles and an enumeration of Mussolini’s successes” and then begins to praise Adolf Hitler at length. The text reads:

“Hitler made a strong German organization with the help of [the] Nazi party and attained great honour for this. By favouring German civilians and by opposing Jews and by his new economic policies, he made Germany a prosperous country.... He transformed the lives of the people of Germany within a very short period by taking strict measures. He safe guarded [sic] the country from hardships and accomplished many things” (Traub 2018).

This endorsement of Hitler and Nazism can be found in the original writings of Hindutva philosopher Savarkar. While Savarkar wrote in his book, *Hindu Rashtra Darshan*, that “no academic and empty slogans of democracy or Nazim (*sic*) or Fascism can be the guiding principle of our foreign policy” (Savarkar 1949, 31), he also writes, “Nazism proved undeniably the saviour of Germany under the set of circumstances Germany was placed in, Bolshevism might have suited Russia very well and we know what the English Democracy has cost us” (81). The Hindutva textbooks are thus channeling the ideology of one of their founders when spreading fascist messages. According to Traub, “This is not the first Gujarat textbook to praise fascism: the last one was the ninth-grade social science book of the mid-2000s, when Modi ran the state government. The offending section was not removed until after a visit from the consul general of Israel” (Traub 2018). Hindutva is thus using textbooks not just to press their current political initiatives, but also to spread their authoritarian ideology, regardless of whether it is deeply rooted in a hateful past.

4.3 Ideology Applied

The regressive, and violent, ideologies of Hindutva that are in the Indian textbooks have led to messaging that is backward-thinking in terms of gender, caste, and religious acceptance. A story for Class 6 in Rajasthan “offers a ringing endorsement of the banned practice of Sati” – a tradition in which women would kill themselves to show loyalty to their husbands. Meanwhile, throughout the Rajasthan textbooks, the passages and examples “reinforce gender stereotypes. Educationist Ambika Nag, studying the environmental science textbooks of Class 3 and 4, pointed out that girls are barely visible in the illustrations in the chapters on games and sports. They are more often seen filling water and cooking” (Chowdhury 2018a).

Just as there is no critique of the caste system in the 2002-2004 NCERT textbooks (in sharp

contrast to its successors and predecessors written under the Congress party), in Rajasthan’s new textbooks, there also exists no critique of this system that is born out of “‘patriarchy and feudalism’.” Instead, a Class 6 social science textbook reads, “‘The initial nature of the caste system was very good. . . . It was based on professions. It was not linked to birth. . . . Between the castes there was no bar on sharing food or drink or on matrimonial relations, nor was there untouchability’.” Specifically, Dalit and Adivasi identities are distorted by stories that present them as self-sacrificing. Of the three lessons on rural communities and marginalized peoples in Classes 6,7, and 8 textbooks, “‘all three require the tribals to sacrifice themselves and their children or put themselves in grave danger for the sake of the rich or powerful’” (Chowdhury 2018a).

Finally, Muslims, after their influential history during the Mughal era had already been distorted, have discovered that their accomplishments in the years after have been erased from textbooks as well. In Rajasthan, “the selection of notable Indians in the ‘Hamare Gaurav’ (Our Pride) sections of the environmental science textbooks itself is a giveaway. There is not a single Muslim among the 15 notable Indians featured” (Chowdhury 2018a). In the 2002-2004 NCERT books, “one unit of the social science syllabus that looks at the features, spread and basic values of ‘major religions’ leaves out Islam. . . . Although the ‘Advent of Islam’ has been included in the social science syllabus for the next class, it is put in a unit alongside West Asia” (Hasan 2002, 84). Despite the “enormous counter-evidence” to counter Hindu communalism “of everyday shared living, fairly fuzzy boundaries, [and] the relative absence of obvious physical markers” (Sarkar 2002, 247), these textbooks are continuing to shape the narrative of Muslim and Hindu identity in a way that perpetuates division and hate.

5 The Effect on Students

Traub, in his reporting, visited an eighth-grade social science class in Rajasthan led by Muslim teacher Sana Khan filled with primarily Muslim students. Despairingly, he writes, “Rabab and another of her classmates ... told me that the ‘glorious’ period of Indian history occurred before

Muslim rule” despite the historically recognized contributions of the Mughal Empire to modern-day India. These students “saw only barbarism in the time of their own community’s emergence in India” (Traub 2018).

The emotional impact on students, however, is not the only concern of the BJP textbook critics. Hasan writes that now “the historian is not expected to raise embarrassing questions, confront orthodoxy and dogma, and represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug” (Hasan 2002, 86). Hasan calls this the “Saffronisation” of history, which is “the antithesis of what constitutes liberal education.” He writes that the new education “seeks to instil a set of beliefs into the minds of the young before they are capable of thinking and exercising their independent judgement” (85). In fact, a member of the RSS on the 2016 Rajasthan textbook committee told Chowdhury that he quit the committee in frustration because ““the mantri wanted the new government’s vichardhara [ideology] to shine through. . . . But children in Classes 1 and 2 do not understand vichardhara. They have to learn how to learn”” (Chowdhury 2018b).

By force-feeding students with one particular ideology at a young age, the BJP is fashioning a more polarized and hateful future populace. Hasan writes, “when two opposite groups are taught in this fashion, they produce two armies which clash, not two parties that can discuss. Saffronisation breeds fanaticism, heightens caste and communal consciousness, and stifles the natural inclination of a student to cultivate a balanced and cautious judgement” (Hasan 2002, 86). While some teachers have tried to fight back by encouraging students to question the textbooks’ depiction of history and political undertones, Chowdhury reports that “the last straw is the pressure of public exams. Held at the end of Class 5 and 8, these exams are based entirely on the prescribed school textbooks, which makes covering the syllabus the first priority for teachers.” As one teacher explained, ““If we correct the information, our answers won’t match the ones demanded in the exam”” (Chowdhury 2018c). Thus, even the teachers who may have wanted to educate their students to be critical thinkers are constrained by the education system they operate within.

6 Conclusion

Hasan writes, “Those unwilling to confront the past will be unable to confront the present and unfit to face the future” (Hasan 2002, 87). The BJP textbooks are aimed at producing students that are in line with the BJP political agenda, and thus are perpetuating class, gender, and religious differences. They are also pacifying the populace by writing about contested political initiatives as though they are neutral fact. But the most concerning aspect of the overthrow of more critically-minded textbooks is the reasoning for the overthrow: an anti-social reform and anti-progressive philosophy. Through its anti-Marxism to the point of being pro-fascism ideology, Hindutva grandstanders are producing a generation of students that are moving backwards towards becoming a more bigoted and at the same time more compliant populace. These children are not only going to be unfit to face the future, they are deliberately turning their back on it in order to solely focus on emulating the past.

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