

For Immediate Release

Textbook revision - an unnecessary, divisive, and costly exercise

We strongly urge the Government of Karnataka to:

1. Revoke the recent revisions to the textbooks, which are regressive in nature, and have been done in an arbitrary manner, without adherence to well-defined curriculum framework and processes.
2. Print and supply the textbooks which have been in use for many years, post the last revision
3. Focus energies on addressing the serious education emergency in the state, prepare a road-map, allocate sufficient resources and implement programs to enable the children of marginalized and poor communities to overcome learning deprivation due to the pandemic

Background

The government of Karnataka has recently undertaken revision of Kannada and Social Science textbooks, in which some chapters have been removed and few added. The process and substance of the textbook revision is deeply disturbing and antithetical to the core values of our education system and constitution, for several reasons:

Undemocratic

The Government of Karnataka constituted a committee of seven men who took the decisions to add and drop chapters, without the broad consultation that has characterized textbook preparation in the past. In sharp contrast, the 2014 Baraguru Ramachandrappa committee worked through 27 committees comprising 172 experts to revise the textbooks, and held several public consultations to hear diverse views. It is not known if the Chakratheertha committee held any public consultations in its process. The preparation of textbooks is a process that requires a high sense of responsibility, as textbooks are the primary resource to which lakhs of young minds will be exposed. Academic experts, teachers, and eminent citizens are usually consulted to get diverse inputs which enables the textbook revision exercise to stay free of biases of a few people, which process has not been followed.

Secondly, at the time the committee was setup, the Education Minister had announced that the committee would first submit a report which would be studied, and only then the revision would be done. However, there is no evidence that the committee submitted a report for public discussions, preceding the revision.

Non-representative

The composition of the textbook revision committee does not reflect the reality of Karnataka society. Almost all the members of the committee are Brahmin men. The chapters dropped consist of writings of Dalit writers and progressive writers, while the chapters added are written by Brahmins. It seems that the committee has pushed the ideology of the dominant

religion/caste in this process. Lack of diversity and representativeness undermines the committee's credibility. Denial of perspectives of those who have suffered social injustice over centuries, reinforces those injustices.

Regressive

Diversity and exposure to cultures other than our own is essential for broadening a student's thinking, for developing respect for others, and for building a harmonious society. The revision violates these aims of education articulated in the eponymous position paper of the National Curriculum Framework 2005.

One of the dropped chapters discusses the injustices of the caste system. Another dropped chapter discusses vegetarian and meat cuisine. A third chapter where content has been dropped is of the noted social reformer Periyar, who provided a different perspective on the Ramayana. Casteist content has been added – for instance, a reference to the upanayana ritual of Brahmin men, in the chapter on Basaveshwara, whose primary vision was of a casteless society.

The Baragur Ramachandrappa committee was setup to remove the errors and biases inserted into the textbooks by the previous committee, including a claim in the science textbook that the Dronacharya was born through in-vitro fertilization (test tube baby). Now more than ever, is the need to build a scientific temper and respect for plurality to find rational and empathetic solutions to the challenges posed by the pandemic. True education would lie in providing diverse perspectives and discussing these in an open manner, to provide opportunities to develop critical thinking in children. One-sided propaganda loses the respect of the teacher and the taught, undermining the very values the content may seek to build.

Costs children of the state heavily

The majority of children of Karnataka have suffered a catastrophic situation during the pandemic, without access to structured learning opportunities and textbooks. They need a variety of learning materials, including textbooks, which should reflect the ideals of social justice, democracy, egalitarianism and India's common cultural heritage (NCF 2005).

Unfortunately, this revision has cost the children of the state dearly — due to this exercise, textbook printing has got delayed for at least 3 months (which is an entire semester).

When politicians play curriculum games, it is the children who suffer.

— National Coalition on the Education Emergency.

The NCEE is a group of individuals, organizations and networks across the country which have come together to 'resume and renew' school education.

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Educators comments

“Instead of enhancing the content of the text books to reinforce constitutional principles of equality, social justice and democracy, it is a shame that the Karnataka government has actually removed some of the chapters that espoused such values. What is special and unique to India's democracy is its respect for all religions, languages, regions, cultures and so on. The harm done to the fabric of society through such manipulation of text books would sow seeds of disharmony, mistrust and divisiveness. It would hit at the core of imagination of India as a secular democratic nation”. - **Smt. Shanta Sinha, ex-chairperson of the National Commission on the Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR)**

When the state and civil society should be working together to support teachers post the massive disruption to education caused by the pandemic, it is unfortunate that Karnataka is embroiled in unnecessary controversies over the past year. - **Prof. Mythili Ramachand, member of the Karnataka D.El.Ed curriculum revision committee.**

One would assume that textbooks and the education of our children need to rise above political leanings and biases, especially in a large diverse, complex country like India. One of the foundational principles stated to guide NEP 2020 is "respect for diversity and respect for the local context in all curriculum, pedagogy, and policy, besides adhering to Constitutional values. The Karnataka textbook revision exercise is antithetical to all this. **Dr. Maya Menon, Teacher Educator.**

Any decision related to choice/inclusion of content in the curriculum or textbooks should be dictated by curricular priorities of which development in children of critical thought and analysis and appreciation of diversity is acknowledged to be the need of the hour in the 21st century. Decisions on the basis of ideological leanings should therefore not be acceptable by the school system - **Prof Venita Kaul, Professor and Director of School of Education Studies, Ambedkar University (retd.)**

For almost a thousand years since Basava, Karnataka has formed its identity in terms of a lively dialectic between the ‘living presence of a teacher’s mind’ and the ‘dominant national narrative’. What defines Karnataka is the rich history of the tension between the two. The Chakratirtha Committee appears to have set aside the historical reality of ‘the being of Karnataka’ as well as the principle of inclusion that Dr. Ambedkar embedded in the Constitution. - **Prof. GN Devy.**

The entire process is undemocratic, opaque and not following the principles of natural justice – **Dr Niranjana Radhya, Development Educationist, Mentor of SDMCs and Chief Advocate of Neighbourhood Common School System through State Funded Public Education.**

A group of brahmin men adding references to regressive caste practices (upanayana in the chapter on Basaveshwara), removing content analyzing the injustices inherent in caste system, in an opaque exercise, violates the constitutional ideals of equality and social justice – **Gurumurthy K., National Coalition on the Education Emergency.**