**Grand Education Machinery: State’s Own Ideological Apparatus**

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Louis Althusser considers the state as the means by which the ruling class maintains its dominant position. According to him, the state consists of two ‘apparatuses’, the repressive state apparatus and the ideological state apparatus. Here, the ideological state apparatus maintains the dominance of the ruling class by controlling people’s ideas, values, and beliefs. And in all this, education system plays a crucial role. Although, Althusser discusses all this from a Marxist viewpoint, that how the capitalist ruling class controls the working class and makes them to accept their hegemony, I wanted to study this phenomenon in a different context with a different perspective. I wish to delve into how the state itself can use this ‘apparatus’, the ‘Grand Education Machinery’, to control the ideas, values, and beliefs of the populace. For this purpose, I have chosen to probe into the changes in syllabus’ that the NCERT History textbooks have underwent during different governments.

So, here I began on the trail to track the history of these History books, and boy…, it was one hell of a herculean task. It was nothing like a ‘one google search away’, I had initially expected it to be. Even after a whole night (yes, one whole night!) of searching online, I was unable to find out the very first NCERT History textbooks or even their syllabus, not to talk about all the subsequent releases. But I did find, thanks to NCERT’s Textbook Archive of Library and Documentation Division’s book catalogue, was that the first of these books appeared in 1966 and 1967, and then there were further commissioning of such textbooks for higher classes (not the Marxist one) later in the mid-1970s.

These history books have been periodically revised, and there is nothing wrong with it as it is justified to keep up with the advances in knowledge. But, the matter of interest is that these changes almost always happen to coincide with the regime changes at the center government. This observation places the independent nature of NCERT in question, and reaffirms the allegations on NCERT of acting as a mouthpiece of the government and echoing its ideologies.

These books were accused to carry a ‘Marxist imprint’, undermining the impact and brutality of Islamic invaders, over-glorifying the Mughal period, neglecting Hindu dynasties, and touching on sensitive and debated topics such as ‘Aryan migration theory’ and ‘Beef in Hinduism’. They also over-emphasized on the role of Nehru-Gandhi in the independence struggle, and dwarfed and ignored other prominent freedom fighters. I also personally feel that they carried a little anti-American sentiment – discussing Soviet Russian history, rise of Nazi Germany, and importantly the Vietnam war. They could have included, in my personal opinion, American, Chinese, and Islamic history. (Last two sentences are out of context personal opinions. And I also feel that these accusations are justified.)

Although, I found no evidence, but there were claims by many authors (and bloggers) that the reworking of syllabus first happened in the tenure of Indira Gandhi, which was mostly related to exaggerations in the roles and achievements of Jawaharlal Nehru and Mohandas Gandhi. There may be truth to these statements as the first National Curriculum Framework (NCF) was held in 1975, during the Emergency, a very chaotic time to discuss the education policy.

Then came the government of Janata Party. The textbooks were blamed to be too sympathetic towards the Muslim viewpoint and neglected the topic of Muslim invaders. Also, it was raised that the books showed little enthusiasm towards Hindu revivalism. One of the textbooks was, hence, subsequently withdrawn.

The 2002 NDA government brought another NCF to bring in new changes to the curriculum. Vedas were emphasized, and it was attempted to break the hegemony of INC and the Communists in the literature and from the NCERT body. The opposition termed it as the ‘saffronisation’ of education. The government was not long lived and soon dissolved. The newly elected UPA government took stringent and rushed steps to ‘de-saffronise’ the school texts. All the changes were reverted back, and new lessons on Sikhism were introduced. It was alleged that records of Muslim atrocities were whitewashed to acquire Muslim votes in upcoming state elections.

Recently-elected Modi government removed few chapters from the syllabus and made them a part of extended learning available online but not in the prints, last year.

Now it is important to mention that these are no ordinary books, these are ‘textbooks’ – books holding monopoly over the ‘knowledge’ that every student will unquestioningly and religiously study, after all, the exams are going to be based on them. This generates a blind belief among students that because the examiner is going to give marks based on the content in these books, the content in there should not be questioned; this, however, subsequently translates to the faith that what is written in textbook cannot be wrong. And this bestows the content of these books an omnipotence and makes them an unparalleled apparatus for ideological dominance. Thus, it is quite regrettable to see the State, especially a democratically elected government, using education to its convenience and to spread its propaganda. I understand that this is inevitable and happens all around the globe, but it is still despairing to watch the history of a nation and its people being oscillated like a tuning fork.