



History text-books and marginalization: the case of the Jain Community

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ABSTRACT

The paper attempts to explore the coverage of Jainism in history text-books. It points out to the marginalisation of the Jainism into history text-books. It looks into the dynamics of the process of selection of history syllabi. It has been often contended that the entire process of education is political in the way it is funded, its goal and objectives, the nature of the textbooks and the power of decision making. At times under the cover of the secular orientation, minority religion gets under-representation. Historical discourses on Jainism therefore seemed to be biased. The paper concludes that the multicultural perspective is essential for proper understanding of history.

Keywords : history, text books, Jainism, marginalisation

This paper attempts to provide a contextualised understanding of the study of Jainism in the context of history text-books. The task of history is to provide a true account of significant and unique events of the past. The attainment of objectivity is the challenge in the writing of history. Threefold factors influence the criteria of objectivity in the writing of history- the selection of historical events, the nature of historical events and personality of the author, his motives, intentions and temperament.

Selection is the prime criterion for a historian. His selection is limited either by personal, academic or political factors. History is violently personal, as stars and molecules have no loves and hates, while men do. Bias is a permanent problem for the historian dealing with human affairs. This is mainly expressed at the level of history syllabi.

History by nature doesn't need to provide religious information nor propagate any tradition. But by itself it is not sufficient dictum. This also calls for fair, unbiased and objective representation of different groups and cross-sections. The proper representation of knowledge of the country's past is the biggest challenge faced while framing the curricular of history. Each of the chapter of history syllabi selected for the study is reflective of processes and preferences of the historian. Historical writing can hardly be fixed or neutral but rather reflect the domination of particular schools or paradigms. Historical writing, like all other forms of writing, is a socio-historical construction. What is recognised as reality is fuzzy and imprecise for e.g. an episode can have different interpretations on why it happened, who started it and what was its outcome.

Politics of education

It has been often contended that the entire process of education is political in the way it is funded, its goal and objectives, the nature of the textbooks and the power of decision making. Education therefore remains positioned concerning whose culture is legitimate. Curricular knowledge shares the relationship with the larger social and cultural dynamics. It plays significant role in maintaining extant social, political, economic and cultural arrangements for example in the twenty-first century America corporations control the production of textbooks. In this control they have established a knowledge industry that emphasises the traditional family, free market, a narrow of patriotism, Christianity and a business needs-driven school curriculum. That is to say, curricular in actuality controls the meaning. There always remain the in-

timite connection between the structures of power with the form and content of the curriculum. The omissions, distortions and misrepresentations in the curriculum in fact reflect the social structure as well as contribute to its legitimating. (Arnot & Whitty, 1982)

Text-books and marginalisation

It is observed that the modern Indian education system is textbook centric. Textbooks are intentionally constructed for pedagogical purposes. The examinations, primarily meant for testing memory, confine their scope to prescribed text-books. Content is treated as the core of curriculum, and nearly all critical as well as constructive action is confined to the textbook. Text-books are purpose-built for the selection, construction and transmission of valued knowledge and practices. They have been hardly neutral vehicles for the inculcation of knowledge or skills. They are prescribed by the state and the information that is crammed in them is regarded as the only 'valid' knowledge imparted to students. The curriculum is never simply a neutral assemblage of knowledge, (Krishna Kumar, 1983) somehow appearing in the texts and classrooms of a nation. It always becomes part of a selective tradition, someone's selection, and some group's vision of legitimate knowledge. The decision to define some groups' knowledge as the most legitimate, as official knowledge, while other groups' knowledge hardly sees the light of day, says something extremely important about who has power in society. Cultural legitimacy on the knowledge of specific groups is thereby conferred.

Because of their centrality in educational planning, textbooks remain key and frequently contested elements in the social construction. Textbooks embody assumptions about what children should read, when and according to which instructional approaches. Their constitution and composition are conscious decisions of small groups of people, usually consisting of representatives of state and the 'state approved' experts. Although textbooks are products of social compromises and negotiations, it is observed that dominant social classes use textbooks as a tool for protecting their interests and safeguarding their power. The visions and meanings of the dominant groups in society are represented in the curriculum and text materials prescribed in the country. Even in U.S.A. many find the text-books as generic and pro-American supporting a very one-sided perspective of events that occurred throughout history. A curriculum which does not represent cultural data of all social groups in a proportionate manner can act as

a means of aggression on groups whose data are excluded or are poorly represented. The children are forced to identify with the symbols of dominant groups. Educational materials thereby laid down the boundaries upon the individual's social perception of reality. (Arnot & Whitty, 1982, p.96)

Historical discourses on Jainism

There is no doubt that history need not be religious by nature, but religions would have their own histories and historical backgrounds. Religions would naturally and necessarily influence and get influenced by historical events. At times under the cover of the secular orientation, minority religion gets under-representation. It is observed that in post-independence India, indigenization of education has turned out to be brahmanization and sanskritization of education.

In India, curriculum and the content of education have been central to the processes of reproduction of caste, class, cultural and patriarchal domination-subordination. In post-independence educational policy, modification of content supposedly aimed at, as pointed out in NCERT position paper indigenization resulted in brahmanization as a key defining feature of the curriculum. India as a matter of choice – a choice consciously or unconsciously is made by those selecting textbook material from the available body of literature and by those creating it. The curriculum itself becomes a tool of cultural dominance and hegemony, a means of subtle control.

Historical discourses on Jainism therefore seemed to be biased. The historian traditionally portrays the ancient Indian history more or less typically as Hindu or Brahmanical version. The kings connected with Hinduism or Buddhism in ancient times and with Islam in medieval period are given greater or larger than life coverage and importance. To illustrate the whole Mauryan epoch sounds or presented as the Buddhist era. Asoka's zeal for the spread of Buddhism is highlighted as the non-violent revolution, while the association of Chandragupta Maurya with Jainism as well as the grand propagation of Jainism by Samprati, the grandson of Asoka is not even mentioned. The students for e.g. completing high school studies (SSC) ¹ from Maharashtra Board gets a light glimpse and understanding of Jainism due to unconscious or at times conscious and sub-conscious level looming of other religions in mainstream history. The student gets a shattered view of Jainism, one of the important Indian religions of the country. The Curriculum does not reflect upon the historical significance of Jainism as it attempts in a way for Hinduism or Buddhism. Once textbooks are "in use" in classrooms, teachers systematically lead students to a set of privileged interpretative practices, shaping how and what students do with textbooks. In this way, textbook knowledge and literate practice are shaped and reshaped by the contexts of classroom talk, with teachers directing and redirecting students' attention

and comments towards particular text structure and content. The students studying such curriculum are thus bereft of the country's rich cultural diversity. The historical construction of groups and communities are made invisible by the curriculum and not considered subjects of key curricular importance.

Even the students graduating with the specialisation of history from the University of Mumbai just gets passing reference of Jainism in Ancient India (Wadhvani, 2011) Medieval (Nalawade, 2009) or Modern Indian history (D'souza, 2007) doesn't contain reference to Jainism or the contribution of the Jains. For most of them Jainism remain a part of Brahmanical tradition and not a distinct religion. History books continue to act as the prescriptions of marginalization for the Jain community; in a way resulting into deprivation of social recognition and social value.

Conclusion

Curricular representation of symbols relating to different social groups is a significant index of the value attached to these groups in the cultural configuration that education helps to form and to transmit. In particular, the history curriculum has to be in line with the transition of the historiography wherein tradition historiography marked by military rivalries and world historical figures is more of giving away place to accounts of social and cultural history of everyday life. Curriculum therefore needs to incorporate an understanding and appreciation of cultural diversities in particular the history of rich cultures and traditions of communities marginalized in the studies, their histories their and their constructive contribution to nation. With this consideration, the curricular needs to be reorganised. Here the example and experiment undertaken outside India would illustrate. University of San Diego has been one of many college campuses that encourage the teaching of what is often referred to as the historical "counter-narrative" in school districts throughout the nation. This means changing the curriculum taught in history classes to study the perspectives of marginalized groups throughout history. University history professor David Miller gave his perspective on the general content of history books, "The texts do have their limitations," Miller said. Generally these text books tell a larger narrative that includes minorities, but does not place them in the center of the narrative. In this sense they are included, but the traditional narrative tends to still be told. A truly alternative textbook would focus on the minority stories and go from there.

Educational interventions can make an important contribution to social change. Analysis of history from all sides will help us to broaden the knowledge base. The invisibility in the curricular in a way results into submerged identity for the community. An approach rooted in multiculturalism is essential to incorporate diverse cultures and prevent loss of valuable cultural heritage.

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