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

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