

## Rewriting Old History for a New India

### What is the issue?

Recent investigative reports bring to light proposals for deletions and changes to school textbooks across the board.

### What about the recent curricular changes by the government?

- The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education, Women, Children, Youth and Sports recently tabled its Report on the Reforms in Content and Design of School Text books.
- The NCERT is already in the process of formulating the new National Curricular Framework, which will direct the syllabi of central and State educational boards.
- **Need for changes**
  - To remove un-historical facts and distortions about national heroes
  - To reduce the content load on students
  - To rationalise the content

### What are the issues with deletion/alteration of historical contents?

- **Heavy governmental control-** By deleting sentences and chapters, the government seeks to avoid students from being introduced to certain processes.
  - For instance, deletion of sections of the Emergency and Gujarat violence indicates this strategy.
- **Idealised picture of society-** The other point is to present an idealised picture of society and politics by sanitising textbooks.
  - Instead of allowing students to comprehend caste as a system of injustice, the deletions seek to present an ideal society in which caste is only a marginal or slight distortion.
- **Restatement of moral bases of socio-political processes-** The deletion is aimed at reframing the relations between authority and citizens.
  - Deleting the chapters on protest movements tends to reformulate the idea of democracy where protests are seen as a challenge to democracy rather than as a phenomenon enriching it.
- **Rupture historical interpretations of the past-** The deletions commit violence against the idea of history.
  - The NCERT's removal of crucial aspects related to the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughals can be seen in this aspect.
- **Suspend critical thinking-** This narrative makes a demand upon students to suspend critical thinking about the world around them and reduces the past to statist and static in their imagination.
  - There is a proposal to delete the description of Akbar's translation of Sanskrit texts into Persian, engagement with diverse social and religious practices, etc.

- **Creating a new history-** This new history makes villains of some communities and presents a fragmented historical narrative which is subject to the demands of community sentiments.
  - This can be explained by the changes of the chapter on the tragedy of Partition.
- **Narrowing the horizon within the country-** Non-Indian contexts have been removed in textbooks of higher classes.
  - Widening the horizons through vignettes from Greece or Egypt or China is seen as too heavy and hence chopped off from the textbooks.
- **Altered information and interpretation-** It appears that there is an intention to gloss over class, caste and gender inequality in ancient Indian society,
  - The reference to women and Shudras, who were excluded from Vedic learning being allowed to hear the Puranas is deleted.

## References

1. <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/rewriting-old-history-for-a-new-india/article65567906.ece>
2. <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/what-school-textbook-deletions-tell-us-about-ruling-establishment-idea-of-democracy-7982891/>
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